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## Social Media Journalism and Its Impact on Social Change: The Case of Twitter(X)

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# SOCIAL MEDIA JOURNALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF TWITTER (X)

Daniel Ebo, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2024

Journalism has evolved over the years, embracing the changes that come with technological advancement. Traditional journalism has converged with digital media to provide easier and accessible ways of news production and distribution. Twitter (now X) has become a major medium for advocacy in recent years, with people trending hashtags to get the needed attention for social change, notable among them being #BlackLivesMatter, #EndSARS in Nigeria and more recently, a hashtag to reverse mandatory wearing of hijab by women in Iran. Several studies have interrogated the impacts of social media on journalism, but less has been studied on specific mediums and how they impact some of the traditional journalistic roles of addressing social issues. This study specifically adopted a user approach in identifying the roles of news organizations and journalists on X and how those roles influence social change initiatives utilizing the agenda-setting model. A correlational analysis conducted showed that there is a significant positive relationship between user engagement with news organization tweets and a positive attitude toward activism exemplified by participants' own involvement in activism or their perceptions of positive outcomes. Implications are discussed.

# SOCIAL MEDIA JOURNALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF TWITTER (X)

by

Daniel Ebo

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
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Daniel Ebo

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This first chapter provides background information about the research. It contextualizes the study by discussing how the digital age has impacted the way the media operates, and the need for studies of this nature considering media's role in activism in recent times. It also outlines how the study is organized in subsequent chapters.

#### **Background of the Study**

With the advent of modern technology, many social interactions have migrated online. News organizations have also, in keeping up with the times, adapted to an online means of news production and distribution. The majority of journalists today (9 of 10) use social media platforms in their work (Willnat & Weaver, 2018). For the purposes of this study, 'Twitter' will be used interchangeably with its new name 'X' as most of the supporting literature existed prior to the very recent name change. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, Twitter has been particularly identified as the most used social media platform by journalists (Jurkowitz & Gottfried, 2022), and this may be because the platform is considered an elite channel for news makers (von Nordheim et al., 2018). Aside from it being an elite platform for gaining access to powerful people, journalists use the platform to surface the voices of ordinary people (Molyneux & McGregor, 2021). In projecting the voices of ordinary people, journalists have sometimes assumed the role of activists in pushing for social change initiatives through social media platforms. Similarly, X has been a hub for activists in pushing for change initiatives.

Thus, Bosch (2016) argues that social media platforms should not be detached from traditional media platforms given the way that they can equally set the mainstream news agenda, especially considering how Twitter was central to youth participation in South Africa's #RMF (Rhodes Must Fall) campaign.

Although journalists' overall contribution to activism has been explored, less has been studied about the news media's impact on activism through social media platforms. Specifically, research of such nature on Twitter is even more scant, although the platform has seen significant levels of activism in recent years. Twitter as a social media platform, beyond its primary role of fostering social interactions, is used by journalists and their various media outlets and by this use, journalists and media outlets inadvertently or intentionally influence social change through agenda setting and projection of social injustices. Many studies in the past about journalists' use of Twitter have mainly focused on the content journalists post in their timelines, with close to no consideration of how followers react to such content (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017).

### **Study Objective**

The main aim of this study, utilizing the agenda-setting model as a theoretical framework, is to examine X users' perceptions of the effects of news coverage on activism using the platform. Specific objectives to this end are as follows:

1. To identify Twitter(X) users' source of news on social media
2. To determine Twitter(X) users' level of engagement with news organizations on the platform
3. To examine the relationship between engagement with news organization tweets and users' attitude towards social change activism

### **Research Question**

The research question that ultimately guides this study in order to achieve the objectives stated above focuses on how users on X perceive the impacts of news organization tweets on the effectiveness of activism:

- Do news organization tweets on X prompt a positive attitude in users towards real-life activism?

### **Significance of Research**

This study is significant for several reasons, but I outline the following four. First, studies of this nature can help evaluate the extent to which journalistic activities on X lead to tangible results that are supportive of activist efforts. Secondly, media organizations can begin to explore innovative ways of utilizing X in the ever-evolving digital era. Thirdly, it shines light on whether X creates user awareness regarding social issues. Finally, it contributes to the literature on how traditional media is evolving and the role of social media in the process.

### **Organization of Thesis**

The next sections of the thesis comprise four chapters. As part of a literature review, chapter two discusses relevant studies on (a) social media journalism, (b) news organizations' and journalists' use of X, (c) social change initiatives and activism on X, (d) Twitter Usage and Online Activism in Ghana and, (e) agenda-setting vs. framing theory. The chapter also will briefly explore the overall perceived impacts of journalists' involvement in activism. Chapter three presents the research methodology, including the quantitative research design used, methods of data collection, sampling technique and sample size, the procedure for data analysis and a chapter summary. The fourth chapter

presents the results obtained from the study and data analysis by examining the perceptions of X users on news media influence in setting the tone for and/contributing to activist efforts that involve the platform (X). The final chapter, five, summarizes key findings from the study and suggests implications.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Social Media Journalism and Audience Engagement**

Broadly, social media journalism refers to the use of social media platforms or social networking sites such as Facebook, X, and Instagram to produce and distribute news content. In conceptualizing social media journalism, it is important to consider how social media affects journalism. This includes social media content that journalists produce, how journalists integrate social media into their work, social media as publishing platforms, and (to a lesser extent) news consumption on social media (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). The impact of “social media journalism” as alluded to in the title of this work was operationalized, in consistence with definitions of journalists studied by Powers (2018), which is how news organizations raise public awareness and understanding of an issue, influence public policy, influence public opinion or discourse, and provoke individual or community action using social media.

Social media is considered very important for modern day journalism because it is a vehicle for finding newsworthy content and allows for dissemination of news and consequently, easy accessibility for the public. Also, journalists generally believe that social media in the context of journalism allows people to be involved in public issues by sharing opinions and recommending solutions (Willnat & Weaver, 2018). While this level of participation may be true for social media, Bergström (2008) in her study of

online participation in a Swedish journalistic context found that the more frequent a news user, the less likely the user was to comment on a news item. The study went on to suggest that since the news practice on the internet more or less equals quick checking and a short glance at the headlines, it might be the case that frequent news users simply do not consider news sites as places for interaction (Bergström, 2008). Meanwhile, the journalists studied by Willnat and Weaver believe that social media allows for self-promotion and faster reporting and is mostly preferred by online news organizations. Although elite institutions are considered more credible sources for news, Hermida et al. (2014) suggest that reporting using social media and deriving news sources from the same provide a more representative form of journalism.

There has been extensive research on journalists' overall use of social media. O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008) studied how new media has affected the traditional values of journalism and established that journalists consider new media as essential to their work while still maintaining the old conventions of the practice even in that 'new' environment. However, Molyneux and McGregor in their study years later (2021) contradict the assertion that old journalistic values are maintained even while using new media. Their study finds that journalists, instead of independently verifying tweets, instead assume discovery and amplification roles, suggesting that the content of the tweet should be able to speak for itself, thus accepting the author's words as presented (Molyneux & McGregor, 2021). Other studies note how social media has become particularly common among young US journalists because it facilitates the disseminator and populist-mobilizer roles of journalists by allowing people to be involved in public issues and share their opinions and recommendations (Willnat & Weaver, 2018).

von Nordheim et al. (2018) compared the different social media platforms and their journalistic use in newspapers of three countries (US, UK, and Germany) and concluded that after a period of stagnation, social media has been a rampant news source, with Twitter being utilized as an elite source. According to Hermida(2010), communication systems such as Twitter are enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events around them and thus can be considered as an awareness system. In a separate study, Hermida argues that Twitter is coded in a way that privileges social communication that is often event-based and event-driven and thus produces content that traditionally makes the news (Hermida, 2013). Comparatively, Facebook only much later changed its algorithm to present more newsworthy content to compete with Twitter as a news channel (Somaiya, 2014).

In their assessment of journalism and social media research in the last decade, Lewis and Molyneux (2018) highlighted blind spots that have characterized the field, including the mistaken assumption by researchers that social media would be a net positive (influence positive change in journalism such as faster reporting), reflect reality, and ultimately matter over and above other factors. Although some of these assumptions may be true in some cases, it is most often not true in many circumstances (for instance not every tweet reflects peoples' realities). According to Lewis and Molyneux, another important limitation of previous research on social media journalism is the fact that studies have always been dominated by perspectives from the Global North, thus having limited inclusion of other geographical contexts (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018).

Evidently, the use of social media to enhance the work of journalists cannot be overemphasized. While several studies have looked at social media generally, Twitter



stands out as one of the most used platforms by journalists (von Nordheim et al., 2018) although now, journalists are considering leaving the platform in droves, according to a global State of Journalism survey (Ponsford, 2023). This next section looks at how news organizations and journalists make use of Twitter in their line of work.

