

Understanding Slacktivism in the Era of Trump Supporters

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ABSTRACT

The impact of online communities in politics has been widely debated. Advocates insist that social media is an effective tool for collective action, while slacktivism supporters hold that conversations on social platforms are ephemeral in nature. Previous work has documented the use of social media for motivating civic engagement and political activism among citizens. However, this has mainly been examined via qualitative analysis and relatively incomplete datasets. In this work, we extend that knowledge by presenting a data-driven longitudinal analysis of the reddit community *r/The_Donald*. We choose this subreddit because there were widespread reports that participants organized online collective action over an extended period, behavior which the slacktivism supporters do not think is possible. For this reason, we explore how people participated in this community to understand to what extent slacktivism holds true in a contemporary case. We examined 17 months of comments from the *r/The_Donald*, from the time it was created until February 2017, that is, a dataset of more than 16 million comments and over 340 thousand participants. We analyze the ephemerality of the participants and their behaviors. We also analyze three notorious cases where part of the community allegedly participated in collective action, which ranged from downvoting TV shows that opposed their cultural and political views, to orchestrating doxing. Finally, we characterize the behavior of the most active participants who appeared to engage in activism. We conclude by discussing possible applications of our findings for the design of technologies to mobilize people for future political participation.

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INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade the impact of online political communities has been the subject of heated debate. Many researchers and practitioners believe that social media has helped to increase activism [52, 14] and collective action among citizens [33], while other scholars state that social media does not help mobilize citizens who were already passive, and that an excessive use of social media use can lead to no effective collective action [56]. Previous work has tried to resolve this debate by studying the use of social media for driving political activism [25, 16]. However, the majority of the research in this space has been conducted via qualitative analysis or limited datasets [54, 29, 39, 49, 52, 20].

In this paper, we extend that knowledge by presenting a large-scale longitudinal analysis on the social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion platform reddit. We focus on one of reddit's most active political subreddits: *r/The_Donald* [2]. Readers may know *r/The_Donald* from their media coverage of their off-site activities. The site boasts over 340 thousand participants with over 16 million comments. We chose *r/The_Donald* because forum participants allegedly organized online collective action on multiple occasions, something that slacktivism supporters do not think could be sustained [36]. Some of the high profile cases in which allegedly members of *r/The_Donald* have participated on political activities involved the downvoting of the highly controversial Netflix TV show *Dear White People*, the trolling of the stand-up comedian Amy Schumer and the orchestration of doxing strategies.

The subreddit *r/The_Donald* appears to have attracted a generation of people where social media was always available to them. This ubiquity with social media seems to have led these individuals to participate in political activism in ways that differ from frequently used methods. Users in *r/The_Donald* appear to be organizing in ways that are viewed by the press, academia and politicians as unorthodox, especially since users in this community have collectively organized to create political memes, troll, dox, and fabricate political documents. They are engaging in politics outside the domain of political parties or common political campaigns, and in the process, creating a vibrant, self-sustaining sub-culture with an in-group language and community memes [LNC, MAGAthreads, Spicy talk, etc].

In this paper, we perform one data driven analysis of *r/The_Donald*. Our goal is to understand how slacktivism has developed in the Trump era by using 16 months of data comprising more than 16 million comments from the subreddit. Here we focus on the characteristics of slacktivism, specifically ephemerality and collective action, and use a framing

approach used by sociological theories to explain social movements [48] to untangle how political activism was shaped by the community that subscribes and participates on the subreddit.

Broadly defined, 'activism' are the joint actions of a group of like-minded individuals gathering to advocate for a cause [11, 26, 31]. Activism can encompass moments of collective action, defined as a 'joint action in pursuit of common ends' [50].

We use 'slacktivism' to describe an online display of support for a social cause that requires little personal effort [36]. Supporters of slacktivism hold that it only increases the feel good factor of the participants and that no impact is possible using social media [36, 12], they also state that if political are made on social media, they tend to be ephemeral [24, 27], while detractors sustain that slacktivism can contribute to political action. [52, 14, 43].

