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Why this image? After collecting vast amounts of Tweets containing #MarchForOurLives and conducting data analysis, I have noticed that this protest was much more than a student-led movement. The March for Our Lives event in Washington D.C. on March 24th was a popular protest that was not only led and mobilized by students, but by politicians, celebrities, influential social activists, and millions of regular Americans of all different ages.

I think that it is common to associate the protest with images of youth, and this is primarily because most Google searches for March for Our Lives include either signs or images of student speeches. But given the impact that non-students had during the protest, particularly on social media, I think that a podium looking towards an audience is most summarizing. Like the physical platform, social media gives a user a platform for millions of other users to be impacted by their Tweets. On March 24th, the key #NeverAgain activists such as Emma González and David Hogg gave powerful speeches in Washington D.C., but many other popular Twitter users Tweeted powerful content that made the protest widely successful.

Critical Reflection Framework Responses

Who are these students? The core leadership of the #NeverAgain movement is responsible for much of the publicity around the protest March for Our Lives D.C. on March 24, 2018. Social media played an active role in advertising the event and generating awareness for the cause of the Parkland survivors. However, the students could not have organized the event without the help, largely on platforms such as Twitter, of other non-student Twitter users. These users included politicians, famous social activists, pop-stars, and regular Americans whose Tweets go viral.

What do they want to change and why? The activists want to change current gun regulations. Particularly, #NeverAgain and #MarchForOurLives seeks to prohibit the sale of high-powered assault rifles (ex. The AR-15) and the sale of high-capacity ammunition. They want change because they believe these weapons pose an incredibly threat to society.

What would change look like? Immediately change would be pressuring politicians into a serious discussion over the legality of high-powered weapons. A ban on the sale of AR-15s would be considered a huge political and symbolic victory for #NeverAgain activists.

How are they being represented, by whom, and for what purposes? Leftist media represents these students as conscientious, engaged, and determined to enact change. They are represented by images of raw emotion and conviction. However, the conservative media represents these students as short-sighted and idiotic, with popular hashtags such as #GrowingUpStupid to suggest ignorance. Both media camps do this to support or refute changing current gun laws in America.

How is their message being circulated and received?

News (TV and the web) and social media. In my research alone, I collected and analyzed over 1 million Tweets containing #MarchForOurLives. Many other Tweets related to the protest (ex. Tweets from Barack Obama) contained no hashtags, so it is hard to know true volume of content circulating information about the protest.

What resonates with our contemporary context?

Social media is a relatively new to society, but it is potentially the most impactful change ever in human society. Within a short timeframe, it is completely transformed how people interact, how people communicate, and how people express opinions. #NeverAgain activists who spearheaded the #MarchForOurLives movement utilize social media incredibly effectively to achieve their goals. The majority of adult Americans partake in social media, so the majority of adult Americans are in some way exposed to the content that #NeverAgain generates.

What resonates with you personally?

As a computer science student, I enjoy being able to collect data and visualize it so that it is human readable. I think that there is immense storytelling power in visualizations. As a user of social media myself, I find it interesting to both see how much data a single user can generate

just by authoring a single Tweet, and how powerful this information can become when compounded with millions of other user's data. I believe the future is data driven and the applications of social media data analysis are endless.

Why research social media?

Social media is one of the most, if not the most, influential aspects of society today. Understanding trends in social media is key to understanding how modern society actually works.