### **News Organizations/Journalists Use of Twitter (X)**

X is a microblogging service that allows users to send and read short texts, called ‘tweets’, with a maximum length of 280 characters, although in recent times, users who pay for premium subscription enjoy longer text lengths. The platform is used by both the elite and ordinary in society, politicians and the public and likewise news organizations. X, as a platform, has attained a special status as the social media platform for news because it has become a venue where newsworthy tweeters, news consumers and journalists converge to report, read, discuss and share the news (Orellana-Rodriguez & Keane, 2018). This can be referred to as ‘X journalism’. According to Herrera and Requejo (2012), media outlets that understand Twitter’s potential make use of it to promote relevant content through effective hashtags and also put a human face to their organizations through interactions with the public.

Twitter has become so popular among news organizations such that they have included editorial guidelines, standards and best practices for engagement on the platform by their journalists (Cozma & Chen, 2012). Molyneux et al. (2017) believe that journalists who have joined Twitter in recent times have done so not only to maintain a strong professional image but also with an organizational mindset prompted by how their employers want them to approach engagement on the platform. Despite the finding that

Twitter is the go-to platform for journalists, ironically the study by the Pew Research Center also suggested that among the American public, Facebook is the most widely used social media for news (Jurkowitz & Gottfried, 2022)

Prior studies have looked at how Twitter is used as a news gathering and dissemination platform and its possible implications (eg. Tworek, 2018; Vis, 2013; von Nordheim et al., 2018) but other studies (such as Moller Hartley & Askanius, 2020; Molyneux & McGregor, 2021) have explored how the platform has been utilized by journalists to shine light on social issues. Hermida et al. (2014) specifically highlight how NPR's Andy Calvin utilized Twitter sources during the Arab Spring in 2011 to broaden the range of voices in the news by, for instance, utilizing messages from citizens who expressed their demand for social change. As previous research cited has shown, the extent of the influence of journalists on activism has mainly been approached from the point of view of the news media itself.

After Twitter was taken over by Elon Musk, which also led to its rebranding to X, there have been concerns that the platform has lost value for journalists. These concerns were fueled by actions undertaken by Musk such as getting rid of an old verification system and tweeting that journalists were not special (Gotfredsen, 2023). Other actions include Twitter exiting the EU's Code of Practice on Disinformation, and a subsequent classification of the platform as the worst for disinformation based on an EU analysis (Lomas, 2023). Despite journalists threatening to leave Twitter after Musk's takeover, Tow Center for Digital Journalism's research has shown that only a few journalists actually deactivated their accounts. However, the rest resorted to tweeting 3% less than they used to in 2022 (Gotfredsen, 2023).

### **Social Change Initiatives and Activism on Twitter (X)**

In this study, I define social change *activism* as advocating for the reformation of behaviors, policies, and institutions in society as is often undertaken by an individual or a social movement. In their classification of movements, Jackson and Kreiss (2023) delineates “counter publics” from “defensive publics” to the extent that, for instance, a right-wing movement which strives to uphold historically dominant racial order will be considered “defensive public” in the sense of activism. Thus, my definition of activism excludes the notion of defensive publics. The news media is considered a pivotal influence on social movements in shaping whether and how those movements generate broad social change. This is especially because the media has the capacity to set the public agenda and influence public opinion and elites by drawing attention to movements’ issues, claims, and supporters (Andrews & Caren, 2010). A recent case in point is the media’s role in the 2020 global mass protests calling for the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria, which was believed to be engaged in brutalities against ordinary citizens. According to Talabi et al. (2021), the media’s coverage of the END SARS protests provided the needed assistance in drawing the attention of the Nigerian government to the prevailing issue of human rights abuse in the country.

The news media however are not the only agents who influence social change on various social media platforms. Activists, politicians and citizen journalists equally play various roles. X has become a prominent digital platform where digital activism has emerged, and this is partly due to the fact that the platform makes it easier to reach

relevant social groups for potential support. During the Hong Kong police brutality protest in 2019, activists utilized Twitter as a platform to document evidence, ask for outside assistance, highlight the tension between protesters and the police, detail weapons and tools used in incidents, and express anger and fear (Wang & Zhou, 2021). In recent years, although journalists by the definition of their roles tell stories of the people and the societies they belong to, according to Shultziner and Shoshan(2018) they are equally embracing the roles of activists by sometimes blurring the line between activism and journalism. For instance, the authors argue that the Israeli journalists who covered the Israel Social Justice protest did not just produce field reports but equally contributed to helping the movement reach its goals through advising the leaders, writing rally speeches, and generally writing in favor of the movement to encourage mobilization. This is a phenomenon the authors refer to as journalistic activism (Shultziner & Shoshan, 2018).

Previous studies have factored in the roles of ordinary citizens in supporting the cause of social movements by assuming the role of citizen journalists to provide firsthand reports of social injustices through sharing photographs, videos and audio clips on social media and other digital platforms (Allan et al., 2007). Likewise, some political leaders have used platforms like Twitter to advocate for issues that affect people. In their analysis of Twitter messages by six US representatives of color known as ‘The Squad, Orbe and Orbe (2023) highlighted how these individuals use their platforms to feature international issues such as Haiti, Afghanistan or communities facing hardships in general and how that is relevant for US policy and practices. Other studies have contributed to the literature on how journalists in the US, Denmark, and Sweden, in supporting the goals of movements (#BlackoutTuesday and #MeToo respectively), embraced the responsibility

of change agents through engaging in some form of activism (Harlow, 2020; Moller Hartley & Askanus, 2020).

What journalists or the news media tweet about as part of coverage may influence how people understand various issues. Policy makers as well as social movement groups may react to these news messages by taking action in agreement with particular angles raised regarding a news issue. The next section provides a brief overview of Ghana's experience with social media activism and Twitter use, since some Ghanaian respondents were sampled to help balance global perspectives on this study.

### **Twitter Usage and Online Activism in Ghana**

Although there are about 23 million internet users and about 6 million social media users in Ghana, according to a 2023 Global Digital Report, the platforms with the greatest number of users in Ghana are Facebook and YouTube, with Twitter and Instagram following behind and gaining prominence in recent years (Kemp, 2023).

Activism in general has been in existence in Ghana throughout the country's days of colonialism and throughout its military regimes. However, according to Nartey and Yu (2023), the use of social media for activism and resistance is a relatively new trend in Ghana. A critical look at Ghana's political climate reveals how Twitter hashtags were made more prominent during the 'fix the country' protest. This notwithstanding, Nartey and Yu mention other hashtags used in the past to launch campaigns against unpopular Ghanaian government actions and social issues, some of which include:

#SaveTheGHMovieIndustry, #DropThatChamber, #OccupyFlagstaffHouse, #HijabIsAnIdentity, #DumsorMustStop, and #RedFriday (2023). Subsequently, other

campaigns have adopted similar tactics on social media to bring attention to issues affecting the country, with a recent one being the #OccupyJulorbiHouse (which is an offensive way of saying #OccupyJubileeHouse). This campaign, which started in September 2023, aimed to mobilize Ghanaian youth to stand up against economic hardships by picketing in front of the Jubilee House, which is the seat of government in Ghana. The action resulted in the arrest of some protestors (MyJoyOnline, 2023). Even after the Jubilee House street protests ended, protestors still use the hashtag on Twitter to recall failed government policies.

Anson Boateng and Buatsi (2023) in their study on Facebook and Twitter usage during Ghana's 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections, established that social media are gradually surpassing traditional media as the preferred choice for civic engagement and mobilization in Ghana. The use of Twitter for civic engagement has indirectly contributed to the growth in users of the platform in Ghana as seen by Global Digital Report data stating that between 2022 and 2023 alone, the number of Twitter users in Ghana increased by 230,000 (Kemp, 2023). Currently, there are 1.15 million Twitter users in Ghana, with a great majority of them being young and male.

The following section provides a theoretical examination through the lens of agenda-setting/framing on how the news media influence the public to engage in social change.

### **Agenda-setting/Framing Model**

Framing involves how a communication source presents and defines an issue (Vreese, 2005). Framing theorists believe that expectations, and to a large extent,

attitudes, are based on previous experience, whether derived from a media message or even personal experience (Baran et. al, 2014). The media, one of the most prominent communication sources, is very influential in shaping public opinion and support by framing issues in a particular way. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson, from a psychological standpoint, explains how messages framed in therapy have “a special and peculiar relationship to a more concrete or basic reality” (Bateson, 1972, p. 197). Notable theorists like sociologist Erving Goffman, who also developed framing analysis, use the term “frame” to refer to “the specific set of expectations used to make sense of a social situation” (Baran et. al, 2014, p. 317). According to Birkland and Lawrence (2009), framing is virtually inevitable in communication since reality is a multifaceted construct which cannot be comprehended as whole and that policy action often requires framing in order to determine which issues to focus on or allocate resources to (Birkland & Lawrence, 2009).