We call 'participants' to reddit users who posted at least one comment. To better understand how participants on r/The_Donald are orchestrating political activism and calls to action, we employed a framing approach, which has been previously used to analyze the collective action produced in social movements, both online and offline [19, 23, 51]. Within social movement literature, framing has been used to explain the process of social movements, Benford and Snow [8] argue that three action frames can be used: diagnostic, which defines a problem or assigns blame; prognostic, which details possible solutions, strategies, and tactics to solve a problem; and motivational, which incites individuals to take action or mobilize. Analyzing comments of the subreddit participants with this approach allows to explain how collective action is being organized within the subreddit, and to find meaning within the text.

To begin, we survey related work. We then introduce reddit and the subreddit r/The_Donald. To ground our discussion of the subreddit, we perform two data driven studies: 1) Ephemerality of users participation and community, 2) Three notorious cases where a subset of the community allegedly participated in collective action: the downvoting of the trailer of Netflix TV show "Dear White People", the trolling case of Amy Schummer, and the orchestration of doxing. We conclude with a discussion about our findings regarding slacktivism in the Trump era and possible applications of our findings for the design of technologies capable of mobilizing people to engage in political activities.

RELATED WORK

In recent years, researchers have been skeptical about the positive impact of the Internet on civic mobilization [37, 36] Our work builds on prior literature on ephemerality of participation on online spaces that state that political events are characterized by the level of ephemerality of their participants [17, 27, 32, 24]. r/The_Donald can contribute to shed light on this topic, especially on the way it takes place at a large scale. Evidence is mixed in terms of the way slacktivism actually develops in specific real situations. Most studies focus on studying it either through qualitative analysis or limited

datasets [54, 29, 39, 49, 52, 20]. Therefore, our work reconsiders their results in larger online communities such as reddit. To our knowledge, we are the first to study slacktivism at a large scale over a long period of time in a presidential campaign. Through our investigation of r/The_Donald, we hope to contribute to scholarly conversations about the way slacktivism has developed.

It is worth noting that these are not just of academic interest, they have clear practical implications for the design of new technology capable of changing the way people communicate and connect with each other in order to orchestrate collective action and have a tangible impact on society.

Slacktivism

Collective Action

Some researchers have stated that the use of technology does not help activism achieve real change on society or that it cannot be measured by means different from e-petition signatures, 'like' counts, and other metrics that only convey support [37, 34, 18]. Others have argued that slacktivism can build awareness of crucial issues, which can then lead to action [53]

Ephemerality

Evidence has showed that content shared over social media consists of short messages shared in short conversations [27, 24]. Recent work has found that while many U.S.-based activist organizations believe that they are creating stronger communities and dialogues with their public through social media content, this rarely translates to significant mobilization with regard to public events[17].

Slacktivism Detractors

Prior work has studied how social media has helped to generate some sort of change, either online or offline. One of the most iconic examples is the Arab Spring. Past research used an 'on the ground' approach to study the role that played social media to social media connected activists with actors in other cities in Tunisia [54]. Prior research studied how citizens developed a categorization scheme to describe common strategies of lobbying on Twitter, along with another series of sophisticated techniques to impact political outcomes [20]. A different study surveyed the way Italians discussed the 2013 election on Twitter, finding that the more respondents acquire political information via social media, the more they are likely to contact politicians either via e-mail, using social media, or attending offline events [52]. A different qualitative study made to undergraduate students found that online political engagement has a significant, positive relationship with offline political activism[25]. A study conducted on the 2010 Swedish national election campaign found that a frequent social media use among young citizens can motivate them to get involved in political participation [22]

Slacktivism Supporters

Others believe that enticing collective action is not possible. For example, past research has examined the effects of social media use on online and offline civic participation, finding that social media use enhances web participation, but not offline participation [56]. A study about the Move On e-mail

campaign, which incited people to write to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concerning its 2004 mercury rule-making, found that only a small portion of emails contained relevant information for the EPA to consider, raising doubts about the notion that online public participation is possible [46]. A meta-analysis involving 38 studies found that Internet use will not have a substantial impact on political engagement [9]. Christensen [12] argues that there is not enough evidence to sustain that Internet activism is replacing traditional political participation, rather, it only helps citizens to become aware of issues. Morozov [37] sustains that digital platforms are unable to sustain the attention of people, therefore, they would not engage in political participation as it takes time or involve personal risks.

