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HOW AFFECT RHETORIC AND A CHANGING DIGITAL LANDSCAPE SHAPE YOUTH DIGITAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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This dissertation, submitted by Amanda Frances Pasierb in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Amanda Frances Pasierb
Date 11/30/20

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores three youth digital social movements, which have taken place throughout the twenty-first century: the Invisible Children movement of Uganda, the Bring Back Our Girls movement of Nigeria, and the Never Again movement of the United States. Using rhetorical analysis of each movement, I explore the relationship each has with youth, digital, social movement, and activism. Specifically, I seek to answer the following research questions: (1) with youth in the forefront of each movement, how have the movements utilized affective rhetoric to promote and gain support, and (2) how have youth digital social movements evolved throughout the twenty-first century?

I argue that key components of youth digital social activism include the ability to get movement followers to connect on an emotional level with the cause of the movement in order to get them to move offline and act outside of the digital realm and providing specific, detailed steps for movement followers to avoid getting stuck in the online vortex that can lead to a version of *slacktivism*. Ultimately, this research provides insight for future social activists and movement leaders to learn from and adapt accordingly, and important areas for future scholars to focus their attention.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> This generation is changing the rules. The traditional routes of communication, influence, and authority have been reversed, and our connectedness has turned the power pyramid upside down.[1]
>
> — Invisible Children "The Fourth Estate"

Young people are not new to the social movement landscape, but as times have changed, so too have the ways in which youth engage in social activism. The utilization of new digital means has shaped the way young people hear about, discuss, and engage in social activism. This dissertation explores three social movements that have connections to youth, the changing digital landscape that each has emerged within, and the relationship that each has to activism as a whole. The three cases in this study include the Invisible Children Movement in Uganda, the Bring Back Our Girls movement in Nigeria, and the Never Again movement in the United States. In this dissertation, I explore the concepts of youth, digital, social movement, and activism to track the evolution of youth digital social movements over time and to explore the affective rhetoric surrounding youth as a mainstay of each of these movements.

The combination of youth and social movement activism is not new. Across the globe, and for centuries, young people have been activists and protestors of injustice. The documented history dates back to at least 1229, when the entire student body at the University of Paris went on strike after students were unjustly punished, and some killed, by outside enforcement while the University was supposed to be independent from local authority. More recently, during the twentieth century, youth have continued to take up social movement activism across the world.[2] For example, during South African Apartheid in 1944, a group of young 'radicals' created the African National Council

Youth League as they became frustrated by the decline of the African National Council under its conservative leadership.[3] In the United States in 1963, around 800 African-American school children skipped school and marched from the 16th Street Baptist Church in Alabama to City Hall during the Birmingham Children's Crusade, demanding an end to the segregation of blacks and whites.[4] Later, youth protests against the Vietnam War in the 1970s brought about an era of protest music that united and galvanized the culture behind the anti-war movement.[5] In 1989 at China's Tiananmen Square, students took to the streets of Beijing riding bikes, with banners, speeches, and songs to rally support for the pro-democracy movement and economic liberalization.[6] In 2010, during what many have referred to as the Arab Spring, youth used social media to organize revolutions across the Middle East in large numbers and with incredible speed.[7] In 2016, the International Indigenous Youth Council protested at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation against the Dakota Access Pipeline in an attempt to protect the Cannonball and Missouri Rivers.[8] While this list is not exhaustive, it does highlight the role youth have played across time and across the globe when it comes to social movement activism.

Today, youth continue to be a part of movements seeking justice. Young people are being active and demanding that their voices be heard from Spain to Egypt to Hong Kong to the United States.[9] In 2018, *Harvard Ed. Magazine* stated that the United States is currently seeing the "most forceful surge of youth activism since the 1960s."[10] While this highlights an important time in the United States to study youth social movements, this phenomenon is not contained to the United States alone. Across the world in varying cultures, contexts, economic conditions, and political spheres, activism has continued to take place in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.[11]

An integral aspect of today's social movements is the role of digital technologies. While the use of digital means is not the same across the globe, in the three cases being explored in this study, the digital aspect of these youth social movements is an important one. This dissertation will explore their similarities and differences and will study of the evolution of how social movements have changed over the years. In the following chapters, I break down the impacts of digital technologies on each of the social movements as it relates to each movement's context, location, target demographics, and ends and means.

Social movements in the twenty-first century have new opportunities and constraints with the use of technology by movement leaders and participants. Exploring these opportunities and constraints presents new reasons and ways to study youth social movements today. The evolution of digital social movements by youth over the years will help provide insights into how future social movements might navigate the continually changing digital landscape.

Studying Youth Digital Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century

The purpose of this study is to explore how leaders of different youth social movements have used affect rhetoric and digital technology over the last fifteen years through analysis of the Invisible Children movement in Uganda,[12] the Bring Back Our Girls movement in Nigeria,[13] and the Never Again movement in the United States.[14] Throughout this research, I highlight the similarities and differences across these movements in order to provide insight into the evolution of youth digital social movements over time and gain insight for the future study and practice of social

movements. Importantly, the purpose of this study is *not* to identify "best practices" or "good/bad" social movements, as the subjectivity of those value claims is wrapped up in the variables of each social movement due to their location, economics, political institutions, and potential restrictions on technology, but rather, this study looks at what has been done over time and the impact of various rhetorical moves.

This study looks at three specific social movements that each have connections to youth, digital, social movements, and activism in the twenty-first century. The first case in this dissertation focuses on the Invisible Children movement that was started in 2004 and is still active today. The Invisible Children movement is an important social movement to study because of the movement's relationship to youth, their use of technology at the turn of the century, and how both of these contributed to what the movement and outside observers have deemed "activism" for their cause.

The second case in this dissertation is Bring Back Our Girls. Bring Back Our Girls is a social movement that began after the abduction of over 200 Chibok girls from their dormitories by Boko Haram in Nigeria. The Bring Back Our Girls movement is positioned uniquely in this dissertation, in part, due to the movement's relationship to the large, worldwide hashtag campaign that helped spread the movement's message outside of the local area in which the abductions took place and how participants engaged in the various stages of activism.

The third case in this research is the Never Again movement. The Never Again movement came about after the February 14, 2018, school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) high school in Parkland, Florida, in the United States. Among these case studies, the Never Again movement provides the most current look at a youth social

movement and the relationship between social movements today and the digital landscape that helps promote, expand, and enact their activism.

Much of the previous youth-led activism throughout history has been started by college-aged students,[15] but the three cases being studied in this project all involved high-school aged students and younger children in many aspects of their causes. Across the cases, youth have been involved in various aspects of these social movements, including youth being the victims of the violence that started the movement, youth being the leaders of the movement, and youth being a major part of the demographic for engagement with the movement. I argue that because the three cases in this study are social movements that involve individuals younger than traditional adult social movement activism, they are important cases worth studying at a time when youth activism is rising.[16] Exploring activism that is done by, and engages, young people is relevant not only because of its growing popularity, but also for the future as a way to learn where, why, and how these youth social movements come about, grow, and accomplish (or do not accomplish) their goals.

In addition, this dissertation examines the impact of the digital realm on social movements over the last fifteen years, as well as how the variables surrounding social movements impact their relationship to the use of digital means. Ultimately, this study explores how contemporary social movements use digital technology across the globe with a younger cohort in similar and different ways to promote their causes further and how these variables all impact how each movement defines activism.

Today's youth pose an important dynamic to study when it comes to social movements and activism. On the one hand, adults sometimes see youth as naïve and

uninterested in politics. However, as Lynn Clark and Regina Marchi highlight, it is not that youth are uninterested in politics, but rather that adults today define citizenship, and how people engage with politics, differently than youth today.[17] Whereas the past understanding of citizenship included activities such as voting, following the laws, and paying taxes, citizen participation today is more along the lines of participating in protests, boycotts, and civil court cases with a concern for others.[18] Thus, older generations may not recognize the political work that younger generations are doing as activism and might discount the cohort as a whole as not being interested in politics at all.

It is important to study the youth perspective because of what they bring to the conversation about politics, social justice, rights, and freedoms. Specifically, Maureen Johnson highlights the importance of looking at younger generations and their perspectives on issues because they are seeing issues for the first time and bring new and passionate perspectives on issues that older generations have been fighting for over many years.[19] Youth activists recognize injustice and fight for change with a passion to create a just world to live in.

Building upon these perspectives, Marshall Ganz, a senior lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School discusses the important aspects that youth bring to solving the problems of the world. First, Ganz argues that youth have a critical eye of the world, meaning that they are able to see the problems in the world more clearly; they look at injustices around the world and ask *why* they exist and how those injustices can be solved. Second, Ganz says that youth have a clear view of the world's needs and pains. Because they have a critical look of the world, youth are able to see the struggles that others face and the needs that those struggles produce. Finally, Ganz states that they bring hopeful hearts that

show the world's promises and possibilities. Again, because the younger demographic has not been in the world as long, they have not seen these problems last for decades, they have not seen as many attempts to solve problems fail, and because of that, they still have hope that they can make changes and believe that problems will get better.[20] From this perspective, youth provide insights into problems and come at those problems with a sense of hope that make their voices important to consider when exploring and attempting to find solutions.

The Invisible Children, the Bring Back Our Girls, and Never Again movements they each have connections to youth through their leadership and membership, but also because they all came about because youth had been explicitly targeted with violence. All three of these cases also use technology and non-traditional forms of garnering attention on a global scale. Finally, these three movements have a variety of demographics when it comes to leaders and participants in their activism. The Invisible Children movement was created and led by three recent college graduate young adult males; the Bring Back Our Girls movement and the fight for education for girls around the world gained Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani female, as a prominent worldwide spokesperson; and finally, the Never Again movement was created by and has been led by high school students of varying ethnic diversity within their leadership. The three cases have enough in common to be examined side-by-side, but they each vary enough in their specifics enough that they cover a wide range of youth social activism that has/is utilizing digital technology.

Defining Key Terms

This project explores the interplay among four key terms: "youth," "social movement," "digital," and "activism." Although each of these terms is complicated, it is important to develop a working definition for each term that will inform the project as a whole. Below, I explore each term, relying on previous research, to develop a working definition for this specific research.

Defining Youth: A Complex Task for a Complex Group

Defining "youth" is surprisingly complex. The complexities arise from an understanding of what makes an individual a "youth" or what makes someone an "adult," and if being in one category automatically excludes an individual from the other category. Additionally, attempting to understand the concept of "youth" or "young adult" becomes even more difficult when considering how these terms are defined on a worldwide scale. With these difficulties in mind, I explore a definition of "youth" that best suits this research below.

In establishing a definition for youth, there are a few important considerations. The first would is the legal understanding of what makes one an adult, which is not consistent around the globe. In much of the world, the age of majority (that is, the threshold whereby the law considers a person an adult) is 18-years-old.[21] One possible benefit of using the age of majority as a standard is that it can clearly define from a legal standpoint where the concept of "youth" lies. Many countries, such as the United States (aside from Alabama, Mississippi, Nebraska, and Puerto Rico),[22] Egypt,[23] Nigeria,[24] Mexico,[25] and Uganda,[26] all observe the 18-year-old age of majority. However, there are

several countries where the age of majority ranges from 9-17 years old, including: Iran,[27] Saudi Arabia,[28] Indonesia,[29] Yemen,[30] Cuba,[31] Cambodia,[32] Vietnam,[33] and North Korea.[34] But, while the three countries being studied in this project, Nigeria, Uganda, and (the majority of) the United States all have an age of majority of 18, because of the diversity across the globe, and even within some countries such as the United States and Canada,[35] bounding the high-end of the "youth" demographic at 18 poses a problem. Because of this fluidity in what is considered the age of majority, it is not a simple solution to the problem of how to bound "youth" for this project.