On the other hand, McCombs and Shaw (1972) defined agenda-setting in terms of the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972 in Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006). Vreese’s definition tries to strike a distinction between framing and agenda-setting by designating agenda-setting as dealing with salience of issues whiles framing concerns itself with the presentation of issues. Jashinsky et al. (2017) agrees with this assertion and proceeds to defined agenda-setting in terms of the deliberate placement or amount of coverage given to issues with the aim of influencing public policy and opinion through print, radio or online news pieces. To put this into perspective, the researchers look at the important roles the media played in

gun violence discussions before and after the Sandy Hook Elementary School mass shooting in 2012 (Jashinsky et al., 2017). Although both theories are applicable to the study, I focus more on the consequence of agenda-setting on the attitude of an audience since this is knowable by survey respondents. Precisely to the point of this study is the inspiration from McCombs and Shaw that mass audience attribute importance to an issue based on the amount of coverage from news media, and this can potentially influence behaviors.

Agenda-setting helps to put into context the roles of media entities in influencing what is discussed on social media (in this case X) and how that potentially affects public policy. This is true especially for which social issues are projected by the media and consequently advocated for by activists. In examining the determinants of media attention on human right issues, Maier (2021) notes how the news media, in focusing on the 2015 Paris terror attack that left 15 people dead, overlooked a massacre in Nigeria that same week that left 2000 people dead. How often news media cover an issue is important, and information on human suffering on news' social media sites can equally provide a critical link to political response and civic policy (Maier, 2021). This is sometimes visible in the hashtags that are generated by journalists using the X platform. However, Munuku et al. (2017) finds that the number of hashtags generated by journalists on socio-political issues in Kenya between 2014 and 2016 were extremely low compared to the about 80% from ordinary Kenyan citizens.

Previous studies such as Xu (2022) underscore the importance of public engagement in the digital media era as having the potential to contribute to socio-political change. Xu believes, however, that mainstream media usually emphasize destructive



activities of social protesters and thereby diminish the actual impact of the protest; hence, the use of new/alternative media by social movement organizations (Xu, 2022). However, Jean Kenix (2009) contends that although alternative media such as Facebook and Twitter are important, alternative media cannot be entirely separated from mainstream media since they overlap in techniques and content generation. Other scholars such as Entman (1993) study framing in terms of what is salient for public attention whiles Aday (2006), and Appelgren and Jonsson (2020) consider the effects of such framings on advocacy and the theoretical objective stance of journalists.

Given the agenda-setting theoretical framework and the social media context and concepts discussed previously, the following section develops a hypothesis to measure social media (X) journalistic impact.

### **Hypothesis**

Undoubtedly, journalism is an important tool to effect change in society and the impacts of news organizations executing this role is well known. Musa et al. (2011) underscore the effective roles of journalists in the independence struggles of many sub-Saharan African nations. They proceed to argue that it is one thing for journalists to respect human rights and another thing to embrace the advancement of those rights as an integral part of their mission, and in cases where journalists turn a blind eye, abuse is heightened by those that wield power (Musa et al., 2011). In their assessment of the social impacts of journalism using the “Voices against silence” documentary as a case study, Pulido et al. (2021) observe that journalistic coverage that achieves social impact helps recover trust in journalism, and thereby improve society in view of corresponding

societal goals. This is evidenced in the outcome of their study, which confirmed that the documentary contributed to eliminating sexual harassment through the consideration of survivors' voices (Pulido et al., 2021).

In media, agenda-setting whether on TV, radio or online, issues that demand social intervention often have to compete with other economic and political matters and sometimes important social issues are neglected. For instance, many agree that journalists should be trained in human rights-based reportage to effectively unearth violations of rights and bring social change. However, such efforts have been largely unsuccessful because even when attempts are made, there is virtually no critical assessment of its effectiveness (Rose, 2013). Based on this observation, this study moves to understand the impacts of news media within the context of social media, specifically X, on activism from an X user perspective. The following overall prediction will guide the study:

**Hypothesis: H<sub>1</sub>:** News organizations' use of X has a positive impact on activism.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

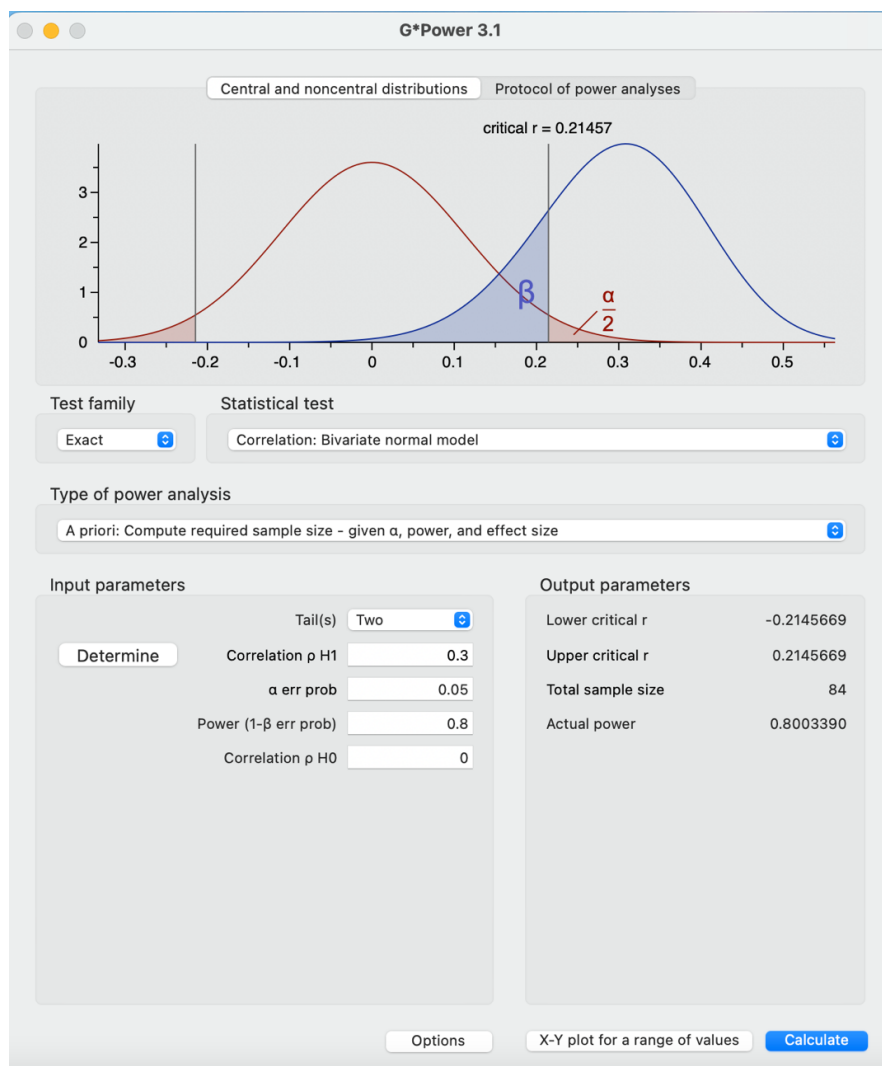
This chapter outlines the quantitative research method used in the conduct of the study. The chapter highlights the participant sampling procedure, method of data collection, data analysis and the ethical considerations guiding the study.

#### **Participants**

Participants for the study were selected randomly from people who frequently use social media and more especially Twitter/X which is the context of the study. The participants were chosen from among college students in the United States (US) and Ghana. The decision to sample US students was backed by Engesser and Humrecht (2014)'s assertion that, it is more appropriate to select participants from the United States for research involving Twitter audience since the US has the largest potential Twitter audience and a high level of internet access. Hargittai and Hsieh (2010) further recommend recruiting college students from the United States since they are known users of digital media and have high internet connectivity and therefore an ideal social media presence. However, in recent years, several activisms in Ghana have originated and thrived on social media platforms including #FixtheCountry and #OccupyHubileeHouse suggesting that digital media is very much accessible in the country. Additionally, as Lewis & Molyneux (2018) point out, studies in the past about social media journalism

have mainly focused on views from the Global North, hence a good reason to recruit some participants from Ghana to balance perspectives.