REDDIT AND THE_DONALD SUBREDDIT

Reddit was created in 2005 by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian as a community-driven platform for discussion, news aggregation and content rating [47]. The platform is composed of thousands of sub-communities focused on different topics, called subreddits. Users of the platform are called "redditors".

Users can submit links or text posts, and other redditors can comment on them. In this paper we will refer to the text post or the link submitted by a redditor to start a new thread as "post" or "parent post" and the comments that originate from it simply as "comments".

In this paper, we focus on the subreddit *r/The_Donald*, created when Donald Trump announced his presidential run. This subreddit follows each of the current president controversies, as well as the ones he has inspired. The interface on *The_Donald* is similar to an old Geocities website from the 1990s, complete with an animated GIF that has Donald Trump winking when you direct your mouse over him. *The_Donald* has over 390,000 "centipedes," or subscribers, and typically has around 5,000 visiting the site at any given time [2].

r/The_Donald was quite controversial during the 2016 presidential election. During that time, founders of the group were linked to crackdowns on "fake news", and the admin of the group, IFIFIFOKIEDOKIE, claimed that the group was being overrun by "shills and trolls" who sought to "slander and attack our community", and drown out "thoughtful discussion or Trump related content." Many disgruntled reddit users also complained about the very presence of *The_Donald*, calling the account's newsfeed "hateful" and claiming that it drowned out more substantive content. Despite its controversy, people may find a good amount of resources in *r/The_Donald*. The group warehouses a great amount of Donald Trump's editorials, which either him and/or a team produced on a series of topics, and which they had published in the country's newspapers.

DATA COLLECTION

We used bigquery¹ to obtain the dataset of activity on months of the posts and comments of the subreddit *r/The_Donald*. We collected 16,349,287 comments from 342,731 participants. The data collection took a snapshot of all main activity that

happened on the subreddit from its start in June 30th 2015 to the date we ended the data collection, February 28th 2017.

EVALUATION

Previous work has identified the role of social media as an organizing mechanism to entice collective action [44]. Recent research has found that while many activist organizations believe they are creating stronger communities and dialogues with their public through social media, this rarely translates to significant mobilization with regard to public events or political activism [17]. It has also been found that debates over social media tend to promote ephemeral engagement and often lack an offline impact [17]. In this study, our aim was to find evidence that could help us shed light on collective action being organized within *r/The_Donald*, and to understand the slacktivism's postulate on ephemerality occurring on the subreddit.

Study 1. Ephemerality

We divide ephemerality in two parts. First we investigate the ephemerality of the community by plotting the daily amount of comments and new participants on *r/The_Donald* of the entire community throughout time. We then analyze the ephemerality of individuals, this is, the time each person engaged in the subreddit. For this purpose, we examine the daily participation of each individual on the *r/The_Donald*. We also analyze how much each individual participated on the *r/The_Donald* in comparison to other subreddits. We report each person's permanence on *r/The_Donald*, their level of commenting, and relate the results with slacktivism's view of ephemerality.

Community Ephemerality: Method.

Using our entire dataset of 16,349,287 comments, we visualized the level of participation of the community as a function of the number of comments the entire community made. We also plotted the time when each community member started participating on *r/The_Donald*.

Community Ephemerality: Results.

Figure 1 shows peaks surrounding specific events, but also a steady and high level of activity throughout the period of the presidential campaign until the day after the election, which was held on November 8, 2016. It is evident that the activity has actually increased subsequent to the presidential election. The argument for slacktivism would expect that the activity on the subreddit decreased after that day [24].

The majority of users created a median of 2 comments. The comment distribution is right-skewed similar to a power law, making the mean less meaningful: 38.1 comments ($\sigma = 256.3$ comments). In fact 90.53 percent of commenters made 50 or fewer comments. The top three users: User A, a reddit auto-moderator with 45,944 comments (Figure 3, point A). Below user A was a user whose name include the term "bot" (Figure 3, point B) who made 43,000 comments. Below User B was User C, who made 32,327 comments (Figure 3, point C). User C started his activity on the subreddit on March 11th, 2016 and continued until the day our data collection ended; in other words, this user created and average of 91 comments per day, became a participant of the subreddit during the period of primaries/caucuses [3], and has remained active since then.