In the absence of a global consensus, there are other frameworks for defining "youth" besides the legal framework of age of majority. After gathering an understanding of the use of "youth" in previous research, exploring the advantages and disadvantages of each in relation to this project will ultimately lead to the final definition of youth for this project. If the age of majority does not cover a wide enough range for this research, then another way to establish a standard for this term is to take a look at how other researchers have defined "youth" in a similar context. In previous research, scholars have varied understandings and usages of what constitutes "youth." For example, when studying policy-making rhetoric and youth in the 2004 election, Allison Howard and Donna Hoffman categorized youth as individuals ages 18 to 29.[36] The bounding of youth beginning at 18 here is, in part, determined by American voting policies wherein an individual must be 18 years old to vote. Additionally, in studies conducted by the Pew Research Center, on young people and political engagement, youth is also considered and measured as individuals ages 18-29.[37] Again, the low-end of the "youth" boundary is set, in part, due to U.S. policies on voting, and while this dissertation does include a social

movement that takes place in the United States, the other two social movements are outside of the United States. Thus, using U.S. standards to bound the term "youth" is problematic for this research as well. However, extending the age range through 29 adds to this dissertation because it facilitates the study of youth across time, as social movements go on for years. Extending the age of youth through 29, based on the political grounding of youth for those under 30, is the best way to capture the dynamic nature of youth in the context of youth social activism for this research.

Meanwhile, in a study that explored the web and youth emotions, the authors categorized "youth" as individuals in the age range of 13-19 years old on the basis of emotional development.[38] This definition of youth as it relates to emotion is important for this study because emotional appeals and affect are key rhetorical aspects I study in relation to how these social movements communicate their cause with outside audiences.

Additionally, this research focuses on how youth utilize social media in their social activism, so taking into consideration social media parameters also helps guide the decision for where to bound the youngest parameter of "youth" for this research. For most social media platforms (i.e. Facebook,[39] Twitter,[40] Instagram,[41] Snapchat,[42] Pinterest,[43] Kik,[44] QQ,[45] and YouTube,[46] with WeChat only allowing users this young access to an account with parental consent[47]), the minimum age requirement to create an account and to use that platform is 13 years old A few outliers include WhatsApp (which recently raised their minimum age requirement to 16 years old),[48] Tumblr(for users in the European Union, they must be 16, but 13 elsewhere),[49] and Periscope (16 years old).[50] While some children younger than 13 work-around the age restrictions of these sites, 13 is the standard age set across many major platforms. The social media minimum age

standards, along with the minimum age of youth as it relates to emotion, provide a strong bottom-line age for those considered "youth" as users younger than 13.

The rationale behind the 13-29 age-range constituting youth for this dissertation is due to 13 years old being the youngest age permitted on the majority of social networking platforms; a key aspect of this project. The extension of the age through 29 moves past the complicated boundary of the age of majority to include those individuals throughout their 20s. This includes the older aged activists that have not yet reached "adulthood" but still contribute to the movements. The extension through 29 years old is important for this research because many young activists may start in their teens or early twenties, but they continue to contribute to the movement for years to follow.

When considering "youth" in this project, there are three ways in which the youth aspect contributes to social movements. Each movement for this project must meet the requirement of being *youth-affected*. This means the movement must have come about due to an issue that has directly impacted youth. Next, the cases must involve youth in their activism, which breaks down into either being led by youth (*youth-led*), or involve the youth heavily in their target demographic for participation(*youth-involved*). Some of the cases in this study are both *youth-affected* and *youth-led,* while others are *youth-affected* and *youth-involved,* and finally, some of the cases are all three; *youth-led, youth-affected,* and *youth-involved.*

Each case in this research came about because of its direct relationship to youth. Invisible Children came about after three young men saw and learned about the abduction of young boys who were forced to become child soldiers in northern Uganda. The Bring Back Our Girls movement developed after over 200 young Chibok girls were abducted

from their dormitories for attending school. Finally, the Never Again movement began after Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school was attacked by an active shooter who killed 14 teenagers. In addition to each of the three cases coming about after an act of violence directed at youth, these movements all have youth backing the movement and showing support for the cause. Young people have come together to either create or contribute (or both) to each of these three movements.

Finally, I explore how social movement organizers and participants present the idea and image of the youth in each of these social movements. This, too, is a complex relationship in that each of the movements has direct connections to youth, but how they communicate about and discuss youth varies. These movements portray youth in the forefront of their movements in various ways, from being directly impacted by a crisis to being movement leaders to empowering more youth to step up and step forward as activists for their cause. The rhetoric used by each movement is significant to study as a way to analyze the overall role and impact youth have had in these movements.

Digital Technologies in Twenty-First Century Social Movements

For those who are involved in the organization of a social movement or activism in the twenty-first century, digital aspects also play an important role. Across the globe, citizens are using technology to empower themselves both politically and socially through the use of computers, mobile technology, and web-based devices.[51] These activists and citizen journalists are using digital technology to tell their stories, bypassing gatekeepers of traditional media to reach wider audiences, which, as I later discuss, is the first step in the activism ladder moving from interest to participation.

In addition to the leaders of social movements using digital means, participants of social movements also engage in digital activism as well. When it comes to consumption of news and politics, the majority of the population still gets their news from traditional forms of media, but news consumption for young adults is done more so through digital means.[52] This creates a shift from traditional news to more diverse sources for the youth demographic. With youth gathering their news from more sources, they are exposed to what individuals outside of mainstream media find important and newsworthy, thus allowing them to set their own agendas as to what they stand behind and support. This helps distribute power into the hands of citizens and provides them with a sense of agency, both of which become important when developing social movements and helping individuals make a difference.[53] This is especially important for youth because the agency that they have to learn about the world is directly linked to the possibility for them to change it.[54]

Within the digital sections of each chapter, I discuss the significance between where a movement takes place and how they use digital technologies. Specifically, I explore issues of access and infrastructure and how that impacts the spreadability of their message. The discussion of digital access and the implications of the variance around the globe is referred to as the *digital divide*.[55] The digital divide is an important issue to consider when discussing social movements with a global reach because of variations in accessibility across the world, including within and across the three countries studied here. When not everyone has the same availability or access to the same digital means, it is important to discuss how those differences impact the various social movements and their overall work.

It is important to note, and explore, that with each case, there is positivity surrounding digital rhetoric and the relationship with youth, social movements, and activism, but there is also criticism with digital rhetoric which includes issues of echo chambers and censorship. Echo chambers occur when an individual seeks out and is surrounded by similar and reaffirming views on issues that individual already has. Research demonstrates that people will more often search for opinions that are similar to theirs than for differing opinions, which reinforces information they already support, rather than content that challenges their ideals or represents different voices.[56] This is very often seen in digital rhetoric, specifically through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. While perhaps not to the extent that previous research has estimated,[57] this is nevertheless an important factor to consider when studying the three social movements of this dissertation.

One of the major problems with echo chambers is that they can lead to instances of confirmation bias, wherein an individual simply seeks out information that confirms what they already think or believe and then ignore information that contradicts their already held beliefs.[58] This can also lead to group polarization where members of the group become reluctant to bring up information that might contradict the group consensus, inhibiting the group from considering all of the facts.[59] If social movements exist exclusively, or almost exclusively, on social media platforms, and the ideas of the participants are the only ideas being brought up and circulated, this could prevent social movements from creating impact or making changes. While the effectiveness of social movements is not the main purpose of this dissertation, the impact echo chambers could have on the rhetoric that is being used by the leaders and/or participants makes this an

important aspect to consider when studying the digital rhetoric that takes place in youth social movements.

In addition to echo chambers posing a concern for digital rhetoric when it comes to youth, social movements, and activism, issues of censorship also pose a problem for social movements that utilize the digital realm. Each case has its own unique relationship with censorship and how that censorship impacts the movement locally and globally is discussed in detail based on the various conditions of each movement.

When it comes to access to information, some countries, such as Tanzania, have laws that secure access to information to their citizens. However, in their Cybercrime Act of 2015, the Tanzanian police force is allowed to criminalize actions of individuals under freedom of expression and access to information, which ultimately undermines and threatens the access that Tanzanians have.[60] In Uganda, current cyber laws threaten the privacy of users as both mass and targeted surveillance is allowed, as well as search and seizure of private electronic devices of individuals.[61] These examples highlight that while citizens might have rights to access and use cyber technology, they may still be restricted by legal repercussions that inhibit how they might use said technology.

In addition to this type of surveillance and access control, other governments are more explicit in their restrictions. For example, during the Egyptian Revolution, the Egyptian government almost completely blocked access to the Internet for nearly two full days.[62] This is significant because it is during times of revolution or activism that access to the Internet and digital media could be of vast importance to citizens across the globe. Without that access, people are isolated from getting information and sharing their information with others. Issues of access, be they technological access issues, or access

issues in the way of censorship, are important aspects to consider when studying digital rhetoric, but even more so when studying digital rhetoric across the globe as rights, freedoms, and development will vary across nations.

While the United States and Nigeria do not have as big of concerns when it comes to censorship, the Ugandan government has been making moves to curtail the freedom of expression of its citizens online and censoring the web content available to them.[63] This has also led to citizens self-censoring the content they share online.[64] This type of censorship could impact how individuals participate in social movements, specifically when it comes to the digital rhetoric of those movements. There is a common thread through all three of the cases in that they all incorporate digital aspects into their specific movements, however, they are all unique based on the time in which they came about, the location of the movement, and the details that surround each of these unique attributes of the social movement.

What Makes a Social Movement a Social Movement

Similar to the term "youth," "social movement" is not an easy term to define. Various scholars of social movements have defined "social movement" in many different ways. In twentieth- and twenty-first century studies of social movements, researchers have not established a consensus on a definition of what they classify as a social movement.[65] Beginning in the mid-1960s, scholars began studying and developing past the idea of collective behavior for organizational and political unrest to an idea of unrepresented groups, collective action, and social movements.[66] McCarthy and Zald define a social movement as "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which

represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society."[67] Charles Tilly states that social movements are more than a group similar to a party, but rather social movements are a "sustained interaction between a specific set of authorities and various spokespersons for a given challenge to those authorities."[68] Tilly claims that social movements are a series of interactions between those with power and those speaking on behalf of those lacking representation.[69] What these definitions of social movements have in common is the notion of change, of shifting from how the structure currently is to a redistribution of power to the way it "should" or "ought" to be.

I emphasize this characteristic of social movements as a means to gauge the social movements of this dissertation to highlight the shift social movements are attempting to make. This is an important distinction because social movements are not simply activists fighting for the status quo, and because of that, they tend to be disruptive, and often challenge the standard ways of thinking. When acts of activism are critiqued amongst society, they are often called out for being disruptive, but I want to make the point, throughout this dissertation, that the disruption is part of what makes something a social movement.

Another defining characteristic of a social movement is their, at the very least, minimal organization.[70] This means that social movements must have some semblance of organization and cannot be a free-for-all within themselves. Movements that lack this basic level of organization are not classified as social movements, but are rather understood as fads, a riots, or unorganized protests.[71] While there must be some level of organization within a movement to be considered a social movement, they are never

single-minded or completely cohesive.[72] This is because, within the movements, factions form and conflicts arise over leadership, how to spend funds, strategies, and ultimate goals. This leads to multiple leaders and organizations within one movement.

In addition to leadership, a social movement must have a sizeable membership in order to continue their existence and sustain themselves in the long-term. It is both the size and scope of a movement that distinguishes a social movement from pressure groups, lobbies, and campaigns.[73] As Pamela Oliver and Gerald Marwell explain, emphasizing the importance and strength of having sizable membership within an organization, "one person marching for a thousand hours is not the same as a thousand people marching for one hour."[74] Membership size is an important aspect of social movements, as this is a key factor that differentiates social movements from other forms of organizing. The size of a movement's membership contributes not only to its validity as a social movement, but also to its impact.