To determine the appropriate sample size necessary for this study and the statistical test (correlation) which I intended to perform, I did a statistical power analysis using the software G Power. With the power level (1 beta) set to .80 and the effect size at .3 for a medium effect, a minimum sample size of 84 was suggested (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Power Analysis.*

A total of 105 people responded to the survey, however, after streamlining missing variables (mainly respondents who started but did not complete the survey or simply clicked the link, accepted to partake in the study but never actually answered the questions), the valid responses narrowed down to 85 which was still within the anticipated minimum. Hence a total of 85 respondents were selected for this study. To be eligible to participate in the study, the participants needed to be students in the US or Ghana who are X users, and to ensure a representative sample size, details of their demographics were recorded (Table 1). This criterion was made known to them in the recruitment announcement sent out by the researcher.

**Table 1.**

***Gender***

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	47	55.3
Female	37	43.5
Other (Specify)	1	1.2
Total	85	100

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

Table 1 above indicates the gender distribution of the participants of the study. Out of the 85 respondents, 55.5% ( $n= 47$ ) were male, while 43.5% ( $n= 37$ ) were females. One respondent (1.2%) identified as gender non-conforming. Most of the participants were between the ages of 25-30 years old, representing 52.9% of the total, followed by 18-24 years old and 30+ years old representing 31.8% and 15.3% respectively (Table 2).

**Table 2.**

***Age***

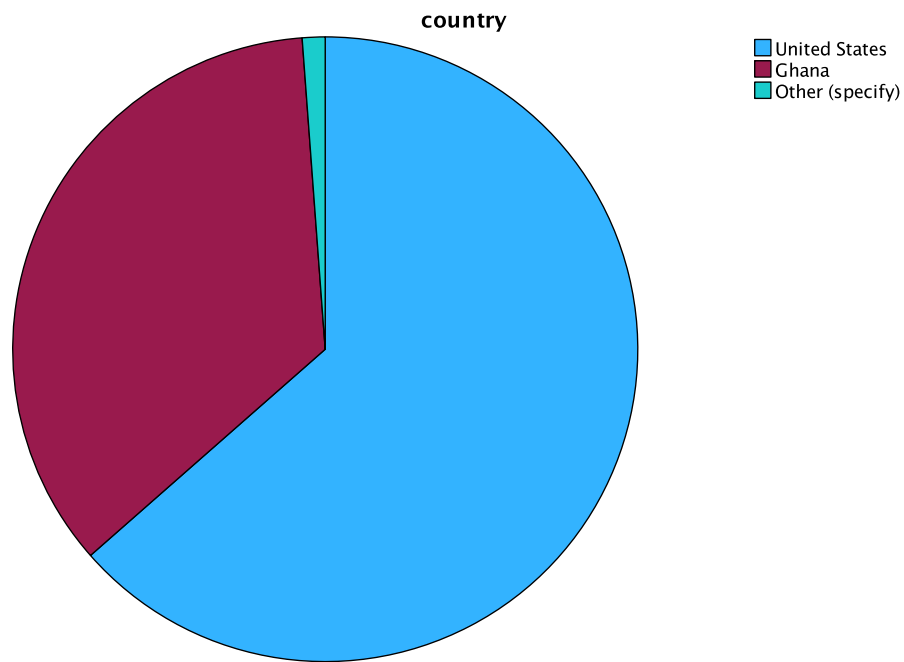
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-24 years old	27	31.8
25-30 years old	45	52.9
30+	13	15.3

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

A majority of the participants (63.5%,  $n=54$ ) were from the United States whereas the remaining respondents (35.3%,  $n=30$ ) were from Ghana. The other one respondent (1.2%) preferred not to disclose their country. The trend is to be expected as the researcher at the time of the study resided in the US and therefore has access to more US-based participants through convenience sampling compared to Ghana. Figure 2 illustrates the country distribution.

Further, in order to recruit the appropriate participants for the study and to ensure that responses were actually from users of X, the survey included questions which sought to ascertain how frequently participants use X. The questions in this part of the survey were a modified version of Ellison et al (2007)'s instrument originally developed to measure Facebook intensity on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Items included: "Twitter(X) is part of my everyday activity", "I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Twitter(X) for a while", and questions about how many followers they had and how much time averagely is spent on the platform in a day (Detailed questions have been provided in the Appendix B). The responses (see Table 3) showed that 25.9% of the participants ( $n=22$ ) had 10 or less followers on X.

This was followed by participants who had more than 400 followers (20%,  $n=17$ ) and those who had between 11-50 followers (12.9%,  $n=12$ ) on the platform.



**Figure 2.** *Country.*

Since this research aims to study the impact of participants engagement with news organizations on X, it was necessary to let participants share the average amount of time they spend on X.

**Table 3.**

***Followers on X.***

Followers	Frequency	Percentage
10 or less	22	25.9
11-50	12	14.1
51-100	11	12.9
101-150	10	11.8
151-200	4	4.7
201-250	3	3.5
251-300	4	4.7
301-400	2	2.4
More than 400	17	20.0

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

Table 4 indicates that a significant number of the respondents, representing 37.6% ( $n=32$ ) spend less than 10 minutes on X. This is followed by 20% ( $n=17$ ) of the respondents who spend between 10 and 30 minutes on the platform, 14.1% ( $n=12$ ) who spend between 31-60 minutes and 10.6% ( $n=9$ ) who spend 1-2 hours on X respectively. Tables 3 and 4 show that the participants indeed used X, albeit at varying levels, and were appropriate to contribute to the study.



**Table 4.**

***Time Spent on X.***

Time Spent on X	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 10 minutes	32	37.6
10-30 minutes	17	20.0
31-60 minutes	12	14.1
1 -2 hours	8	9.4
2-3 hours	9	10.6
More than 3 hours	7	8.2

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

**Procedures**

This study used an online survey to collect data from participants. The survey questionnaire was administered using Western Michigan University's Qualtrics platform. Online platforms for research surveys are known to offer flexibility and convenience for participants (Evans & Mathur, 2005) and in the case of the researcher, this approach was convenient for reaching potential participants whilst maintaining appropriate research standard. After designing the questionnaire on the platform, a link to the survey was generated and shared to the potential participants across multiple platforms, mainly WhatsApp, which is popular among students in Ghana. Through convenience sampling, the link was shared with the network of the researcher both in Ghana and the US and they in turn were encouraged to share with their networks. Additionally, I shared the link with

colleagues and professors at WMU via email to help distribute to their respective networks who qualify for the study.

Objectives of the study as well as the basic criteria were explained to the potential participants in the recruitment announcement that went out with the link. Also, the participants were assured of their confidentiality and removal of sensitive information. The Qualtrics survey was designed such that participants had to give consent by clicking a button on their screen before they could proceed to the page with the survey questions and refusing consent after reading the guidelines meant the survey automatically ends.

The survey questionnaire required them to answer questions about how frequently they use X and how often they follow tweets from news organizations. Subsequent questions centered around their perceptions about the influence of these organizations' X usage in setting the tone for and/ causing social change. That is, how they would evaluate the effectiveness of news tweets on social issues and its impacts on their own attitudes towards activism.

### **Instruments**

A 5-point Likert scale was used to determine participants' sources of news content and their level of engagement with news content on Twitter. Questions were based on both Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2016)'s instrument for measuring citizens' interaction with journalists and Hermida et al. (2012)'s instrument for determining news sources on social networks. The first set of questions asked participants to respond to questions such as how often they "retweet a member of the news media," "ask questions (via DM or

@mention) to a member of the news media with options ranging from “Never” to “Often” (see Appendix C for full items and scale). The next set of questions required participants to select “yes”, “no” or “unsure” about their sources of news on social media based on a categorized list of sources provided to them (see Appendix C for items).

Social change initiatives as relates to news media impact was similarly measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1- *strongly disagree* to 5- *strongly agree* to determine X users’ perceptions about how “X journalism” influences social change. Items were derived and modified from Dahmen and Wath (2021)’s instrument used for measuring journalistic impact. The original instrument was approached from a journalistic perspective therefore it was modified to reflect a user perspective with items such as “News organizations’ Twitter(X) activities inspire an individual to take an action, such as sending letters or emails, voting, signing a petition, attending a meeting, volunteering, protesting, or joining or starting an organization” (see Appendix D for full items).

### **Method of Data Analysis/Treatment**

The data was analyzed using a bivariate correlational analysis to determine the relationship between participants’ engagement with news organization tweets (X journalism) and their involvement/perceived impacts in social change activism. This would help address the research question and hypothesis of whether news organization tweets have a positive impact on activism. X Journalism is herein defined as news media utilization of X(Twitter) for journalistic activities such as news coverage and distribution.

The Pearson product moment correlation was used since it is the most popular correlational procedure for calculating a correlational coefficient for two variables measured on an interval scale (Frey et al., 2000).