¹<https://bigquery.cloud.google.com>

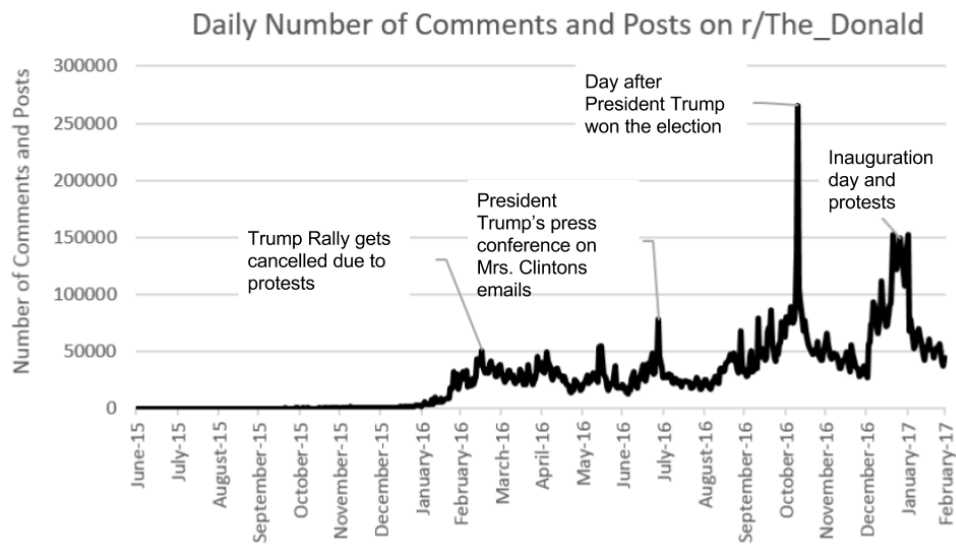


Figure 1. Daily Number of Comments and Posts.

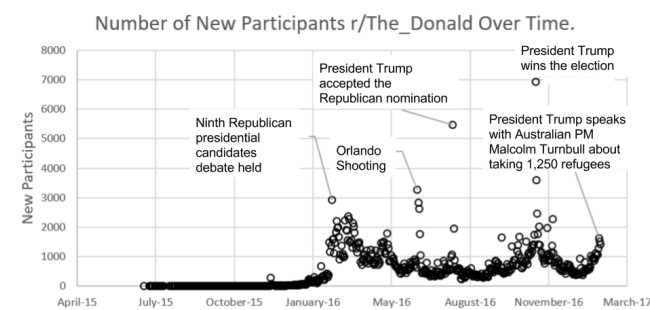


Figure 2. Number of daily new participants.

This already points to the fact that this user is not ephemeral, something that contradicts slactivism supporters.

We also examined the per-day number of people who participated for the first time on r/The_Donald with either a post or a comment. Figure 2 shows that new members joined the r/The_Donald with clearly identifiable peaks during significant external events. Probably the first such event and a milestone in the joining of new members to the subreddit happened on February 13th 2016, when the ninth Republican presidential debate was held. Nevertheless, it is clear from the data that the new members also arrived to the subreddit on days that no significant event seemed to have occurred, and even after the election day. The reason for this individual's arrival at those times is still unclear.

Ephemerality of Individuals: Method.

We examined the number of days between the first and last comments of each individual participant in the r/The_Donald. We also plotted the comment participation ratio for each user, based on the number of comments each individual made on r/The_Donald in comparison to other subreddits. In order to

do this, we collected a different dataset that allowed us to know in what other subreddits each individual participated. Users on r/The_Donald participated on 124,602 additional subreddits as seen in Table 2. The political subreddit that had more users from r/The_Donald participating was r/HillaryForPrison with 25,573 participants. This is interesting as previous work has demonstrated that social media use tend to create 'filter bubbles' diminishing the possibility of exposure to new or challenging ideas [13, 40, 10].

Ephemerality of Individuals: Results.

Figure 3, shows that participants on r/The_Donald were active for extended periods of time. We can observe that individuals are distributed almost along the whole graph, meaning that they kept active between 100 and 500 days, 65 days on average. It is clear from this data that the community is not dominated by those commenters who are only briefly active, which is something unexpected for those who assume that participation should be ephemeral [24, 27].