Bringing together all of these understandings and definitions of what makes a social movement leads to the conceptual definition of a social movement I use throughout this dissertation. The key concepts for a social movement for this research are: (1) it must be pushing for change, a shift from what is to what ought to be, (2) there must be a sustained interaction between those challenging authority and those in authority, (3) it must be at least semi-organized, (4) and there must be sizable membership/following within the movement.

What is "Activism"

Along with "youth" and "social movement," defining what constitutes "activism" is complex. Activism is what makes a movement work, the function of what brings about change or evolution and a change in the system as it is.[75] What activism looks like has changed with the changing of time and technology. "Traditional" activism, such as marches, protests, sit-ins, petitions, posters, and radio and television interviews, is contrasted with the "digital" activism of today, where the purpose of spreading a message is the same, but the means of spreading that message have changed and expanded. For example, instead of physical petitions, social media users share digital online petitions. Rather than television interviews, participants might go live on Facebook, Instagram or Periscope to share their message with the masses. Instead of sit-ins, digital activists might hack a website. Importantly, activism today does not completely exclude traditional forms of activism, but rather combines traditional activism with digital activism. Each case in this dissertation utilizes both traditional forms of activism as well as digital activism. All three cases incorporate protests and/or marches wherein large groups of people gather together to bring attention and a loud voice to their cause. They also all use digital platforms to spread their messages, gain more attention, and recruit new followers.

Despite the differences between traditional and digital activism, the two can, and do, work in tandem. Digital activism can lead to traditional forms of activism, and traditional forms of activism can direct participants back toward the digital sphere for more information and a place to connect with others about the cause. Traditional and digital activism are not opposite counterparts to one another, but rather they are complementary acts with similar broad goals to bring about change and evolution.

Slacktivism is a critique of social media activism and what is considered action, and beyond that, sufficient action. Yu-Hao Lee and Gary Hsieh use *slacktivism* to describe activism that takes place online that is low stakes, low cost, and requires little effort but still shows minimal support for a cause.[76] *Slacktivism* is an important aspect to consider for the three movements studied in this dissertation, but this critique of non-traditional forms of activism should not derail or negate the legitimate contributions these forms of digital activism provide to the movements themselves.

Along with *slacktivism* as an argument against digital activism is the idea of social media as a double-edged sword.[77] That is, the benefits and drawbacks that using social media in one's activism has can both help and hurt the movement overall. This helps shed light on potential issues of access and censorship when it comes to technology and social media across the world. This perspective critiques the sometimes glorified assumption of digital and social media activism's ability, on a state or transnational scale, to solve issues and create impactful change. This critique goes in tandem with slacktivism in that while yes, social media allows *some* individuals access to express their views and/or concerns and need for change, it also poses problems in that not everyone has the same access and the actual contribution to change that digital activism makes. Throughout this dissertation, I highlight aspects of what each social movement does that separates their activism from slacktivism, and where their activism may be considered slacktivism utilizing Clark and Marchi's ladder of political engagement.[78] Clark and Marchi discuss steps wherein young people move from interest to participation in a social movement, a process that involves connective journalism and is stemmed in emotions. They argue, though, that the engagement does not necessarily stop there, and that this

type of communication can, in fact, be actionable. To explain in greater detail, this explanation starts with an understanding of the differences between traditional journalism and collective journalism as it relates to emotion. First, it is important to note that traditional journalism does utilize emotion via storytelling as a means to share their various narratives, but what makes connective journalism different is how viewers of those narratives connect to them.

Connective journalism is a way of sharing information that builds a collective and individual identity, and thus is seen when people engage in communicative acts that give a voice to their way of viewing the world, as well as communicating about how people ought to feel on those issues. Clark and Marchi argue that young people share what they *feel* is important and is often determined through strong emotions such as outrage, anger, disgust, glee, joy, anticipation, amusement, or appreciation.[79] People do not simply want to share stories, but rather, they also want to share how they feel about those stories, creating what Papacharissi calls "affective publics".[80] While this emotion-based approach to news has its drawbacks, this type of communication can be actionable, meaning these rhetorical acts not only share emotional explanations about one's concerns on issues, but also what people can do as a response.

This type of journalism involves three specific practices in which young people move from interest to participation in the social media era, including: (1) sharing, (2) inserting oneself into the story, and (3) participating in the making of a story.[81] These three steps are on what Clark and Marchi call the ladder of political engagement, moving from interest to participation, and is what I use to combat the argument of slacktivism. To begin, the first major critique of online activism is that it is low stakes and low stakes is

used to demean electronic political participation.[82] However, each of the three steps presented here do require a level of interpersonal risk.[83]

In addition, critiques against online activism argue that online activists do not engage in other activities outside of the mere slacktivism acts such as changing ones profile picture, joining a Facebook group, or sharing a tweet.[84] Based off Clark and Marchi's ladder of political engagement, those small steps are, in fact, just steps in the shift from interest to participation for online activists. So while not all online activists move from the sharing stage of online activism, that is just the first stage of online activism, and not one to be diminished.

How Affect Shapes Youth Digital Social Movement Activism

Throughout this dissertation, I incorporate multiple theories to help provide insight into the three cases of youth digital social movement activism. I explore the impact that affect rhetoric has on these movements, specifically with the mobilization of young people as a key feature in the movements. I then discuss echo chambers and how the digital landscape impacts who and what individuals hear and learn about and the significance of this for what might otherwise be ignored or underrepresented issues in mainstream media. I also bring in Clark and Marchi's ladder of political engagement to help explain the importance of the various steps performed by these social movements as a means to combat the major criticism of digital social movements being nothing more than slacktivism. It is with these theoretical perspectives that we can see the adaptive forms of activism various social movements enact and better understand those moves which can help us study and analyze future social movements.

Dating back to at least Aristotle, rhetorical analysis has included the study of how a rhetor uses appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) in their attempts to persuade their audience. Over time, however, the understanding of what rhetoric is and does has progressed beyond neo-Aristotelian criticism. While rhetoric is no longer explicitly centered on the persuasion attempts of a speaker onto others, the studying of appeals, specifically pathos has shifted to what is today referred to as *affect*. Affect rhetoric is a valuable lens to view digital youth social movement activism because of its modern connection to digital, sensory, and bodily rhetoric and the impact that all of that has on an audience.

Affect is a complex rhetorical term that is difficult to define clearly, in part, because affect is an action. However, understanding affect is important for this study, specifically, with how affect relates to the youth aspect of each movement and the appeals to the emotions of outsiders in order to gain their interest, attention, and ultimately, their action. Affect is an emotional response a person has to a stimulus that is said to precede cognition;[85] that is, affect is a reaction that takes place prior to a person cognitively thinking through the stimuli that causes that response. Affect is not a personal *feeling*, but rather it is the ability to affect and be affected by someone or something.[86] Affect is emotive, but it is pre-emotional.[87] Affect is different from Aristotle's *pathos* because affect is the response that one has before that response is labeled with feelings or emotions.[88] In addition to pre-existing emotions, affect also involves an interplay of the senses. This is also significant when it comes to studying today's social movements that involve social media and technology as the advancements of today's technology and

media engage multiple senses, and more senses simultaneously, than traditional forms of media and technology.

Affect is not limited to a response simply from words that are spoken or shared, but affect is also a response from visuals as well. Elizabeth Brunner and Kevin Michael Deluca proposed the term *affective winds* in 2016 to describe the "force of images that moves people to engage and interact by exploring the affective potency of visual arguments."[89] This is important to consider when studying social movements today because of their use of images on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and various *Live* streaming platforms. Affect rhetoric is an important aspect of this research as it provides additional insight into the methods used by youth social movements throughout the growth of the digital era.

Specifically, in this dissertation, affect is directly related to the youth aspect and the infantilization of those whom the movement is working to help. Infantilization is treating someone as a child or denying their age or maturity. Infantilizing is often seen when discussing individuals with disabilities, such as autism and muscular dystrophy (e.g. Jerry's Kids), which, while problematic, has sometimes been used to gain sympathy and pity from outsiders.[90] Infantilization relates to both affect and youth in the cases of this study because the utilization of young children and girls in the rhetoric, both written words and imagery, of these social movements elicits emotional responses from those who see and hear about the movement. It evokes a sense of inability for these individuals to take care of themselves and the need for outside help, similar to that of a parent to a child. This emotional response, similar to how it is used with individuals with disabilities, gains pity, sympathy, and hopefully even funds for the social movements. Each of the

cases in this study utilize youth in various ways, and thus have unique relationships to infantilization and different affect impact.

Throughout this dissertation, I show how social movements have worked to move past this first step of online activism, as well as discuss the impacts on a movement when it does, in fact, get stuck in this first stage. With each case, I highlight the steps of political engagement to show how Invisible Children, Bring Back Our Girls, and Never Again have all created means for activism to take place within each social movement. Additionally, I explore the evolution of activism and the shift from using offline, traditional activism to garner more digital activism, to using digital activism to get participants to engage in offline, traditional activism.

Case Backgrounds

Invisible Children: Uganda

In 2003, a group of young aspiring filmmakers, Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole set out to produce a documentary about the war in the Darfur region of Sudan.[91] Traveling through Northern Uganda, Jason Russell witnessed the vehicle in front of the one they were traveling in get shot at, and that is when he learned about the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and their leader, Joseph Kony. After witnessing this event in Northern Uganda, the focus of the group's documentary shifted from the war in Darfur to the civil war impacting Uganda.

In 2004, Jan Egeland, Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, called the LRA crisis in Northern Uganda the "most forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world."[92] The Lord's

Resistance Army is a rebel group who claimed to have been fighting for the freedom of the Acholi people in Northern Uganda. However, over the last two decades, the LRA has mainly attacked the Acholi people by killing, abducting, enslaving, and raping them.[93] As of 2005, nearly half of the people in Northern Uganda were displaced, living in camps, and had lost their freedoms due to the LRA. Luis Moreno-Ocampo, prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), detailed the crimes alleged against the LRA beginning July of 2002, when ICC jurisdiction began, stating that two of the most serious crimes were numerous acts of murder, often reaching into the hundreds of killings within a single month. In addition to murder, the LRA enslaved many people of Northern Uganda. Both of these actions the LRA committed, and continues to commit, fall into the category of crimes against humanity.[94]

As the leader of the LRA, Kony has arrest warrants issued against him on "12 counts of crimes against humanity including: murder, enslavement, rape, inhumane acts of inflicting serious bodily injury and suffering; and 21 counts for counts of war crimes including: cruel treatment of civilians, intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population, pillaging including rape and forced enlisting of children."[95] Among all of the crimes Kony and LRA were committing, it was the abduction and forced enlisting and enslavement of children that shaped the Invisible Children movement.