To determine the variables to be correlated, I first combined four items (measured on a 5-point Likert scale) from the questionnaire which measured the extent to which participants engaged with news organization tweets. These combined items formed a composite variable which I titled “engagement with news organization tweets”. To assess the reliability of the scale, I ran a test of internal consistency using Cronbach’s Alpha in SPSS which resulted in  $\alpha = .724$  proving an adequate reliability, with a mean of 2.588 and standard deviation of .982. Next, I combined four more items from the questionnaire which asked participants about the extent to which they agreed with researcher statements about the impact of news organization tweets on activism as modified from Dahmen and Wath (2021)’s instrument for measuring journalistic impact. These items were combined to create a composite variable titled “Impact/involvement in activism” which measured participants attitude towards activism as a results of news media tweets. Another reliability test was done for this scale with Cronbach’s Alpha reported at  $\alpha = .872$  proving a good reliability, with a mean of 3.344 and standard deviation of .983. Thus, impact/involvement in activism was positioned as a dependent variable and Engagement with news organization tweets as an independent variable.

The Pearson moment correlational analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and results were represented visually in the form of tables, histograms, pie charts and scatter plots which helped with easy interpretation and comparison of data sets. To take the analysis a step further, I split the data into two,

sorting out survey responses from Ghana and USA and analyzing them separately to make inferences and comparative analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Every participant of the study was assured anonymity and confidentiality as is the standard of ethical research within the social sciences. The assurances were made known in a consent form linked to the survey as well as in the recruitment announcement. The study proposal also underwent systematic review and approved by the Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSRIB) of Western Michigan University. The participants of the survey were guaranteed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study if they desired. They were informed of the risks or otherwise of participating in the study and the rigorous measures taken by the researcher to ensure their privacy and the data provided.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter delves into the analysis of the data collected in relation to the objectives and research question posed for the study. As noted in the preceding chapter, this study utilized correlational analysis to answer the research question, and results of same will be presented. Prior to the correlational analysis findings, I analyze results which achieves the other stated objectives of identifying sources of news of twitters users and determining the level of their engagement with the news media on the platform.

#### **Sources of News on Social Media**

To reach the main objectives of the study, it was imperative to find out if respondents looked to Twitter(X) for news in light of what previous studies have shown. A series of questions were consequently asked that pertained to where respondents get their news on social media. The results are shown in Tables 5,6, and 7. Table 5 shows results from all the respondents, while Tables 6 and 7 show specific demographics of Ghana and USA respectively.

Table 5 indicates that out of the 85 respondents, a good majority of them, 61 (71.8%), get their news from individuals and organizations that they follow on various social networking sites not limited to X. When that is narrowed down, the responses showed that 66 (77.6%) of the participants get their news from news organizations or journalists that they follow on those social networking sites. On Twitter(X) specifically, 52 (61%) of the respondents said they get their news from tweets by individuals or

organizations on the platform while 49 (57.6%) also indicated that their source of news are updates from news organizations and journalists on Twitter.

**Table 5.**

*Source of News*

Source	Yes	No	Unsure
Individual/organization followed on social networking sites	61 (71.8%)	13 (15.3%)	11 (12.9%)
News organization/journalist followed on social networking site	66 (77.6%)	12 (14.1%)	7 (8.2%)
Twitter(X) updates from another individual/organization	52 (61%)	24 (28.2%)	9 (10.6%)
Twitter(X) updates from news organization/journalist	49 (57.6%)	27 (31.8%)	9 (10.6%)
Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data			

This clearly suggests that when it comes to sources of news on social media, users do not rely exclusively on Twitter for their news but look to other social media platforms as well. Additionally, users do not rely solely on traditional sources (i.e. news organizations and journalists), but also source their news from regular individuals or

organizations themselves. This notwithstanding, on the broader social media level, a good majority of the users (almost 78%) still get their news from traditional sources, indicating a certain level of trust from such sources.

**Table 6.**

***Source of News (Ghana)***

Source	Yes	No	Unsure
Individual/organization followed on social networking sites	22 (73.3%)	4 (13.3%)	4 (13.3%)
News organization/journalist followed on social networking sites	26 (86.7%)	1 (3.3%)	3 (10.0%)
Twitter(X) updates from another individual/organization	21 (70.0%)	5 (16.7%)	4 (13.3%)
Twitter(X) updates from news organization/journalist	21 (70.0%)	6 (20.0%)	3(10.0%)

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

Table 6 shows that out of the 30 respondents from Ghana, 22 (73.3%) get their news from individuals and organizations on various social networking sites not limited to X. Twenty-six (86.7%) of them, representing a majority, also said they get their news



from news organizations and journalists that they follow on the various social networking sites. On the Twitter platform, 21 (70.0%) of the responses from Ghana get their news from other individuals or organizations on the platform, and 21 (70.0%) equally said their source of news is Twitter updates from news organizations and journalists on Twitter. The results suggest overall that although people in Ghana look to various platforms and entities for news on social media, a majority of them look specifically to news organizations and journalists for their news on those social media platforms.

**Table 7.**

***Source of News (USA)***

Source	Yes	No	Unsure
Individual/organization followed on social networking sites	38 (70.4%)	9 (16.7%)	7 (13.0%)
News organization/journalist followed on social networking site	39 (72.2%)	11 (20.4%)	4 (7.4%)
Twitter(X) updates from another individual/organization	30 (55.6%)	19 (35.2%)	5 (9.3%)
Twitter(X) updates from news organization/journalist	27 (50.0%)	21 (38.9%)	5 (9.3%)

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

From Table 7 above, 38 (70.4%) out of the 54 respondents from the USA get their news from people or organizations that they follow on social networking sites not limited to X. This is not very different from the respondents from Ghana. Additionally, 39 (72.2%) of them get their news from news organizations and journalists they follow on the various social networking sites. As far as Twitter is concerned, 30 (55.6%) said they get their news from organizations or individuals they follow on the platform while 27 (50.0%) get their news from news organizations and journalists followed on the platform.

The responses of the USA participants with regard to Twitter as a source of news, percentage wise, were significantly lower than that of their Ghana counterparts who reported 70% for the sources of news on Twitter. This finding stands in agreement with that of Jurkowitz & Gottfried (2022) that the American public mostly get their news from Facebook and other platforms like YouTube. Another interesting finding is that, whereas a high majority of respondents get their news from social networking sites in general, the responses for Twitter as a news source, although significant enough, fell below that. When this is taken a step further, it can be seen that more respondents said they get their news from individuals or organizations on Twitter than they did from news organizations and journalists on the platform, with the exception of the Ghanaian respondents who reported the same percentage for these two categories. The reverse was true for social networking sites in general where more respondents indicated that they get their news from news organizations and journalists than individuals and organizations they follow. It can be inferred thus that, on Twitter, more people get their news from individuals and organizations they follow than they do from news organizations and journalists on the

platform. In the next section, I analyze how often the respondents engage with tweets from the news media.

### **Level of Engagement with the News Media on Twitter**

Having assessed where the study participants get their news from on social media, this study went a step further to find out how often they interacted with tweets from members of the news media, specifically on Twitter(X). To achieve this objective of the study, a series of questions based on Gil de Zúñiga et al.'s instrument (2016) for measuring engagement with news organizations on Twitter were posed to the participants. The overall results are illustrated on Table 8 with additional comparisons to specific demographics shown on Tables 9 and 10.

Results from Table 8 shows that out of the 85 total responses, a combined 55 of them representing 64.7% of the respondents who answered “sometimes” ( $n = 26$ ), “always” ( $n = 11$ ) or “often” ( $n = 18$ ), indicated that they did view news organization tweets at some point or another. This represents a good majority of the Twitter users from this study.

When asked how often they retweeted posts from the news organizations, a combined 56 (65.9%) of the total respondents said they either never retweeted a member of the news media ( $n = 27$ ) or rarely did ( $n = 29$ ). Only 25.9% ( $n = 22$ ) said they sometimes retweet the news media posts. The participants were also asked if they asked questions either via DM (direct message/ inbox) or @ mentioned (replying under the post or quoting the post) to a member of the news media. For this question, a significant combined number of 74 (87.1%) of the participants responded that they either never asked questions to a member

of the news media ( $n = 43$ ) or rarely did ( $n = 31$ ). Only one respondent said they often asked questions via DM or @ mention to a member of the news media.

**Table 8.**

***Engaging with News Media***

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Often
Look at News Organization tweets	14 (16.5%)	16 (18.8%)	26 (30.6%)	11 (12.9%)	18 (21.2%)
Retweet a member of the news media	27 (31.8%)	29 (34.1%)	22 (25.9%)	3 (3.5%)	4 (4.7%)
Ask questions (DM or @ mention) to a member of the news media	43 (50.6%)	31 (36.5%)	10 (11.8%)	-	1 (1.2%)

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

The findings from Table 8 suggest that while people may look at tweets from news organizations, they are often reluctant to actively engage those tweets either by retweeting or passing comments. As Bergström (2008) notes, this behavior could be

linked to the fact that frequent news users simply do not consider news sites as places for interacting since news practice on the internet more or less equals quick checking and a short glance at the headlines. The Twitter users from this study engage news organizations through the viewing of their tweets, but from a distance. Just as was done in previous analyses, the separate responses of participants from Ghana and the US on these questions are compared. The results are illustrated on Tables 9 and 10.