In our analysis of individuals, we also wanted to understand the use of reddit by both highly active and ephemeral participants. We thus investigated in which other subreddits r/The_Donald users also commented or posted. For this purpose, we calculated each participants's mean posting ratio on r/The_Donald. That is, the number of comments each individual wrote on r/The_Donald over total number of comments on reddit.

$$The_Donald_PostRatio = \frac{num_comments_The_Donald}{num_comments_reddit}$$

Individuals who post primarily on r/The_Donald would have a mean post ratio close to 1. In Figure 4 the X axis shows the number of posts and comments that individuals generated for r/The_Donald, while the Y axis shows their mean post ratio.

Figure 4 shows that post ratio varies with the volume of comments. In essence, people with approximately more than 500

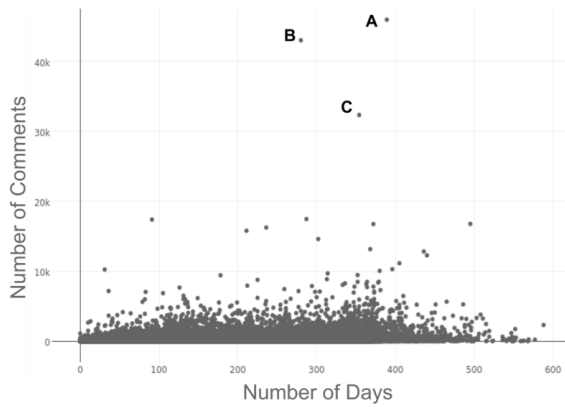


Figure 3. Number of days between first and last comments of users. The most a dot is to the right side, the most days passed between the first user comments and last days comment

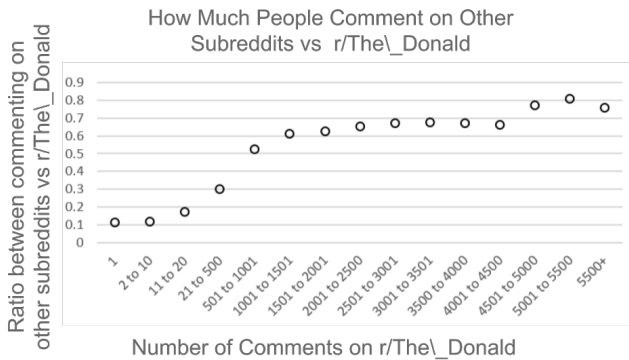


Figure 4. Overview people’s participation in other subreddits.

comments post and comment much more on The_Donald than in other subreddits. We would have expected for the prolific r/The_Donald commentators to also participate elsewhere, but they massively concentrated on r/The_Donald. On the other hand, low volume r/The_Donald commenters came from elsewhere on reddit, where they were much more participative. It would seem that even those who made only 1 comment on r/The_Donald had made on average 9 more comments elsewhere on reddit.

Emphemerality: Discussion

The usual narrative around slacktivism suggests that individuals have ephemeral participation around political topics [27, 32] on social spaces and that their participation would usually start only during a political event, and would not continue after it [24]. However, the dynamics on r/The_Donald suggest that a large number of participants stayed engaged for long periods of time, not necessarily being casual users, as observed on Figure 3. In the case of new participants, they seem to be arriving with an increasing rate even after the election day, as it can be observed in Figure 2.

In Figure 4 we can observe that the mean post ratio from participants on r/The_Donald to other subreddits was high, meaning

that they participated almost exclusively on the r/The_Donald. However, those who did participated on other subreddits, did so on subreddits that agree with their political view, supporting the theory of polarization and selective exposure on social media [42, 13, 40], this is, users would tend to arrive to social spaces where their political believes are reinforced, avoiding those ones that do not resonate with them, creating a 'filter bubble effect'.

Study 2. Uncovering Collective Action

By means of large-scale and longitudinal observational data, we explored whether users on r/The_Donald organized collective action mobilization efforts. We especially aimed at understanding whether people participated in an effort to mobilize other users to take action, and whether this behaviour continued after Donald Trump was elected. This would contradict the slacktivism theory, since it holds that participation ends once major political events have passed and that collective action is generally never orchestrated on social media [12, 36].