According to the Invisible Children website, this movement was created in order to bring attention to the "most forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the world."[96] The founding members of this group believed that "if people around the World knew the reality of the LRA violence – more than 60,000 children abducted, tens of thousands killed, and millions displaced – and if they could see the names, faces, and

stories behind the statistics, they would be moved to take action and demand justice."[97] To accomplish this goal, the group created their first documentary, *Invisible Children: The Rough Cut,* released in 2006.[98] This film focuses on the youth who have been abducted and turned into child soldiers by the LRA, and the children who walk long distances every night searching for refuge in order to avoid being abducted by the LRA. *Invisible Children: The Rough Cut* was the first of twelve films, contributing to part of the over 134 million views across all of their online videos.[99]

While Invisible Children was started in 2004, the movement applied for, and was accepted as, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization as a public charity.[100] In addition to film screenings, Invisible Children also sold t-shirts, bracelets, and posters to help raise money for their cause, to help fund their continual production of films focusing on awareness, and for humanitarian aid for Northern Uganda that will be discussed further in this dissertation.[101]

Bring Back Our Girls: Nigeria

Today it is estimated that over 130 million girls are out of school around the world. If that number were the population of a country, it would be the 10th largest country in the world—the size of both the United Kingdom and France combined.[102] Some of these girls have never had the opportunity to go to school, and some of them have had their opportunity taken from them. Amongst this group of girls are those who have been affected by political or religious groups who forcefully took their right to education away. Boko Haram is one of these militant groups that has been working out of Nigeria with the purpose to impose Sharia (Islamic) law in the country since 2002.[103]

Boko Haram is a terrorist group, which, when translated to English, means "Western Education is Sinful."[104] They target the education of girls, in an effort to keep women exclusively in the household and not participating in education opportunities.[105] Boko Haram has become more radical and violent since 2009 after their founder, Mohammed Yusuf, died in police custody and Abudakar Shekau became the new leader.[106] This group regularly attacks civilians in places like churches and schools, along with government officials and military members, as a way to rid northern Nigeria of what the group perceives as Western influence and to enforce their extreme Islamic religious ideologies.[107] In May 2013, the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, declared a state of emergency in three northern states, including Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, stating that these states had already been overtaken by these radical groups "whose allegiance are to different flags than Nigeria's."[108]

One of the most recognized acts of terrorism from Boko Haram to enforce their ideals was the abduction of over 200 Chibok girls from their school dormitory in April 2014.[109] This was the single largest abduction attributed to Boko Haram.[110] On April 14, 2014, gunmen from Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls aged 12-17 from the Government Girls Secondary School in the town of Chibok in the state of Borno in north-eastern Nigeria.[111] These girls were abducted from their dormitories and were forced onto trucks and driven into the bush. It was during this process that nearly sixty of these young girls managed to escape, leaving around 200 others in captivity.[112]

Almost three weeks after their abduction, on May 4, 2014, President Jonathan spoke out about the girls for the first time, saying, "wherever these girls are, we will surely get them out."[113] The next day, on May 5, Boko Haram faction leader Shekau

claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of the girls, saying that God instructed him to sell the girls, that they are his property now, and that he will be carrying out the instructions of God.[114] Some of the elders in the area also claimed that some of the girls had already been sold as brides to fighters of Boko Haram for 2000 naira, the equivalent of around $6.[115]

A week later, a second video was released by Boko Haram, showing about 100 of the missing girls. It was at this point that the worldwide media campaign was launched, demanding the release of the girls using the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. The #BringBackOurGirls hashtag was first used by a Nigerian lawyer, Ibrahim Abdullahi on April 23, 2014.[116] This tweet echoed the words from former Nigerian minister of education, and Vice President of the World Bank, Oby Ezekwesili, who led a group of protesters to Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria, demanding the Nigerian military to 'bring back our girls' after the kidnapping.[117]

As the hashtag spread online, including images of the missing schoolgirls, the concern for the safety and return of the Chibok girls became a worldwide issue. The plea initially began directed at the Nigerian government and military to do something to find and bring back the young girls who had been stolen. However, the movement eventually evolved into an appeal to Boko Haram, pleading to bring the girls back, and eventually, the movement's demands were directed at the entire world to do something, including the United Nations.[118]

The kidnapping sparked outrage and condemnation around the world and among world leaders and celebrities alike. In addition to celebrities and political leaders, this movement attracted the attention of youth activist Malala Yousafzai, a spearhead for

girls' education across the world. Yousafzai has taken up being a spokesperson for the Bring Back Our Girls movement, both in the media as well as on the ground in Nigeria and with political leaders. Through Facebook and Twitter, the Bring Back Our Girls movement garnered attention from civil rights groups and students' and girls' rights campaigns in the United States, Canada, England, France, Malaysia, and South Africa, among others, who joined the campaign.[119]

While the campaign resonated around the world, with more than one million uses of the hashtag in less than three weeks,[120] in Nigeria, the Bring Back Our Girls campaign clashed with then-president Jonathan's administration. Jonathan accused the movement of manipulating the victims of terrorism and accused activists of playing politics after his meeting that was scheduled with the parents of the abducted schoolgirls was canceled.[121]

Never Again: United States of America

Around 2:20 p.m. on February 14, 2018, in Parkland, Florida, in the United States of America, shots rang throughout the halls of Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) high school. By 2:50, the shooter had left the school and made his way to a local Wal-Mart.[122] Roughly thirty minutes on that Valentine's Day afternoon resulted in the loss of fourteen student lives and three teachers along with thousands of the surviving MSD students and faculty forever marked by this tragedy.

As a part of what some call the post-Columbine (1999) generation,[123] the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas grew up living in a world where school shootings were not just a scary story being told, but a reality happening throughout their lives, such as the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007,[124] the Sandy Hook shooting in 2012 at the elementary

school,[125] and the Isla Vista attack near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2014.[126]

Survivor Cameron Kasky calls his generation the "mass-shooting generation" and spearheaded a group of student-survivors of the MSD shooting who all decided they were not going to let this tragedy become just another name on the list of mass shootings in the United States.[127] After speaking to the press on February 14, MSD student David Hogg was popularly quoted, saying, "Please… we're children. You guys are the adults. You need to take some action and play a role. Work together, come over your politics and get something done."[128]

Not willing to be another number, Kasky invited a group of MSD students to his house two days after the shooting, and that is where these "children" began taking action.The gathering included Delaney Tarr, Ryan Deitsch, Jaclyn Corin, Sarah Chadwick, Alex Wind, David Hogg, and Emma Gonzalez. Kasky and his friends were set on "rewrit[ing] the entire national dialogue about school shootings."[129] The members of this group quickly decided not to focus on macro-politics, but rather focus on a few, reasonable, attainable goals, and continue to repeat those specific messages over and over again. The two main goals decided upon were background checks and raising the age limit to purchases rifles from eighteen to twenty-one years old.

The group quickly recognized that in today's digital era, they needed a hashtag to keep everything related to their movement easily connected across technology and platforms.[130] The group eventually settled on the #NeverAgain hashtag; they recognized the historical weight of this hashtag and its relationship to Nazis and the Holocaust, and so they were careful to use the phrase with respect.[131] It was at this point that their

movement began to take off. Following the establishment of the hashtag, the MSD students began other efforts to bring attention to their cause and creating a social movement. These events included the March for Our Lives, one of the largest youth protests since the Vietnam War,[132] which took place in across the United States in cities including Washington D.C., Boston, Minneapolis, Houston, and Parkland, Florida where the shooting took place,[133] as well as over 800 other marches in smaller cities across the globe;[134] and a push for youth to vote in the 2018 United States midterm elections, *Vote for Our Lives*.[135]

The question quickly arose as to why this group of students was different from other victims of other school shootings or mass shootings. What about this group made them think that they could take on these issues and make changes? Reflecting on the Sandy Hook elementary shooting, the group felt that while society was able to "shrug off 20 dead first graders," they were not discouraged and continued to move forward despite knowing the difficulties that lay ahead of them.[136] These difficulties and strategies the movement utilized to overcome them will be explored throughout this dissertation.

Method: Digital Rhetorical Criticism

In this project, I analyze content taken directly from the specific movements' social media accounts, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. This content will come from the Invisible Children Twitter (@Invisible; verified account), Instagram (invisiblechildren), Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/invisiblechildren/; verified account), and YouTube (Invisible Children; verified account); the Bring Back Our Girls Twitter (@BBOG_Nigeria), Instagram (@bringbackourgirls), Facebook

(https://www.facebook.com/bringbackourgirls/), and YouTube (Bring Back Our Girls); and from the Parkland movement Twitter (@AMarch4OurLives; verified account), Instagram (marchforourlives; verified account), Facebook, (https://www.facebook.com/marchforourlives/; verified account), and YouTube (March For Our Lives; verified account). I will also gather data from the content on the websites that are directly associated with and linked to each movement; https://invisiblechildren.com/, http://www.bringbackourgirls.ng/, and https://marchforourlives.com/. From these sites, I have collected content across the existence of the movement that is directly written or published by the movements' accounts, including original postings as well as re-posting of outside content that they share on their specific page(s). I also include text and visual postings (images and videos) in my analysis.

In addition to the content that is posted and shared on these platforms, I examine content that has been shared from traditional media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, and various articles. Along with information from news sources, I also study the physical activities that have taken place offline, and tangible items and merchandise that the movements sell and distribute. Using content that has been shared online as well as content that has happened offline highlights the multi-faceted approach that these modern social movements have taken. I gathered content from the movements themselves as well as third-party sources reporting on the movements.

In this research, I conduct a rhetorical criticism of the content collected from the platforms mentioned above and locations including digital and traditional/offline forms of rhetorical dialogue. In doing that, I analyze the words as well as the images, texts along

with videos, and digital along with offline interactions that take place among members within the social movement. This research explores how these texts are influenced by the various contexts of the people involved in them and how the context is then, in turn, influenced by the texts.

The scope of the content collected for this project varies between cases as their timelines are not the same; Invisible Children began in 2004 and is still continuing today, more than fifteen years later, whereas the Never Again movement has only been in existence for a few years. Thus, bounding the content based on equal lengths of time does not allow the questions of progression throughout the individual movements to be answered, where a more holistic analysis is more fitting for this project.

Research Questions

This dissertation seeks to answer how youth digital social movements have changed throughout the twenty-first century. Specifically, I look at how each of these concepts interact with and influence each other. I seek to answer several questions throughout this research:

(1) How do these movements, with youth in the forefront, incorporate affective rhetoric as a means to promote and gain support for their cause?

(2) How have youth digital social movements evolved throughout the twenty-first century.

Each case in this study has unique relationships to youth, the digital realm and social movement activism. Throughout each chapter, I examine each case individually to reveal the specific techniques used and to highlight their role in youth digital social

movement activism today. I then do a cross-case analysis, looking at how the cases are both similar and different in their techniques and what this means for the evolution of youth digital social movements over time.

Chapter 2:

Invisible Children: Early Digital Era Youth Social Movement Activism

Invisible Children started in 2004, when three young aspiring American filmmakers went to shoot a documentary about the war happening in the Darfur region of Sudan, but, while traveling, they witnessed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) attack the vehicle in front of theirs and their film project changed direction.[137] The Lord's Resistance Army is a rebel group in Northern Uganda who claim to be fighting for the freedom of the Acholi people in Northern Uganda; however, for over two decades, this group has continued to attack Acholi people, killing, abducting, enslaving, and raping the people they claimed to be fighting for.[138] Joseph Kony is the "self-appointed 'messiah'" of the LRA, and has been their leader, directing the LRA to "abduct, threaten, destroy and murder" in his name.[139] Throughout the movement, Kony was a key focus for Invisible Children, aiming to make him known, and ultimately get him arrested.

Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Moreno-Ocampo, detailed the crimes alleged against the LRA beginning July of 2002, when ICC jurisdiction began, stating that two of the most serious crimes being committed were numerous acts of murder, often reaching into the hundreds within single months, as well as enslavement. Both of these crimes fall under the category of crimes against humanity, but unfortunately, Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, referred to the humanitarian crisis happening in Northern Uganda the "most forgotten, neglected humanitarian emergency in the

world."[140] According to the Invisible Children website, the movement was created in order to bring attention to this forgotten humanitarian crisis.[141]

Specifically, the filmmakers wanted to learn more about and document the kidnappings that were happening resulting in many young Ugandan boys being turned into child-soldiers. According to the United Nations and the Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, a child soldier is considered any child who is associated with "an armed force or armed group… below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies, or for sexual purposes."[142] Between the times of June 2002 and August 2004, the year the Invisible Children movement began, UNICEF estimated that nearly 15,000 children had been abducted by the LRA and over 40,000 children were being displaced every night, leaving their homes and traveling to urban centers in attempt to avoid abduction and attack from the Lord's Resistance Army.[143]

While the abduction of these young boys and turning them into child soldiers was not the only offense of the LRA against the people of Northern Uganda, it was the act that caused, and was the main focus of, the Invisible Children movement. With some background information on the catalyst of the Invisible Children Movement, this chapter details the relationship this movement has with youth, with the digital realm, how it has become a social movement, and ultimately the activism Invisible Children has done over the years.