**Table 9**

*Engaging with News Media (USA)*

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Often
Look at News Organization tweets	11 (20.5%)	10 (18.5%)	15 (27.8%)	6 (11.1%)	12 (22.2%)
Retweet a member of the news media	19 (35.2%)	20 (37.0%)	12 (22.2%)	-	3 (5.6%)
Ask questions (DM or @ mention) to a member of the news media	28 (51.9%)	18 (33.3%)	7 (13.3%)	-	1 (1.9%)

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

The results from Table 9 shows that out of the 54 respondents from the USA, 33 representing 61.1% of the total, answered either “sometimes”, “always”, or “often” to the question of how often they viewed news organization tweets. This thus indicates that a majority of the participants do look at posts from news organization, albeit at varying frequencies. On how often they retweeted posts from the news media, 39 of the 54 respondents either never retweet a post or rarely did. This number represents a majority 72.2% of the total responses from the US. Finally, a combined 85.2% (46) said they either never ask questions via DM or @ mention to a member of the news media (28) or rarely did (18). Only one respondent said they often did.

The responses from the US participants are similar to the overall responses suggesting that the Twitter users will often engage with news organization tweets by simply viewing them but not through retweeting or passing comments. Table 10 presents findings from the Ghanaian respondents.

From Table 10, it can be seen that 22 of the 30 respondents sometimes, always or often looked at news organization posts on Twitter. This represents a combined majority of 73.4% of the total responses. Additionally, only 3.3% ( $n = 1$ ) often retweet a member of the news media, whereas a combined 16 (53.4%) of the total participants either never retweeted a member of the news media ( $n = 8$ ) or rarely did so ( $n = 8$ ). Interestingly, a significant 33.3% ( $n = 10$ ) said they sometimes do retweet the posts, which is higher than the percentage of the overall responses (25.9%) and that of the US (22.2%). Finally, the greater majority of the respondents from Ghana (90%,  $n = 27$ ) said they either never ask or rarely ask questions of a member of the news media via DM or @ mention. The remaining 10% (3) all said they sometimes did.

**Table 10.**

***Engaging with News Media (Ghana)***

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Often
Look at News	3 (10.0%)	5 (16.7%)	11 (36.7%)	5 (16.7%)	6 (20.0%)
Organization tweets					
Retweet a member of the news media	8 (26.7%)	8 (26.7%)	10 (33.3%)	3 (10.0%)	1 (3.3%)
Ask questions (DM or @ mention) to a member of the news media	15 (50.0%)	12 (40.0%)	3 (10.0%)	-	-

Source: Generated by researcher based on SPSS data

The results from the responses from Ghana in general corroborate that of the US and the overall responses from the participants in suggesting that while a majority of the Twitter users viewed news organization tweets, they were less inclined to engage them through retweets or comments. The difference here is that the Ghanaian participants reported higher percentages for two of the categories mentioned in this analysis while the US participants recorded higher for one of them. To break this further down, more Ghanaian respondents, based on percentage, were likely to view news organization

tweets and more of them were less likely to DM or @ mention a member of the news media as compared to the US participants. On the other hand, more US participants were less likely to retweet a post by a member of the news media as compared to their Ghanaian counterparts.

Now that a certain level of engagement with news organization tweets either by looking at them or relying on them as news source is established, the next section delves into the main statistical analysis guiding the study in order to answer the research question and test the hypothesis.

### **Correlational Analysis**

In order to determine if there is a relationship between a Twitter user's level of engagement with news organization tweets and their attitude towards activism, herein shown by their involvement or impacts they perceive in real life activism, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation (Pearson's  $r$ ) was performed. To control for Type I error, a  $p$  value of less than .05 was required for significance. Results indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between engagement with news organization tweets and impact/involvement in activism,  $r(83) = .65, p < .01$ . The relationship was strong, with engagement with news organization tweets accounting for approximately 42% of the variance in involvement/impact in activism. Table 11 shows the results from the correlational analysis followed by Figure 3 illustrating the results on a scatter plot.

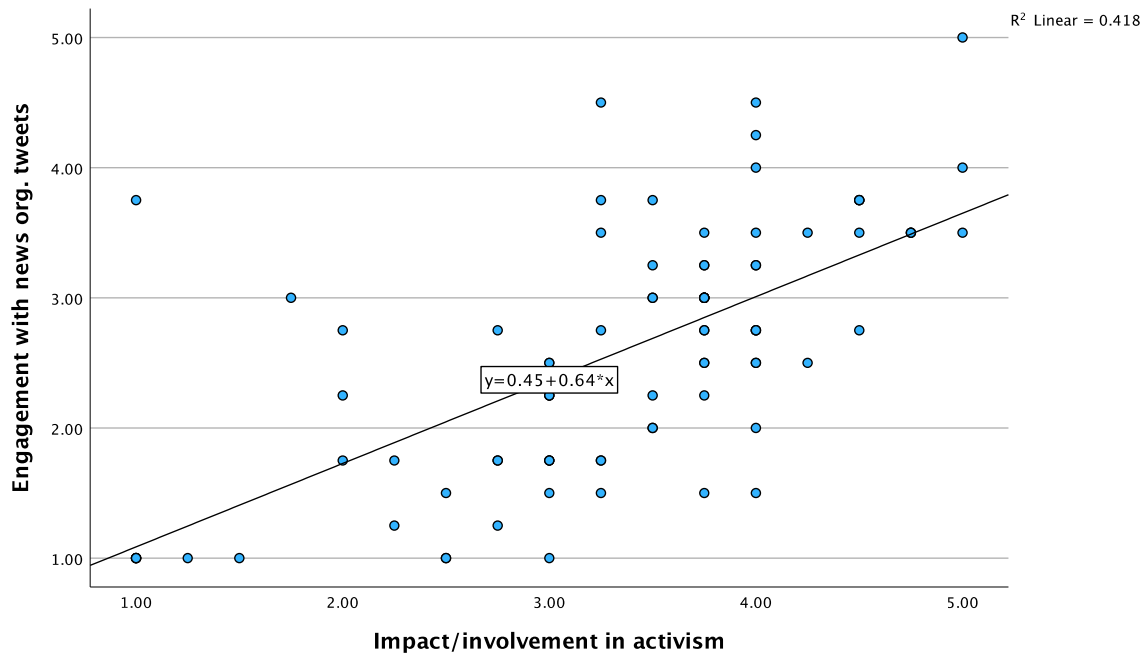


**Table 11.*****Correlational Analysis***

		ENG	IMPA
Engagement with	Pearson Correlation	--	
news org tweets	N	85	
Impact/involvement	Pearson Correlation	.646**	--
in activism	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	85	85

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11 and Figure 3 show that the higher the score that a Twitter user reported for their engagement with news organization tweets on the platform, the higher their reported scores for involvement or impact in activism. This thus indicates a direct positive relationship. In simple terms, the results show that there is relationship between how users interact with news organization tweets and how they perceive certain impacts as far as social issues are concerned. The users who engaged more with news organization tweets strongly responded that they themselves were either influenced to engage in activism through actions such as signing petitions or joining protests, or they perceived impacts in terms of how authorities responded to the issues, these responses included actions such as releasing statements or tangibly instituting policies and changing laws.



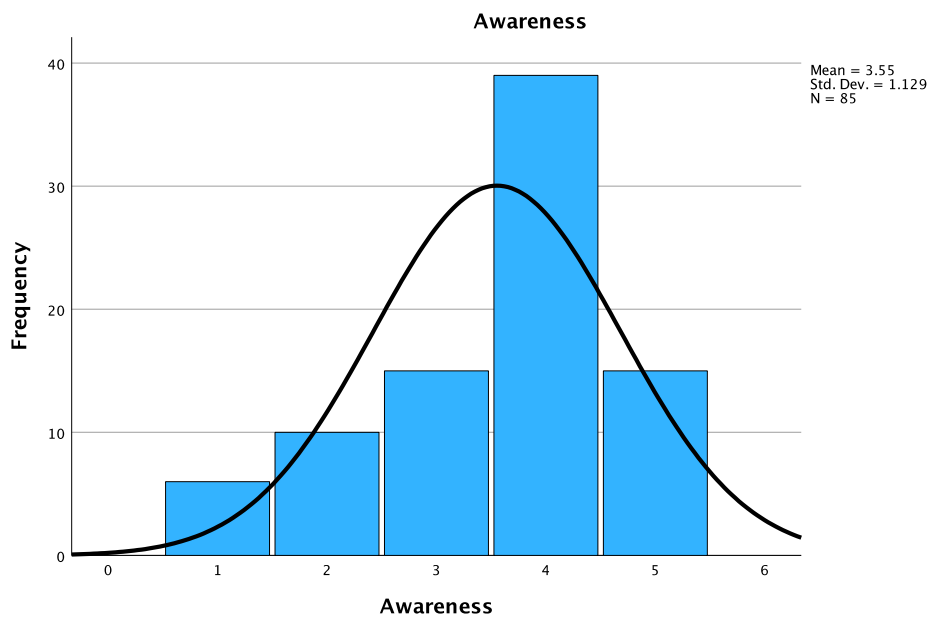
**Figure 3.** *Correlational analysis plot.*

In the next short section, I present a breakdown of some specific responses of the participants in relation to the ways they perceived social impacts because of news organization tweets.