We narrow our analysis to specific cases where r/The_Donald community allegedly [35, 1] organized collective action. We focus especially on the alleged collective action that the community generated around:

1) “Amy Schumer” Case Amy Schumer is a high profile comedian who debuted a brand new comedy special exclusively on Netflix in 2017. Her comedy show faced very negative press reviews. Schumer claimed that people on The Donald organized a campaign on Netflix against her to give her show negative reviews, which in turn led the press to follow suit [4]. People on r/The_Donald allegedly organized themselves against Amy because of her political ideology. We will study how people discussed "Amy Schumer" on r/The_Donald, and analyze whether they organized collective action on the subreddit.

2) “Doxing”. Doxing refers to the Internet-based practice of researching and broadcasting private or identifiable information (especially personally identifiable) about an individual or organization. Actually, r/The_Donald community was almost banned due to the amount of doxing it was performing [1]. Community members allegedly organized collective action to broadcast personal information about celebrities and politicians that opposed their views. We looked for evidence of any type of incitation to doxing during the studied period, especially on how collective action was organized for doxing.

4) “Dear White People” Case. On February 8th, 2017 Netflix released the trailer of "Dear White People", a satirical series about a student of color that navigates a predominantly white Ivy League college. The trailer quickly received a backlash online, with detractors bemoaning a perceived effort to divide and highlight difference. The video on Netflix’s official YouTube Channel for US & Canada², received a large number of dislikes (a ratio of 7.48 dislikes per like approximately) A wide number of Netflix subscribers was said to cancel their account too. r/The_Donald community allegedly contributed

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LzggK5DRBA>

to the orchestration of this movement against "Dear White people"[35].

We chose these cases since they were covered in mass media, and because they supposedly led to significant consequences, something that the slacktivism supporters regard as impossible [36, 12]. We used these case studies as a way to shed light on the possible ways users were trying to mobilize others to take action, and therefore refuting slacktivism theories.

Method: Categorizing Content

Our objective was to understand whether users on r/The_Donald were having conversations to encourage collective action. We employed a framing approach [8].

By categorizing people's posts and comments within these collective action frames we can begin to understand how people on r/The_Donald tried to mobilize others by means of their comments, either by pointing out a problem (diagnostic frame), giving solutions (prognostic frame), or motivating people to take action (motivational frame), just as the stages of collective action where crowds or communities identify opportunities, brainstorm solutions, initialize mobilization of users and take action [55].

After we obtained all posts and comments for each of our three case studies, we used Amazon Mechanical Turk to hire three crowd workers, who categorized all comments and posts into the categories of the collective action framing theory. First, we asked two coders to categorize each of the comments or posts into one of the topics from the framing theory. We then asked the coders to pick the "most relevant" topic for each comment. Then we asked the third coder to label the comments or posts in which the first two coders had disagreed. Finally, we used a "majority rule" approach to determine the topic for those posts. The first two coders agreed on 81.9 percent of the posts and comments.

For this study, we gathered the comments or posts that were explicitly mentioning each case. We collected all posts or comments that explicitly mentioned the terms: i.e. "DOXING", and every variation of the word (i.e. "Doxing", "doxing", "DoXing", etc.) along with "Dear White People" and "Amy Schumer". We only selected the comments or posts that explicitly mentioned these terms as sometimes comments that were responses to the main post can deviate from the topic, and we would have no guarantee that they were still discussing our studied cases. We followed this method in order to assure that the comments or posts that we gathered were explicitly on the case study we were investigating. We read all comments and posts that resulted from our query to better understand their context.

Results

Table 1 presents an overview of the number of posts and comments that we collected for each our case studies, and also the number of posts and comments that were categorized into each collective action framing topic. In the following, we discuss the nature of each one of the framing topics that were present on r/The_Donald.

Diagnostic. This category focused on diagnosing problems and identifying people to blame for a problem. Across each of the three case studies, we found that this category covered the majority of the conversations (between 84.4% and 92.34%). It appeared that people focused primarily on "diagnosing" what the problem with Amy Schumer was (people especially discussed why they rejected her and her political views), and what the problem with Netflix's "Dear White People" show was (especially, what was wrong with the political views and ideology that the show promoted). In the case of "doxing", people focused on diagnosing who might have doxed them, how they avoided being doxed or the rules about doxing on reddit. An example of a comment from this type where a person was diagnosing and discussing the issues of the show "Dear White People":

"...Look I'm just so tired of the left trying to divide us by race, gender, and skin color [...] We are all Americans [...] This "dear white people" crap is not only insulting to me as a white male, who is currently working and going to college because I couldn't get scholarships cause of muh privilege. It's just more race baiting divisive crap from the Left when we all need to focus on MAGA [Make America Great Again]. It really gets under my skin..."