The Role of Youth throughout the Invisible Children Movement

The Invisible Children movement has a strong relationship to youth. Throughout the movement, youth have been a key focus of both the leaders of the movement, but also a key demographic of those involved in the movement. Below I explore the various roles youth have played in the Invisible Children movement, establishing this group as a cornerstone in each aspect of the movement as a whole.

Youth-affected

To begin, the Invisible Children movement began as a result of young children in Northern Uganda, specifically young boys, being kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and being turned into child-soldiers. The young boys of Uganda being directly targeted by the LRA is the first connection this social movement has to youth. The Invisible Children movement is first youth-affected. Young boys were the targets of the abductions and turned into violent soldiers, and young girls were being abducted to become sex slaves for Joseph Kony.[144]

In addition to young people being the targets of the violence that spurred the Invisible Children movement, the use of the word "children" in the movement's name is important as well. Using the word "children" in the name of the movement clearly identified those who were impacted by the movement were young children. Utilizing children as the face of a cause is not new or unique to the Invisible Children movement. Studies have found that utilizing children in charities was a powerful way for the those charities to generate emotional reactions from people, as well as having a greater commitment to donating money to support the cause.[145] On top of simply utilizing

children in the movement, utilizing negative emotions involving children generated significantly more monetary donations and larger donations of time and items as well.[146]

This relationship between children and emotions, and children and donation of time, items, and money is significant to the Invisible Children movement. Through Invisible Children's use of children as a part of their name, and the use of children in their promotional materials, such as videos and online images (discussed below), they were able to tap into the emotions of the public in hopes of gaining their support.

Youth-led

Along with the Invisible Children movement being youth-affected, this movement is also youth-led. Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole were each in their early to mid-twenties, respectively, when they left for Darfur in 2003 and created the Invisible Children movement and first film in 2004. These three set out at a young age to take on a warlord who had been attacking Northern Uganda for over half of their lives. Twenty-two-year-old Ben Keesey joined the Invisible Children movement in 2005 as their Chief Financial Officer (CFO), the group went on to register Invisible Children as a non-profit organization in 2006, and then they reappointed then-24 year-old Keesey from CFO to CEO in 2007. Those working within the Invisible Children movement, both the founders and leaders, were young adults, all falling into the category of youth as they built this grassroots movement. This is significant because the Invisible Children movement highlights young people working to tackle large issues that impact more than simply them and their surroundings. The young age of the leaders of this movement is also

related to the final relationship invisible children has with youth; their target demographic for involvement.

Youth-involved

In addition to being youth-led, Invisible Children movement has youth who are involved in the movement. In the beginning of the movement, Invisible Children created their first video: *Invisible Children: The Rough Cut*, which they took on tour around the United States, traveling to high schools and college campuses for viewings with other youth. Specifically, for the Invisible Children movement, their target demographic was teenage girls and young adult females.[147]

Throughout their different events, one of the main goals of the Invisible Children movement was to encourage the youth of America to "do more than just watch" when it came to their involvement in social movements.[148] They elicited involvement from other youth by hosting events that made those who wanted to be involved in them go out into public, take up physical space, cover any available surface with posters, hosting multimedia events with popular musical performances such as Mumford and Sons, The Plain White Tees, and David Archuleta; all popular artists for those in the youth demographic.

The movement garnered attention from young people by coming to them directly at their schools and universities and by making the acts of involvement something the youth was capable of doing. These acts included purchasing t-shirts with the slogan My Heart Is Beeping, reed bracelets that were made by the people of Uganda, short videos on DVD with different colors highlighting different children, and buttons. These were all

priced where high school and college students could afford them, and with their purchase, these youths could make contributions to the movement themselves. In addition to monetary contributions, as a cornerstone of their grassroots advocacy, the Invisible Children movement encouraged the youth to engage their political leaders via letter-writing, phone calls, rallies, and in-person lobby meetings.[149]

One of Invisible Children's large national events that incorporated and appealed to youth was called Displace Me. The event took place in April 2007 with nearly 68,000 attendees across fifteen cities in the United States. This event encouraged participants to make and sleep in makeshift villages overnight to bring awareness to the displacement of the children taking place by the Ugandan government.[150] It was this event that got the attention of musician Pete Wentz from the band Fall Out Boy. Wentz not only attended the Displace Me event, but he was also inspired to film Fall Out Boy's next music video in Uganda.

The band traveled to Uganda with the intention of shooting a documentary-style video for their upcoming song "I'm Like a Lawyer with the Way I'm Always Trying to Get You Off (Me and You)," but once the band arrived, their direction changed and they essentially shot a love-story between two young people in Uganda. This video highlights young people and young love in Uganda as something that is relatable across the world, but that familiarity and comfort was juxtaposed with the dangerous reality of young boys being abducted and turned into child soldiers in the night in Uganda. Invisible Children co-founder Bobby Bailey described the video as "groundbreaking" and as something that had the ability to humanize the people in Uganda across the world and bring people together.[151]

Another way Invisible Children engaged the youth to participate in their movement was through their events. For example, in 2011, the events 25 and Break the Silence were held across the United States with over 90,000 people pledging to be silent for 25 hours to represent the 25 years of conflict in Central Africa as an act of spreading awareness. After the 25 hours of silence, participants were encouraged to gather across eighteen U.S. cities for Break the Silence. Break the Silence was a multimedia event that featured exclusive videos and musical performances by artists who volunteered to collaborate with Invisible Children, creating a festival-like atmosphere to appeal even more to young people with the hopes that the environment alone could appeal to those who otherwise might not be interested in social activism.

Finally, the Invisible Children movement held an event called the Fourth Estate Summit. This was a "broad, educational conference about global justice" designed for core supporters of the Invisible Children movement.[152] The Fourth Estate Summit brought experts in film, business, journalism, economics, and international justice together to "discuss the role of the millennial generation in global justice and international humanitarian efforts".[153] One of the standout statistics from this conference was the average age of attendees, which was just sixteen years old. This emphasizes the involvement of young people in this movement.

One of the Invisible Children movement's cornerstones was their engagement with youth throughout the movement's existence. From reaching and engaging high school and college students to providing practical ways those young people could get involved to partnering with celebrities and musicians, Invisible Children worked to find ways to get and keep the youth involved.

The Invisible Children movement has had a connection to youth in every aspect of the movement. First, the movement was established as a response to the youth of Northern Uganda being kidnapped and turned into child soldiers by the LRA. Second, the Invisible Children movement was created and run by youth filmmakers turned activists, Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole. Finally, a large portion of those who were engaged in the Invisible Children movement were also youth across the world working toward solving this humanitarian crisis. Invisible Children has a youth component throughout all stages of the movement making this a unique social movement as it focuses on youth, is managed by youth, and calls for majority of youth involvement.

Youth and Affect

Throughout the years, Invisible Children has positioned itself within a framework of young people needing saving, and the idea that young people can save them, and more than that, they can bring an end to an adult warlord halfway around the world. The Invisible Children movement tapped into the vulnerability of a group of people (youth) to invoke sympathy from an audience of roughly the same age. They were able to do this by appealing to the emotions of these young people; these kids cannot be in school like you, they cannot go on dates or to the movies, or be with their friends and families like you, and that elicits that feeling of pity and sorrow toward a group of individuals.

Additionally, the use of the word "Children" in the movement's name identifies children as the main focus of the cause, which as I detail below, is much more expansive than only working to rescue the abducted child soldiers. Invisible Children focused and highlighted the fact that these were not adults or soldiers, but instead young children; a

study conducted found that the average age of the children abducted in Uganda was 12.9 years old.[154] Bringing attention to the young age of the children who were being abducted by the LRA is a tactic that is often used in order to not only garner sympathy, but also to persuade individuals open up their wallets and donate to the cause.[155] This is an important angle that the Invisible Children movement took on the atrocities happening in Uganda because the abduction of children was not the *only* war crime the LRA was committing, but the movement highlighted these children as the face of the movement as the most important war crime they were committing.

As media scholar, Susan Moeller notes, children have replaced women in the eyes of the public as emblems of purity and goodness, and thus, people are motivated to act in order to protect them or save them.[156] Not only that, but, within the United States, children who are not from the United States are presented in the media in more sympathetic terms than those from within the United States–this is especially true for young black males.[157] That means, the young people the Invisible Children movement were speaking to had been primed to feel more sympathy toward the young black males who were being abducted as child soldiers than perhaps any other group of individuals.

This verbal and visual rhetoric of presenting these young black boys as the catalyst and face of the movement cannot be overlooked. While it is nice to believe young people and all of those who shared, showed up, wrote and called their government officials on behalf of these young, undoubtedly mistreated boys from Uganda, there is more depth to those messages that elicits reactions and responses from those who hear them.

This is not to downplay the empowering communication used by the Invisible Children movement to mobilize their youth followers The Invisible Children leaders focused on their belief that young people could change the world, and they made sure to tell their members as much. Outside of the movement, there are personal benefits that youth experience from being engaged in civic activism, such as developing the five Cs: competence, confidence, connection, caring, and character, and through their activism, they prepare to experience the sixth C, contribution.[158]

The Most Viral Video of the Time: How Invisible Children Utilized the Digital Landscape

In this section, I discuss the relationship the Invisible Children movement has with the digital landscape. First, I explore the significance of time, both as it relates to the age of movement leaders and the time the movement came about. The next aspect that is important to consider when discussing the digital impact on the Invisible Children movement is the location in which the movement takes place. Location is significant because it has an impact on access, infrastructure, and spreadability. Additionally, when discussing the significance of the impact of digital aspects on the Invisible Children movement, limitations cannot be overlooked. Limitations include the concern of echo chambers among movement members, as well as censorship in the locations where the movement spreads. Finally, I discuss the overall significance of the digital aspects of the Invisible Children movement have had as it relates to social movements and participants.

To begin, I look at the impact that time has played in the Invisible Children movement. First, I discuss the age of movement leaders and their relationship to the digital realm. As discussed above, the Invisible Children movement was led and

participated in by mostly youth. The age of the movement leaders and members is significant due to the relationship that young people have with the digital world. Youth who grew up with technology are referred to as "digital natives"; that is, they were children in the time of increased personal Internet usage in the mid to late 1990s.[159] Invisible Children's founders, Russell, Bailey, and Poole, were all in their early to mid-twenties when they created the movement and organization in 2004. This puts the founders in a little older category than what is considered digital natives. They were still young enough to have a relationship to digital technologies, but they were not young children growing up alongside communication technologies.[160]

The founders of Invisible Children might not be considered digital natives, but their main demographic of followers, mostly being in high school and college, would be considered digital natives. This is significant because while the leaders might not have an instinctual relationship to technology and social media, the followers of the movement do. Invisible Children movement followers, being digital natives, are used to, and prefer, receiving information very fast. They also prefer graphics before text and random access, such as hypertext, where they can navigate to new and related information with a single click. These digital natives ultimately function best when they are networked and connected to others.[161] All of these preferences and characteristics of the digital native members helped to share and spread the message of the Invisible Children movement in ways the leaders may not have been instinctually aware of.

While youth do generally have a stronger relationship to social media as a way to achieve their goals,[162] the Invisible Children movement began in 2004, which was still in the early stages of social media, and a time when both Facebook and Twitter were not

even available to users worldwide.[163] This speaks more to the era in which the Invisible Children movement came about than to the age of the leaders or members.