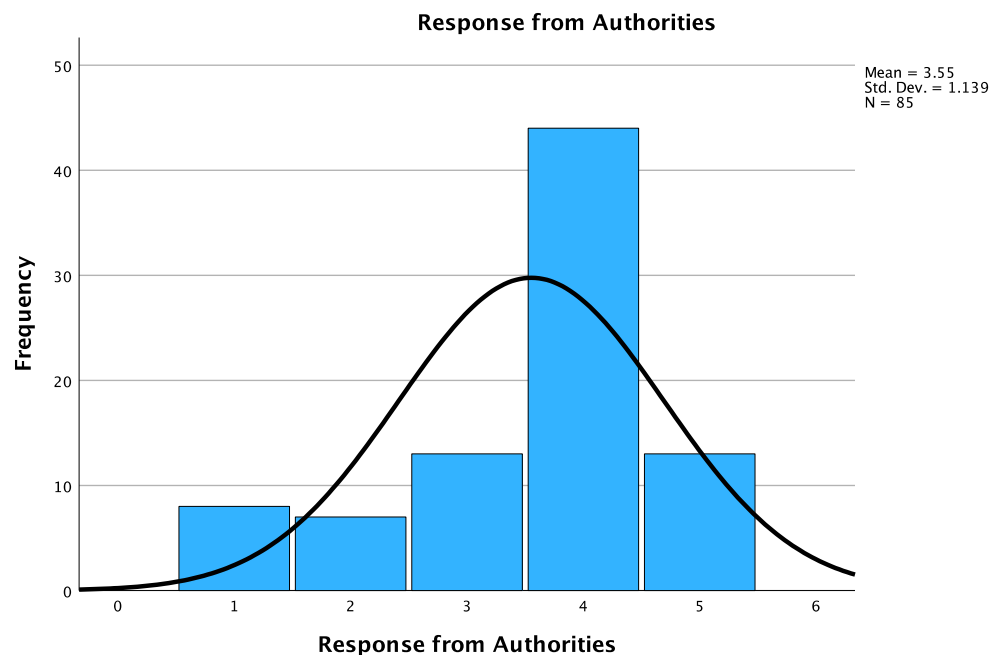
### **Other Specific Findings**

As mentioned earlier, the scale used to measure the impact of news organization tweets was adopted and modified from Dahmen and Wath's 2021 instrument for measuring journalistic impact. The participants were asked to respond regarding the extent to which they agreed with statements about the impacts of news organization tweets. Figures 4 and 5 show the distribution of some of the items relevant for discussion.

Figure 4 shows an asymmetrical, negatively skewed distribution, with majority of the responses toward the right side of the x-axis. As can be seen, the highest number of the respondents answered “agree” (indicated by point 4 on the x-axis) to the statement that news organization tweets increase their awareness, knowledge and understanding of an issue. In addition to those who responded “strongly agree” to the statement (indicated by point 5), a total of about 64% (54) of the 85 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that news organization tweets increased their awareness, knowledge and understanding about an issue. The finding reflects the agenda-setting framework and McCombs and Shaw’s 1972 assertion that the emphasis placed by the news media on an issue correlates with the meanings and importance ascribed to that issue by mass audiences.



**Figure 4.** *Distribution of responses for increasing awareness.*



**Figure 5.** *Distribution of responses for prompting formal response from authorities.*

Similarly, Figure 5 shows an asymmetrical, negatively skewed distribution where the majority of the scores suggests users agree (indicated by point 4) or strongly agree (indicated by point 5) that news organization tweets prompt a formal response to an issue. Together, about 67% (57) of the 85 respondents believe that news organization tweets prompt authorities to respond through means such as releasing statements, or it encourages the pursuit of an agenda through forums, public hearings, or an investigation.

Interestingly however, on the statement of whether they themselves engaged in activism because of the news organization tweets, the results were sparsely and evenly distributed. Thirty-one (31) of the respondents, representing about 37%, said they either agreed or strongly agreed that news organizations' Twitter(X) activities inspire them to

take an action, such as sending letters or emails, voting, signing a petition, attending a meeting, volunteering, protesting, or joining or starting an organization. This was closely followed by about 33% (28) who said they either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining 30% (26) answered “neutral” to the statement.

In conclusion, the result of the analyses, most importantly the correlational analysis, confirms the hypothesis of this study that news organizations’ use of X has a positive impact on activism. It also answers the research question of whether news organization tweets on X prompt a positive attitude toward real-life activism. The other analyses shown above also support the idea that news organization tweets influence certain outcomes that are supportive of activist efforts, even if those actions are not directly undertaken by an individual.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this research was to examine Twitter (X) users' perceptions of the effects of news coverage on activism using the platform by determining the relationship that exists between news organization tweets and users' attitude toward activism. After analyzing and discussing the findings from the study in the previous chapter, this final chapter outlines the summary of the study, conclusions, limitations, and implications based on the study.

#### **Overall Study Summary**

This study examined the impact of the news media on activism within the context of social media and more specifically, X, by exploring the relationship that exists between news organization tweets and users' attitude towards activism as shown by their own involvement in real life activism or impacts the users generally perceive in terms of other people's actions in support of activism. The first chapter introduced the study by situating it within the larger context of social media and journalism. It covered the aims of the study, relevance of the study, the research question, and a preview of subsequent chapters. The second chapter presented a literature review covering key concepts related to the study as well as a brief overview of Ghana's experience with the topic at hand

since the country would be introduced for comparative analysis. The chapter also presented the theoretical framework of the study and its hypothesis.

Chapter three covered the methodology used in the study. It presented discussions on how participants were selected, method of data collection, and the data analysis procedure. It included some statistical tests conducted to determine sample size and the variables to be measured by the study. The fourth chapter analyzed the findings of the study from data collection through the online survey and made inferences as well as comparisons based on existing literature. This final chapter ties everything together and makes suggests some implications.

### **Summary of Findings**

The following three areas summarize the findings of the study: Twitter(X) users' source of news on social media; Twitter(X) users' level of engagement with news organizations on the platform; the relationship between engagement with news organization tweets and users' attitude toward social change activism.

Considering Twitter users' sources of news on social media, it was shown that although the literature points to Twitter as the platform for news especially for journalists, it was not necessarily the case for users as shown by the study. Although users do indeed get some of their news from Twitter, they also rely on other platforms such as Facebook and YouTube for news. For those who get their news on Twitter, a majority of them said they get their news from news organizations, which is also the case for even those that get their news from platforms outside Twitter. This shows overall that the news media still plays an integral role in the consumption of news on digital media.

The only nuance for this part of the findings is that more American participants get their news from news organizations/journalists on platforms outside of Twitter than they did on Twitter.

Despite the fact that a significant majority of the participants look at news organization tweets as a form of engagement, the study found that this level of engagement was passive rather than active. That is to say, the participants would read news organization tweets but not engage actively with them through actions such as retweeting, commenting, or mentioning the tweets.

On the important area of the relationship between the news organization tweets and users' attitude toward activism, this study found a positive connection between participants' engagement with news organization tweets and their involvement, or users' perceptions of positive impacts on activism due to news tweets. Participants who said they engaged with news organizations on Twitter also said they themselves got involved in activism or they saw positive results that they attributed to the tweets. The scores they reported for each of these phenomena rose higher as the other did. This finding reflects the position of existing literature and to a large extent the agenda-setting theory regarding the impact of traditional media in influencing the attitude of mass audiences on issues.

A limitation of this study is the fact that the participant pool did not consist of an equal number of US and Ghanaian participants hence not providing a balanced basis for comparison. Also, although the sample size was sufficient for the study, a much larger sample size will create stronger correlations between the variables used. Lastly, much of the literature reviewed were before Twitter's change of ownership and the consequent



adjustments that came with features on the platform. Newer studies may point to differences in how news organizations and users interact on the platform.