Prognostic. This category focused on identifying solutions to problems. Across our case studies it was the second most used category (see Table 1). Something especially interesting about this case was that people did not directly mention what a solution to a problem could be, but rather used "hedge" words to suggest what the problem was. An example comment, where a person tried to suggest the best ways to deal with a doxing incident:

"...I humbly suggest we add sub-paragraph:3a. Lets start our own calletteremail writing campaigns to any companies that terminate an employee over one of these doxing incidents. Lets make them know that by trying to appease these communist aggressors they are pissing us off to the point that we will no longer do business with them..."

Motivational. This category focused on creating posts and comments that could "motivate" people into action. This was the category that people practiced the least across our case studies. However, it was still practiced. Contrary to the claims of slacktivism supporters, people were using social media to try and to initiate collective action. The type of action that people tried to motivate covered: (a) collectively creating massive tweets for a particular cause; (b) collectively boycotting brands that supported political views or ideologies they oppose; (c) collectively downvoting content on YouTube; (d) signing petitions to oppose people or organizations that oppose their political views. An example of a comment motivating people to take these particular type of actions:

About boycotting a brand:

"...Don't drink Budweiser anymore. It's owned by Brazilians who hire [...] Amy Schumer..."

About contacting other celebrities on social media:

“LET THESE CELEBRITIES KNOW THAT WE SUPPORT THEIR DECISION TO LEAVE AMERICA NOW THAT TRUMP IS GOD EMPEROR!”

1. [Barbra Streisand](https://twitter.com/BarbraStreisand)
2. [Bryan Cranston](https://twitter.com/bryancranston)
- ..
5. [Amy Schumer](https://twitter.com/amyschumer)

I think I got their accounts correct. Let me know if you find any issues with my links or if I forgot any.”

Surprisingly, similar to the prognostic topic, most comments in this category did not directly give people orders to take action, but rather suggested which actions were needed. Suggestions to take action were also frequently followed by the assertion that said action was already performed by others, including the person that made the suggestion in the first place.

About cancelling the Netflix subscription:

“...All the more reason that we should dump Netflix. Their "Dear White People Show" they released is a bit too preachy. If Soros is funding, hell yes, I'm done. Pic related: My cancellation receipt <http://imgur.com/a/VbdCK...>”

About starting a petition to deport Amy Schummer:

“I just started a petition to deport Amy Schumer on the White House petitions site, We the People. Will you sign it? <https://wh.gov/ie8nb>”

This approach could convince other people to take action in their effort to follow the example of their peers.

Discussion

We discuss our results using the notion of ephemerality proposed by slacktivism, along with the categories used for framing social movements: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames, as well as the characteristics that slacktivism supporters and detractors have stated in previous research, covering collective action and social media influence.

We found that the majority of posts and comments that people used in our three case studies were diagnostic, that is, they did not suggest solutions or necessarily motivate action; instead, they could be classified as short conversations [27, 24]. These comments mainly focused on diagnosing and identifying problems. The majority of people’s comments remained at the early stages of collective action, where people are brainstorming and ideating the problem [55]. In the case of "Amy Schummer", 92.34 % of the comments and posts were diagnostic, while in the cases of Doxing and "Dear White People", the same type of comments amounted to 84.4% and 84.59% respectively.

It has been found that a strong collective identity is important for a successful social movement [41]. This sense of identity increases over time as participants come to share beliefs and begin to see themselves as a collective [15]. The shared sense

of community that reddit members tend to have [28] might play a role in social pressure [7].