The time in which the Invisible Children movement came about and grew is important to the movement's relationship to the digital world. For example, when the movement first began in 2004, Facebook was brand new and simply expanding from Harvard to other universities and had not yet reached the masses. In February 2005, YouTube first went live, and by the Fall of the same year, Facebook expanded to high school students in the United States and was later available in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.[164] Twitter did not come about until Summer 2006, the same time that the now virtually non-existent Myspace became the most popular social networking site in the United States. Apple did not release its first iPhone until the following Summer at the end of July 2007.[165] All of these rapid changes in social media and technology highlight some of the digital landscape that the Invisible Children movement has had to navigate since its early years. The Invisible Children's smaller digital footprint in its first few years of existence can be attributed, in part, to the changing digital atmosphere in the early stages of the movement.

As the movement progressed over time, more and more usage of digital means like social media and more dynamic websites developed alongside the creation of the movement as a whole. Invisible Children joined Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, with verified accounts on each, and they eventually added Instagram to their social media profile as well. The movement transitioned into the social media era with digital native followers who helped to promote and share their message.

The Invisible Children movement's digital impact is most prominently seen in their Kony 2012 campaign. The purpose of this campaign was to see if an online video could "make an obscure war criminal famous" and, if he became famous, would "the world work together to stop him or let him remain at large?"[166] The movement leaders created and produced their tenth video, which started not by exposing the humanitarian crisis happening in Uganda, but rather by highlighting the importance of global connection through social media. Following their initial call for connection, the remainder of the film exposes Joseph Kony, a then relatively unknown Central African rebel. At that time, the Kony 2012 video became the "fastest growing viral video" with over 100 million views in six days.[167] During this time, the Invisible Children movement took advantage of the digital era it found itself in the middle of, regardless of the age of movement leaders, and directly reaching the youth digital natives.

The Invisible Children movement leaders were right on the cusp of being digital natives, and their target demographic was, and continues to be, nearly all digital natives themselves. The Invisible Children movement's connection to the digital realm has improved over the years, in part, due to their relationship to the digital realm. Because of their close relationship to the digital world, the movement has been able to adjust to the changing digital landscape over the growth of the digital era. Both the age of the leaders and followers and the time in which the movement has taken place have contributed to the growth and spread of the Invisible Children movement.

A Ugandan Crisis, An American Movement

Age and time are not the only important aspects of the Invisible Children movement as it relates to the digital realm, the location of the movement is also important to discuss. The location of a movement is important as it relates to access and infrastructure, which ultimately impacts the ability of the movement to spread outside of the local area where the movement developed. Additionally, limitations like censorship and echo chambers are important to explore as it relates to the location of the movement as well.

While the cause of the Invisible Children movement was centered in Uganda and Central Africa, the leaders and headquarters of the movement are all in the United States. The location of this movement is significant when it comes to access and infrastructure. When the Invisible Children movement originated in 2004, 63% of U.S. American adults used the Internet, and of that 63%, 77% of 18–29-year-olds used the Internet, the highest percentage of all other age groups.[168] Today, there are over 288 million active Internet users, 246 million active mobile Internet users, 230 million social media users, and over 225 million active mobile social media users.[169] This shows the growth of Internet users in the United States since the inception of the Invisible Children movement.

While access to the Internet is high, at 87%, in the United States, there are still issues of access and infrastructure. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) estimates that more than 21 million people living in the United States do not have Internet access, including 27% of those living in rural places, as well as 2% of individuals living in cities in the U.S.[170] In addition to not having Internet access, nearly 45% of adult in households with incomes lower than $30,000 do not have broadband access. Having access to

broadband Internet, according to the FCC, is critical to civic engagement, among other important aspects of today's world, and this digital divide still impacts individuals living in urban areas, larger numbers in rural areas, and even larger numbers on Tribal lands.[171] Without access to the Internet, and more specifically, without access to broadband Internet access, the Invisible Children movement was not able to reach everyone through their digital engagement; especially those with lower household incomes.

Not only does this exclude individuals in the United States from actively participating in the movement, but it limits the movement in its abilities to try to solve a problem in Uganda. If we take a look at Internet access to those in Uganda in 2004, only 7.2 per 1000 people had Internet access.[172] This number has increased over the years. In December of 2019, 40% of the Ugandan population had internet access, an increase of 10% in just two years.[173] However, compared to the Internet penetration in the United States, the Invisible Children movement, over the years, has still been less likely to reach those who are most impacted by the atrocities they are fighting against.

Adapting the Digital Plan: Reaching Ugandans through Available Digital Technologies

Outside of what is considered the use of modern media, including websites and social media platforms, the Invisible Children movement has used various other forms of media in their goals to help the people of Uganda and Central Africa. Specifically, the movement has worked hand in hand with Central African organizations and international experts producing and sharing messages to educate the public on violence prevention and conflict mediation, among other issues related to violence. This is done with the goal of creating a better understanding of the issues happening and providing ways in which

people can work to end the cycle of violence. The movement utilizes traditional FM radio as well as SD cards and what they call an innovative mobile cinema program.[174] Throughout their work, Invisible Children has produced and broadcast over 600 hours of FM radio messages across seven radio stations, and have held two mobile cinema film screenings in Central African communities.

In addition to their work on spreading information and education on violence across Central Africa through their digital productions, the Invisible Children movement has also utilized digital means through their crisis tracking and conflict analysis. The Invisible Children movement recognized that the LRA was striking and killing people in remote and isolated communities in Central Africa with little international attention. Because of this, there has been a lack of data on the violence taking place, making it difficult for humanitarians, policymakers, and security forces to help protect these communities.[175]

The Invisible Children staff worked with partners in Central Africa, local communities, and crisis mapping experts to collect and verify reports of attacks via the Invisible Children's Early Warning Network. The Early Warning Network was developed as a response to a lack of access to basic communication infrastructure which put these communities at risk. Working with local community leaders, the Invisible Children movement installed new High Frequency (HF) radios and repaired existing radios in their communities. They also trained local operators on how to safely report incidents of violence.[176] Through this work, over 100 communities have received potentially life-saving information via this Early Warning Network, over eighty individualized community action plans created with local leaders have been put into

place, and over 300,000 people have directly benefitted from the Early Warning Network.[177]

In addition to the Early Warning Network, Invisible Children has brought the Crisis Tracker to Central Africa. The Crisis Tracker, according to their website, is a "geospatial database and reporting project that tracks armed group activity and conflict-related incidents," specifically focusing on the Northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo and Eastern Central African Republic.[178] The information that is gathered from the Early Warning Network, along with data from the United Nations local non-government organizations (NGOs), and firsthand research conducted by Invisible Children and peer organizations is all compiled together, vetted, and put into the Crisis Tracker database. The information gathered and produced is publicly available through various means, including a digital map, a breaking news feed, regular data analysis reports and media documenting.[179] Since its inception in 2008, over 3,000 incidents of armed group activity have been reported on the Crisis Tracker and twenty-nine Crisis Tracker security analysis reports have been created and shared with local stakeholders. [180]

Despite a lack of access to digital infrastructure in many parts of Central Africa, the Invisible Children movement has continued to utilize the media that does exist locally to help promote information and safety for the people most impacted by the LRA and their violence. Through alternative technology, the Invisible Children movement has been able to tap into the ways in which they can most benefit the people of Uganda and Central Africa.

Digital Activism: Four Styles of Internet Engagement

To best study the digital activism of the Invisible Children movement, I utilize Earl et al.'s work on four broad styles of Internet engagement: brochureware, e-mobilization, online organizing, and online engagement.[181] These four categories help explore and analyze forms of activism in the Internet activism era. I use this framework to explore the various activism done by the Invisible Children movement to help better organize and understand the efforts done by this movement and to ultimately argue that the Invisible Children movement was more than simply online slacktivism.

Internet Engagement: Brochureware

Brochureware is when a movement utilizes the Internet to spread and share their message. This is very similar to passing out hard copy brochures person-to-person in traditional forms of activism, but, it is often easier and cheaper to disperse the information to a wider audience via technology and digital means. Depending on the infrastructure in place where the movement begins, brochureware is often also more financially feasible than passing around pieces of paper. That is, assuming those creating the content have access to digital technology and the ability to share their message, and those who the message is intended to reach also have those specific forms of connectivity.

As discussed above, the Invisible Children movement came about prior to the social media era when sharing information was as simple as a click of a button and access to the Internet was not at people's literal fingertips in the way it is today. However, as time progressed, Invisible Children has used the Internet and social media that came

about with the rise of the movement to share their information via text, emails, images, and, most notably, videos. This form of activism benefits movements because it extends their reach of new potential followers in a more financially feasible way. This is a significant aspect of not only digital social movements, but social movements that are created by and directed toward youth as they often do not come from, or require, a movement to have a large financial backing.

Internet Engagement: E-mobilization

E-mobilization is when a movement uses online tools to bring people together in-person for face-to-face activism.[182] In addition to brochureware, e-mobilization utilizes non-tradition forms of activism, but also leads to more of the traditional forms of activism as well. When it comes to Invisible Children, this type of activism was seen most frequently in their mobilization phase of their activism. The movement started in-person with their national tours, but as time and technology progressed, Invisible Children used online tools to share information about their various events over the years. It was through this e-mobilization that events like Displace Me (2007), 25 (2011), Break the Silence (2011), and Cover the Night (2012) gathered over 200,000 activists across not only the United States but also dozens of countries as well.[183] This type of activism enabled the Invisible Children movement to reach far and wide to share their message, which some argue helped Invisible Children set a blueprint for other social movements to follow for humanitarian advocacy on a large scale.[184]

Internet Engagement: Online Organizing

Online organizing is when a movement organizes an entire campaign and/or movement online, requiring no physical place to gather in order to make change. Typically, this type of activism comes about from organizers who have little background in activism, and does not require large amounts of money to execute.[185] Because of this, online organizations typically have different priorities and concerns than those of traditional social movements because they are not having to levy funds from outsiders to move their cause forward. The most prominent form of online organizing from the Invisible Children movement was the Kony 2012 campaign. This campaign took place almost exclusively online, and had no real offline presence or even goal. Invisible Children utilized social media platforms to share their Kony 2012 short film and encouraged others to do so as well.

The ultimate goal of the Kony 2012 campaign was to make Kony known, that is, to raise awareness of who he was and what he was doing. This is also why, in part, many activists, scholars, and outside observers reflected upon Kony 2012 in the frame of a "failed" social movement. This dissertation is not set out to determine the value of a movement, or of a campaign within a movement, but it is important to highlight this finding. Because the Kony 2012 campaign existed almost entirely online, there was no tangible "change" for onlookers, or even participants, to point to and say "this is what this campaign did." Making a war criminal famous, or infamous, was a broad goal, one that ultimately did nothing to stop Kony and the LRA.

However, through the virality of the Kony 2012 video, Invisible Children argues that they were successful. Had the goal of Kony 2012 been to gather X-amount of

signatures, or to pass legislation, had crowds across the world gathered at local government offices, had this campaign incorporated more traditional forms of activism along with the online aspect, the perception of this campaign, and of the Invisible Children movement as a whole, could have been drastically different.