## **Conclusion**

Social media has been instrumental in transforming the flow of news and information during the last couple of decades. Given how quickly information flows within the medium, organizations have been quick to embrace it as an integral part of their work for the purposes of reaching wider audiences and quickly. The news media has not been left out of this revolution. The literature has shown that journalists and the organizations they work for have turned to social media to facilitate their work. Twitter specifically is often relied on in recent times for news sourcing and dissemination. Other actors such as policy makers and social activists, form a part of the Twitter community, who are constantly seeking avenues to reach the masses. Being that they are the center piece and targets of the actors aforementioned, the masses play an equally important role in determining the level of impact that the news media has on setting the public agenda.

The findings of this thesis have shown that despite the adoption of a relatively novel medium, news organizations still maintain their traditional roles and exert similar impacts as they would within the traditional context. Just as they do traditionally, news organizations still exercise the ability to determine which social issues online users care about and to some extent, actively engage in. News organization tweets, as shown by the study, not only raise awareness of issues, but contribute to the kind of understanding that Twitter users have on the issues. This is important because users' awareness and understanding of a social issue can potentially influence what actions they take

concerning those issues. An important point of note is that while some users may engage in activities such as protests or signing petitions, others simply shift their attitude toward the problem by acknowledging what other people have done or are doing to tackle such social issues. A central point that both kinds of users agree on is the idea that news organizations tweets have a role to play in how the situation unfolds- whether people protest, or whether they see policy makers change laws, hold hearings or take other action.

Lastly, it is interesting, that though news organizations do not have a monopoly on what news gets to users, this can equally impact the awareness creation process. The fact that this study has shown that users rely on other entities aside from news organizations for information suggests that news organizations even in the digital age still wield some power via the agenda-setting function.

### **Implications**

Based on the conclusions above, the following implications can be gleaned in terms of identifying the impacts of news organizations on Twitter particularly when it comes to their agenda-setting roles on social issues.

First, the news media can expect to impact the public agenda, activism and policy decisions if they continue to be on social media. As has been established, Twitter users and largely social media users still rely on news organizations' accounts for information. Participants have shared that their decisions to engage in activism are partly influenced by news organization tweets which suggests that news organizations' social media presence are impactful.

Furthermore, news organizations will continue to affect the understanding of issues even outside of traditional norms. The agenda-setting functions of news organizations in influencing how issues are understood, are still enforced via social media just as they are within traditional contexts. Even though social media differs from traditional contexts in how they operate, the study has shown that majority of users link their understanding of issues to social media information by news organizations. Adapting to these mediums will continue to enhance that.

Lastly, there should be continued acknowledgement that news organizations are one of many entities influencing the public agenda on social media. This thesis has shown that users do not get all their information from news organization on social media and therefore recognizing the roles of other actors in shaping public discourse is important. Acknowledgement of the roles of actors outside of the news media consequentially, allows for a wholistic understanding of the roles of news organizations and the extent of their impact on social change.

Active user engagement with tweets was identified as one of the challenges news organizations face in this study. Adopting strategies to tackle this challenge can expect to improve the work of the news media and impact their online communities in the fast-paced digital world.

This thesis has shown that the more users engage with news organization tweets, the more they shift to a positive attitude towards activism exemplified by their direct involvement in activism or their perceptions of positive outcomes. A challenge identified by the reviewed literature is that members of the media are recently threatening to boycott Twitter. Although there is data to suggest that this migration off the app is slow,

if it happens, it will invariably affect the level of engagement and the consequent impact on social change in an already challenging space particularly for those that rely on Twitter for information. News organizations thus do not share all the responsibility, but the owners of the platform have a duty to play in ensuring a conducive environment for the news media to thrive.

## **Appendix A: Consent Form**

### **Western Michigan University School of Communication**

**Principal Investigator:** Joseph Kayany

**Student Investigator:** Daniel Ebo

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "*Social media journalism and its impact on social change: the case of Twitter*"

**STUDY SUMMARY:** This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question. The purpose of the research is to: *examine Twitter (X) users' perceptions of the effects of news coverage on activism using the platform* and will serve as Daniel Ebo's thesis project for the requirements of a master's degree. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to complete an online anonymous survey. Your replies will be completely anonymous, so do not put your name anywhere on the survey. Your time in the study will take 20 minutes maximum to complete the survey. There are no known risks involved in taking part in this study and no direct benefits of taking part. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is not to take part in it.

The de-identified (anonymous) information collected for this research may be used by or distributed to investigators for other research without obtaining informed consent from you.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact Joseph Kayany at [joseph.kayany@wmich.edu](mailto:joseph.kayany@wmich.edu) or Daniel Ebo at [daniel.ebo@wmich.edu](mailto:daniel.ebo@wmich.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research and Innovation at 269-387-8298.

This study was approved by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) on (approval date).

Participating in this survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply

I agree to participate in this research study (Survey following upon clicking)

I do not agree to participate in this research study. (Browser closes)

## Appendix B: HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: October 17, 2023

To: Joseph Kayany, Principal Investigator

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-254 Social Media Journalism and its impact on social change: the case of Twitter

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled Social Media Journalism and its impact on social change: the case of Twitter has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) and **approved** under the **Exempt** Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application. **Please note:** This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., **add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.**). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB or the Associate Director Research Compliance for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Sincerely,

Amy Naugle, Ph.D., WMU IRB Chair

For a study to remain open after one year, a Post Approval Monitoring report (please use the continuing review submission form) is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) **October 16, 2024** and each year thereafter until closing of the study. When this study closes, complete a Closure Submission.

**Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.**

## Appendix C: Survey Guide 1

### I

#### *Demographics*

1. What is your gender?

A. Male

B. Female

C. Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

D. Prefer not to answer.

2. What is your age?

A. 18 – 24 years old

B. 25 – 30 years old

C. 30+

D. Prefer not to answer.

3. Which of the following is your current country of residence?

A. United States

B. Ghana

C. Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which ethnicity best describes you?

A. Caucasian

B. African/Black-American

C. Latino or Hispanic

D. Asian

E. Native American



F. Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

G. Prefer not to answer.

## II

***Frequency of Twitter(X) Usage: Modified from Ellison et al (2007)'s Facebook***

***Intensity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83)***

1. About how many total Twitter(X) followers do you have?

*0 = 10 or less, 1 = 11–50, 2 = 51–100, 3 = 101–150, 4 = 151–200, 5 = 201–250,*

*6 = 251–300, 7 = 301–400, 8 = more than 400*

2. In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes per day have you spent on Twitter(X)?

*0 = less than 10, 1 = 10–30, 2 = 31–60, 3 = 1–2 hours, 4 = 2–3 hours, 5 = more*

*than 3 hours*

## III

***To what extent do you agree with these statements? (From 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree)***

1. Twitter(X) is part of my everyday activity.

2. I am proud to tell people I'm on Twitter(X).

3. Twitter(X) has become part of my daily routine.

4. I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Twitter(X) for a while.

5. I feel I am part of the Twitter(X) community.

6. I would be sorry if Twitter(X) shut down.

## Appendix D: Survey Guide 2

### I

#### ***Engaging with news organizations on Twitter: As developed by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2016)***

*Based on the following options: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always, 5 = Often*

1. How often do you

- A. look at tweets from news organizations?
- B. retweet a member of the news media?
- C. ask questions (via DM or @mention) to a member of the news media?

### II

#### ***Source of news on social networks: As contained in Hermida et al. (2012)***

Please indicate which of the following is a source of news on social media for you.

*Select “Yes”, “No” or “Unsure” for the following statements about your source of news and information on social media*

- 1. Individual/organization followed on social networking sites, including friends and family
- 2. News organization/journalist followed on social networking site
- 3. Twitter(X) updates from another individual/organization, including friends and family
- 4. Twitter(X) updates from news organization/journalist

## Appendix E: Survey Guide 3

*News Organizations' impact on social change initiatives on Twitter(X): As modified from Dahmen and Wath (2021)'s instrument for measuring journalistic impact.*

The following statements are meant to gauge the extent to which news organization tweets affect your involvement in activism. In this survey, activism is defined as advocating for the reformation of behaviors, policies, and institutions in society. Please keep this in mind as you answer the questions.

*Select from (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree) for the following statements:*

1. News organizations' Twitter(X) activities increases my awareness, knowledge, and understanding of an issue
2. News organizations' Twitter(X) activities inspires me to take an action, such as sending letters or emails, voting, signing a petition, attending a meeting, volunteering, protesting, or joining or starting an organization.
3. I have noticed that news organizations' Twitter(X) activities prompts a formal response from people in power and authority, such as statements, or it helps set the agenda through forums, public hearing, or an investigation.
4. I have noticed that news organizations' Twitter(X) activities prompts a tangible, response to the problem, such as changes in laws, policies or guidelines, or changes in the leadership or accountability of a government agency, a company or other institution.

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