Previous work has found that people will tend to follow others’ orders in online social spaces if they can see that the person giving the orders is also following them [38, 7, 5]. As it has been observed before, social pressure also plays a large role in deciding to participate on social actions [21]. Previous research suggest that the desire to present a positive image to others and a desire to be consistent with one’s own values can lead to the willingness to contribute to a cause [30]. It has also been found that people can change their opinions as a result of the interactions they were having in social spaces [45] This could be especially observed in the "Dear White People" Case, where people were letting others know about cancelling their Netflix subscription. Overall, these apparent calls to action lead individuals on r/The_Donald to generate 1,300 comments with the words “cancelled” and “Netflix”, possibly hinting that the calls to action lead over 1,000 Netflix accounts to be terminated. The receipt uploaded by users is the only proof that others might felt social pressure to cancel the subscription as well. In the other cases (Doxing and Amy Schumer case) we found evidence that other users made efforts to mobilize others, but we do not have evidence that uses took actions outside of reddit.

Showing an image of the Netflix subscriptions cancellation might have enticed or even pressured others to do the same [6]. This, in turn, could have triggered a collective action, even though it was not lead by anyone in particular, as we did not detect any single user that had made several messages classified as motivational (which that might have marked him or her as a leader). Instead, subtle ways of calls to action were given in form of prognostic messages using hedge words like "I humbly suggest..."

Category	Amy Schummer	Dear White People	Doxing	Total Avg (%)
Diagnostic	2760(92.34%)	395(84.59%)	450(84.40%)	90%
Prognostic	174 (5.82%)	39(12.03%)	64(8.33%)	7%
Motivational	55 (1.84%)	34(3.38%)	18(7.26%)	3%

Table 1. Total Comments Per Case per Categories

	Total
Comments	16,349,287
participants	342,731
Other subreddits r/The_Donald users participated	124,602

Table 2. Datasets

Limitations and Future Work

The insights this work provides are limited by the methodology and population we studied. For example, the subreddit we examined, r/The_Donald, focuses around US politics, especially the political campaign and presidency surrounding Donald Trump. Hence our results might not describe how slacktivism takes place in other environments. Future work focusing on inspecting how people engage in political discussions in different social media platforms and in other regions across the world could create a strong body of literature to better understand current slacktivism.

Also, our investigation focused on breadth rather than depth, as a result, we do not know much about the identities and motivations of the people participating in r/The_Donald. Future research could conduct detailed interviews with the participants of this subreddit.

We found that many participants on r/The_Donald apparently tried to trigger action in others by sharing that they had already done said action. Mirroring the behavior one wants to trigger seems to create a highly participatory space. This result suggests that the correlation between the levels of participation of people (how much they respond to a call to action) and the mirroring that “leaders” or organizers follow warrants deeper investigation, especially within social media.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we investigate the subreddit r/The_Donald as a vehicle for understanding how slacktivism has evolved in the Trump era, focusing on the characteristics of ephemerality and collective action in online communities.

Analyzing ephemerality via 16 months of site activity, we found that some participants stayed engaged for long periods of time (65 days on average), with new subscribers arriving at an increasing rate even after the election day, and not necessarily being casual users, something that slacktivism detractors might have expected.

Prior work also suggest that the people who do decide to participate in this spaces are likely people who are already very active online and that participate in many other online activities. Although we cannot assume that they are participating in other online activities i.e. other social networks, we found that at least within reddit they were participating almost exclusively on r/The_Donald, which still is unexpected.

We also observed that r/The_Donald users participated in other subreddits that had their same political point of view, which supports previous work regarding the low exposure to new and challenging ideas that users on social media tend to have.

We then examined collective action using three high profile cases in which participants of r/The_Donald contributed to orchestrate: The downvoting of the highly controversial Netflix TV show "Dear White People", the trolling of the stand-up comedian Amy Schumer, and the orchestration of doxing strategies.

We found that among the comments analyzed over 90% of them remained on the early stages of collective action [55]. However, the rest showed subtle ways of collective action, more in form of suggestions or using "hedge" words than in direct orders. This was especially observed in the "Dear White People" Case, where people were letting others know about cancelling their Netflix subscription. Following sociological theories and reddit's sense of community, this might have led others to take action.

Due to the rising popularity of social media, it becomes increasingly important to understand the new dynamics of slacktivism on this online spaces. Our findings shed light on understating what triggers and influences the motivation of users

to participate in collective action, which can be used for the development of the next generation of technologies to mobilize people for future political participation. New theories or refinement of existing ones is needed to better understand the design and evaluation of participatory technologies. This might involve theories about motivation and persuasion.

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