Internet Engagement: Online Participation

The final of the four types of Internet engagement is online participation. Online participation is when individuals engage in various forms of activism that take place online, such as petition signing, coming together to deny services and/or attack a company or person, and virtual sit-ins and demonstrations.[186] This is often referred to as "flash" activism because it often resembles that of a flash flood; the activism comes on quickly and with ferocity, and it is not the longevity of the acts that are impactful, but rather the force that comes up quickly that makes a lasting impression. One of the biggest benefits of this type of activism is that individuals who might not otherwise participate in political activism are more likely to engage because of the quickness and ease of this type of activism.[187]

The Invisible Children movement utilized this type of activism, again, most notably, through the Kony 2012 campaign. This campaign was a quick and strong onslaught of content shared across various social media platforms in a short period of time. The purpose of this campaign was to bombard people with information about a war criminal who was virtually unknown around the world. Again, because of the ease of this task, it was easy for individuals who might not otherwise take the risk of joining a social movement in the traditional sense to join via sharing, commenting, or posting the Kony

2012 video or information. These low-risk tasks were more viable options for more people than higher risk ones, like participating in a march, which is how a movement is able to create that flash flood feel–the more people, and the easier it is for them to participate, the bigger the swell.[188]

For the Invisible Children movement, a movement where the target demographic is young, white women, this low-risk level of participation gave them a way to contribute in ways that felt both doable and safe. And while this might seem simply to fulfill young white women's needs to feel good about their doing good, flash activism in this sense is still important because of the size of membership that can be obtained. Quick, short-lived online engagements are usually larger than offline engagement, which is important because the size of a movement is important to the attention that movement gets and also can be related to the success of a movement.[189] So, this type of engagement, while it might seem futile on the surface, actually serves a bigger purpose for the movement as a whole.

However, with every social movement that utilizes digital means, there are concerns that those movements need to consider and work toward avoiding, or learn how to work through them. Below I explore the issues of echo chambers and censorship.

Digital Concerns: Echo Chambers and Censorship

Ultimately, there are issues when it comes to the digital aspects of this social movement. The inability of the Invisible Children movement to reach those most impacted by the LRA through modern digital means in the early 2000s created an issue where the crisis and what to do about it were only being discussed by a group of people

similar to one another and without actual connections to the violence taking place. This creates what is called an echo chamber. Echo chambers are when groups of people with the same ideas and concerns exclusively seek out and speak to one another, essentially only hearing their own voices and opinions echoing back to them.

Echo chambers are significant when it comes to the Invisible Children movement because if the majority of the communication about the LRA and Joseph Kony is coming from people in the United States, people very removed from Uganda and the issues that are actually happening daily there, the potential not to understand the problem accurately, and the desire to "save" anyone they deem in need of rescue is high. A variety of voices and opinions are needed in order to actually work to solve these problems. This also relates to the issue of the white savior complex that is often associated with Westerners attempting to "solve" and "fix" issues that they see taking place in the global South, with strong ties to colonialism.[190] Without truly hearing and listening to the voices of those directly involved in the crisis or conflict, outsiders communicating amongst themselves does not only *not* solve the problem, but it perhaps creates an additional problem in thinking that others *need you* to save them.

Echo chambers are not the only issue of concern when exploring the digital aspects of the Invisible Children movement as it relates to location. The next aspect to consider is the issue of censorship; both on a governmental level and on an individual level with self-censorship. In the United States, due to the First Amendment, freedom of speech is protected against government censorship.[191] However, social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, are all private companies and they are able to censor what individuals post on their platforms based on their own guidelines;

many of which do, in fact, censor hate speech, obscenity, misinformation, and harassment at varying degrees.[192]

Taking into consideration that the Invisible Children movement focuses on the crisis in Uganda, it is important to explore the digital censorship in Uganda. According to the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), the Internet, especially various social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, are significant and highly utilized tool for "social, economic, and human rights development in Uganda and Africa at large."[193] While some argue that the Internet is the only remaining place in Uganda for free assembly, the Internet is now being censored as well.[194] The Ugandan government claims they only shut the media and Internet when there is a threat to security, CIPESA argues that the Ugandan government is using laws to curtail the Internet freedoms of its people under the guise of protecting national security.[195] This censorship prevents the people of Uganda from continual access to the Internet and limits their ability to participate and contribute to social movements including the Invisible Children movement.

Not only does the Ugandan government censor access to the Internet for their citizens, the government has also imposed a daily fee of 200 Ugandan Shillings ($0.05 USD) to access the popular social media sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp.[196] With this daily fee, some Ugandans are not able to pay to access those applications and sites, so they cannot see the communication from the Indivisible Children movement taking place on those sites, and they are also unable to contribute to the dialogue about the issues and solutions. This imposed paywall is a form of censorship that those in Uganda have to overcome in order to participate in social movements that engage via these digital

means. This is simply not an obstacle that individuals in the United States who want to participate in social movements via Facebook and WhatsApp have to overcome.

While the Internet is available and "partly free" according to the Freedom on the Net report by Freedom House, rights have shrunk for Ugandans over the years, and Ugandans have experienced increased control, repressive laws, persecution, and detention of Internet users.[197] This has resulted in individuals practicing more self-censorship, according to Dr. Wakabi, executive director of the CIPESA.[198] This means that because of the repercussions individuals have faced for speaking out online, for example, some Ugandans have self-imposed censorship so they do not end up facing prosecution.[199] This type of self-censorship is still a kind of censorship that limits what is said and shared on the Internet for those living in Uganda.

Due to the limitations and restrictions Ugandans face when it comes to the digital landscape, including access and infrastructure, as well as censorship from both the government and self-imposed censorship, it is more difficult for Ugandans to participate in the digital aspects of social movements seen in the Western parts of the world. This is perhaps an important reason for those outside of Uganda to work with the people there to help spread their message and cause. If the people of that country are not able, or are afraid, to speak out against what is happening, other outside voices can bring global attention to the cause, with caution to speak with rather than speak for the people they are hoping to aid.

The Invisible Children movement has had an interesting connection to the digital realm throughout the years since its existence. The time of the movement's creation, 2004, was just before the social media era, with many of the most popular social

networking sites either not in existence or in their infancy at the time. However, while many of today's popular social networking sites were not as prominent in 2004, the age of the movement leaders and participants contributed to the movement's ability to adapt and change with the changing digital atmosphere of the time. With young leaders and digital native followers, the Invisible Children movement was, in fact, able to utilize the digital realm in beneficial ways.

Finally, through their incorporation of various digital means, the Invisible Children movement has helped their followers be able to first become aware of the problem the children of Uganda are facing, and second have the means and ability to share that information, bringing attention to what was then a virtually unknown humanitarian crisis. Next, the use of digital means allowed both to insert themselves into the story by posting and sharing their involvement in the movement. The Invisible Children movement struggled to help its followers complete the transition from interest to participation as they struggled with the final step of having followers make the story their own, because it was not their own, and the work that needed to be done was too far away to move offline effectively.

Ultimately, the Invisible Children used various digital means in different ways depending on the time and their specific audience. Because of the time in which the Invisible Children movement came about, the movement had to, and did, adapt to the changing media landscape over the years. The movement was created at a time when many major social media platforms were not widely popular, or even in existence yet, but they were also able to create and distribute what was then the most viral video on the

Internet with their Kony 2012 video. The movement was able to adapt to the times in order to maintain their relevance and social presence.

The importance of the Invisible Children's relationship to digital media is their adaptability. The adaptability was most prominently seen through their adjusting to the developing Internet and social media boom of the early 2000s, as well as through their differing media plans based on the location of whom they were trying to reach. This not only helped the movement grow and maintain relevance throughout the years, this plan also allowed the movement to connect directly with and assist those whom the movement was designed to help.

Invisible Children as a Social Movement

The next factor to explore when looking at the Invisible Children movement is the social movement aspect. Scholars in the social media field have defined "social movement" with various key components, such as the preference to change some element of the current social structure,[200] being a sustained interaction of those with authority and those challenging that authority,[201] and an ultimate shift from what is to what those organizing the movement think "ought" to be. Additionally, social movements must be, at least, minimally organized; that is, a social movement must have some internal organization and cannot be simply a group of individuals doing multiple independent acts.[202] Along with this organization, social movements must have a sizeable membership in order to maintain their existence in the long-term, and it is both the size and scope of a movement that distinguishes it from pressure groups, lobbies, and campaigns.[203]

Invisible Children meets the requirements of a social movement as it focuses on changing the current social structure in Northern Uganda where the LRA have maintained cruel and enduring control for over thirty years.[204] The movement is working for and on the behalf of those in Northern Uganda without control over their situation, who are being targeted and tortured in the current social structure.

The Invisible Children movement is also an organized group; an important aspect of becoming a social movement. In 2006, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) officially declared Invisible Children a nonprofit organization,[205] and in order to become a nonprofit organization, one of the requirements that must be met, among many others, is that the applicant must have obtained official status as a corporation, association, or trust.[206] The fact that Invisible Children was able to obtain 501(3)(c) status means that had to be established as a corporation which in and of itself requires, at least, minimal organization. The members of Invisible Children's organization also provide the movement's goals and successes in great detail throughout the Invisible Children website, which also highlights the group acting collectively rather than several individuals acting independently.

Another source of organizational validity is the verification that a person or group receives on the various social media platforms. According to author, entrepreneur, and marketer Neil Patel, being verified is one of the most important things that an organization can do on social media. He states that verification provides "instant social proof and credibility" when an organization is searched for online and verification puts that organization at the forefront in their particular area as a trusted option.[207] While verification may not have been a contributing factor to the validity of an organization

twenty years ago, it is a reasonable assessment criteria for organizations conducted in today's digital era.

To become verified, a group or individual must follow the requirements of the various platforms. For example, to become verified on Facebook according to the *Facebook Help* page, an account must be authentic, representing a real person, registered business or entity; the account must be unique, meaning only one account per person or business may be verified; the account must be complete with an about section, profile photo, at least one post, and should be active; finally, the account must be notable representing a well-known person, brand, or entity.[208] The process to become verified on Twitter is similar to that on Facebook.[209] Instagram, however, states that, at this time, "only Instagram accounts that have a high likelihood of being impersonated have verified badges" meaning that while the process to get verified is similar to other platforms, Instagram does not verify all accounts that meet those requirements. They instead suggest users link to their other verified Facebook page in their profile (important to note that Facebook owns Instagram, thus the push to link verified Facebook accounts over other platforms).[210]

Invisible Children is verified on multiple platforms including Twitter (@Invisible),[211] Facebook (@Invisiblechildren),[212] and YouTube (Invisible Children).[213] This speaks to the validity and organization of Invisible Children as an organized group, and their verification status helps individuals who are searching for the movement to locate and identify their pages and content. The searchability of the verified accounts leads to the next question concerning social movement status: membership size.

While identifying the exact size of the membership of a group, and what the weight of each "member" has relative to that of another "member" is nearly impossible, there are some measures to help get an idea of the following a movement has. For starters, the Invisible Children movement does have a record of the number of attendees at their various events across the globe detailed on their site. From their first effort of what they called their "National Tour," where the Invisible Children group traveled to schools, community centers, and places of worship across the United States, their statistics show that across the sixteen national tours and over 13,000 screenings, they were able to reach over five million people.[214] However, "people reached" does not equate to membership size. The Invisible Children website also details specific events and work the movement has done over the years, including 1,500 attendees at the Fourth Estate Leadership Summit,[215] 80,000 attendees at the 2006 Global Night Commute, 68,000 attendees at the 2007 Displace Me event, and over 400,000 total participants across all events.[216]

One of the most notable instances that highlights the sizable membership of the Invisible Children movement is the Kony 2012 video. At the time of its release, the Kony 2012 video amassed over 100 million views in 6 days and 3.7 million citizen signatures on a pledge for the arrest of Joseph Kony.[217] In addition to the statistics listed on the Invisible Children's website, examining the social media sites of the Invisible Children movement highlights the amount of social media followers or subscribers they have. Invisible Children currently has followers or subscribers ranging from 210,000[218] – 230,000[219] on Twitter and YouTube, respectively, to over 2.5 million followers on Facebook.[220]

Looking at the social media following along with the numbers of attendees and activists who have participated in the various Invisible Children events, a more holistic understanding of their sizable membership is established. Their following meets the standard for a "sizable membership" in order to be considered a social movement lasting in the long-term from its conception in 2004 to today, where the movement continues to have a strong following.

The Invisible Children movement meets all of the requirements of a social movement established for this study. These are important aspects to consider when studying any potential social movement so as to denote whether or not something is, in fact, a social movement, or if it is actually a pressure group, lobby or simply a campaign. Social movements are meant to change the status quo and shift from what is to what ought to be, and often times, in order to do that, social movements will be disruptive and can make people uncomfortable. Again, this is why it is so important to clearly establish what is or is not a social movement in order to properly analyze them and their actions.

Activism Through the Years

Activism is the work movements do that brings about change or evolution; it is the acts that bring about a change in the system.[221] In this section, I discuss the specifics of what the Invisible Children movement has done over the years as activism. First, I take a look at the traditional and non-traditional forms of activism, and then I explore how Invisible Children mixed both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism together. Next, I discuss the connection between the Invisible Children activism and youth and activism and digital. Finally, I end with a discussion of activism and the digital realm,

where I explore whether Invisible Children partook in activism or simply slacktivism, and what we, as scholars, and social activists alike, can learn from this movement.

The Boundary between Traditional and Non-traditional Activism

The phrase "traditional activism" might be somewhat of a misnomer. Activism is intended to be disruptive; it is supposed to go against the grain of what already is. With that in mind, what is considered "traditional" today was perhaps "radical" for the time in which it was being implemented. Women who partook in the Freedom Trash Can event of the 1960s, wherein women threw away items such as mops, lipstick, and high heels, items they viewed to be oppressive to women, were seen as "young radicals."[222] Civil Rights activist Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus in 1955, among decades of additional political work, who is now referred to as the mother of the Civil Rights movement, was seen as rebellious in her day.[223] However, today, the image of women protesting and marching for their own rights, of sit-ins and demonstrations, are all a part of what is now considered "traditional" forms of activism; marches, protests, sit-ins, physical petitions, etc. For the purpose of this dissertation, "traditional" forms of activism will include actions that do not utilize digital means as their main method of activism.

The Invisible Children movement, throughout its sixteen years of existence, has done, and detailed, a lot of activism both within the United States and in Uganda. While the specific purpose of this dissertation focuses on youth digital social movements, I do want to highlight some of their more traditional forms of activism alongside the digital

activism. However, I will not go into great detail about every act for the sake of conciseness.

Specifically, the Invisible Children movement organizes their activism into a four-part model that they believe best addresses the conflict with the LRA in its entirety, focusing on both immediate needs and long-term needs of those who have been affected by the LRA.[224] The four parts of this model include media, mobilization, protection, and recovery.

Invisible Children co-founder Jason Russell, states that "at Invisible Children… content is king. It has to be the most compelling, the most astonishing, the most passionate [in order to] tell a story that is quality, entertaining, and heartbreaking in hopes that the viewer wants to participate."[225] It is not surprising, then, that Invisible Children made storytelling through various forms of media a cornerstone of the movement. Over the years, Invisible Children produced and shared over a dozen short films highlighting the crisis happening in Uganda. starting with "The Rough Cut," to creating and distributing various "color" films that focused on individual children affected by the LRA, and ultimately with their infamous Kony 2012 video. From the beginning, including media as a large factor of their movement highlights the more non-traditional and digital shape of activism that the movement was doing.

This second aspect of activism was focused on spreading awareness around the world of the crisis happening in central Africa and the LRA conflict.[226] In their mobilization phase, there were five main areas where the movement focused their attention: national tours, artist relations, the Fourth Estate Summit, grassroots advocacy, and international events. The mobilization part of the model consisted of much more

traditional forms of activism like traveling around the country, touring schools, and hosting conferences and events for activists to attend. Most of these events took place in-person and focused on what individuals could do to create change and bring an end to the LRA, including writing letters to politicians and holding rallies and lobby meetings. Additionally, it was through this portion of the model that the Invisible Children movement orchestrated international events to garner global attention to their cause.

The last two phases focused specifically on the LRA-affected communities. Importantly, the programs that have been put together in the recovery phase have all been overseen by the Invisible Children Uganda (ICU) and their national offices in Kampala, Gulu, and Pader, as well as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as opposed to leaders from the United States "fixing" the problems from afar.[227] Programs from the recovery phase include scholarship and literacy programs, water and sanitation programs, and helping women in LRA-affected communities by providing them with job opportunities as seamstresses in order to give them a marketable skill that could help them economically. In addition to helping those in the communities, this program was designed to help the children who had been abducted by the LRA up to six months before they were reunited with their families in an attempt to help rehabilitate them from the atrocities and trauma they had been subjected to as child soldiers.

The protection part of the model focused on setting up technologies to help the communities alert one another when and where the LRA was active. This was done through the Early Warning Network and the LRA Crisis Tracker. Updates from the Crisis Tracker can be found on the official webpage at: LRACrisisTracker.com, on Twitter at @CrisisTracker, and on mobile devices via the iPhone or Android app. In addition to the

Early Warning Network and Crisis Tracker, deflection fliers and FM radios were the final parts of the protection phase. These were both attempts to encourage LRA soldiers to surrender.

The four-part model detailed by the Invisible Children movement covers both traditional forms of activism with things like rallies and lobbying, as well as more non-traditional forms of activism including the media blitz across social media and the Crisis Tracker. The use of the technologies available to the masses in Uganda, like the FM radio announcements, shows that the Invisible Children movement was adaptable to the situation they were in; if they were speaking to high school and college students in the United States, they could use things like social media to spread their message, but if they were speaking directly to members of the LRA trying to get them to surrender, they knew to adapt and adjust their technique and reach them via FM radio.

Digital Activism: The Shift from Offline to Online

As I have mentioned above, the Invisible Children movement came about prior to the mass availability of broadband Internet and the popularity of social media. However, as time progressed, so too did the movement's relationship with the digital realm. Most notably, the Invisible Children movement used digital means to produce and distribute videos and content they created, such as the Kony 2012 campaign. Utilizing the digital realm within the movement creates a landscape where anyone with access to the Internet could participate in the online activism. This availability for large groups to participate in activism helps get outside attention on the movement and is linked to the success of a movement as a whole.

An important aspect of this form of activism is that, through these digital means, the youth are able to find and select what they view as important news and share information that relates to those issues. When relying on traditional media, such as television broadcast news and/or newspapers, an individual can only digest what the gatekeepers of those institutions deem significant. However, through online activism, which includes sharing information, individuals are able to discern what they view as important and newsworthy. This allows attention to be brought to unknown issues, like the child abductions among other atrocities committed by the LRA in Uganda. Allowing young people to have control over what they view as news is an important facet of digital activism that ultimately has the ability to lead those young people into activism where they might otherwise be disengaged from the issues strictly presented to them by the mainstream media.

Activism versus Slacktivism

Much of the work Invisible Children has done over the years took place offline, however, their most well-known activism was the Kony 2012 campaign, which did take place almost exclusively online. This is also one of the aspects of the Invisible Children movement that has come under the most scrutiny. Because the first goal of the Kony 2012 campaign was to make a virtually unknown war criminal infamous, Kony 2012 set itself up to be criticized as a type of slacktivism. Some may argue: what does making a war criminal known do to stop the war criminal from continuing their path of destruction? However, the purpose was to bring attention to a part of the world that does not frequently make headline news, and making Kony infamous was only the first step in

the Kony 2012 movement. The Kony 2012 video is the most rapidly spread human rights video ever, so when it comes to spreading their message, Kony 2012 did exactly what Invisible Children intended; they made this unknown war criminal known.[228]

While Invisible Children arguably achieved their first goal of the Kony 2012 campaign, the second goal of this campaign was to stop Kony and the atrocities of the LRA, and that was not as achievable via sharing a video online. The argument that surrounds Kony 2012 is that raising awareness is simply not enough, and this is where the critique of slacktivism comes in. Tweeting, sharing, liking, etc. is low-cost and low-risk, and so, some argue, it lacks the effort to create actual change.[229] Clicking and sharing does not solve problems. Bringing attention to a cause does not change the situation to which attention is now directed. Twitter does not solve global crises.

However, I argue that this type of engagement is a necessary but insufficient step in activism in today's digital world. Research on young people and the media has found that the youth use the media to participate in politics, specifically, they utilize media to circulate information, collaborate with others to create and share information and content, and to connect with others through various platforms.[230]

Additionally, I explore the steps from interest to participation below to highlight how important the first step of creating and sharing one's own news is and how this first step can lead to additional actions by utilizing Clark and March's ladder of political engagement as a way to combat the argument of digital activism as slacktivism.[231]

Sharing: The First Step of the Ladder

First, the Invisible Children movement reached out to young people and gave them information that they were able to relate to and share through digital means. The digital aspects, such as utilizing social media, provided a place for these young people to see and share what they decided was important news; the abduction of children in Uganda, an issue that was not getting much attention outside of the Invisible Children movement. Through the use of digital means, individuals were able to highlight and bring outside attention to the issue and cause.

Sharing what followers viewed as news through digital means happened throughout the Invisible Children movement, from sharing information and images supporting the movement, to the viral Kony 2012 campaign. Having access to digital means allows individuals to create and share what they consider to be news. This type of access and ability to share helps bring attention to issues that are not being covered by traditional media. Sharing and spreading the message of the Invisible Children movement via digital means, the movement was able to grow in size and in attention.

To call this type of activism low-cost and low-risk is accurate, but to argue that this is ultimately where that form of activism ends ignores the idea that social activism is a process that participants move through, and sharing and posting is, at least sometimes, only the first step in that process. Rather than disparaging this step of the activism process, and potentially discouraging the work youth are doing, it is important to encourage the continual step forward from interest to participation.

Inserting Oneself into the Story: A Step Closer to Engagement

The next step of moving from interest to participation in Clark and Marchi's ladder is the ability of followers and members of the movement to insert themselves into the story they were sharing. The Invisible Children movement provided opportunities for participants to insert themselves into the story in-person through various acts like protests, sit-ins, and various other events, but they also had opportunities to insert themselves through technology. The Invisible Children movement used hashtags in various phases of their activism, such as #MyHeartIsBeeping, based off of their first bracelet video campaign, and of course, most popularly, the #Kony2012 hashtag. These hashtags allowed followers to post and share pictures of themselves using the hashtag so they became a part of the message and story they were sharing. Through these hashtag campaigns, members of the Invisible Children movement with access to digital technologies were able to insert themselves into the story.

Because of the time in which the movement came about, the ability to insert oneself into the story was more difficult for followers outside of attending the few gatherings that took place once a year. As time and technology progressed, members were able to insert themselves into the story more frequently, which helped keep the movement in the forefront of people's mind and attention. The more people were able to feel like they were a part of the story, the more likely they were going to move to the final step from interest to participation in the movement.

Making the Story their Own: The Final Step of Engagement

Finally, participants in the movement moved to make their own story as the final step from interest to participation. It is in this final step where participants of the Invisible Children movement shared their own personal stories about how they participated in the movement to address the problem, and this is where the emotional connection to a movement came in. This is the riskiest step in the ladder of engagement because it is the most personal and exposes not only how an individual feels about a problem, but also the actions they have taken to address the problem. Individuals who participate in Invisible Children events, be they protests or contacting local governments to push for international action, then had the opportunity to share their experiences online with friends, families, followers, and the public at large.

This last step moving from interest to participation often moves the social movement offline, especially for the Invisible Children movement and the era in which it came about. Not having an interactive and direct way to communicate with leaders during the early development of the Invisible Children movement hindered the digital ways in which movement participants could take control of the story and make it their own. This is often part of the biggest criticism of the Invisible Children movement: it was nothing more than liking and sharing content online, slacktivism.

However, the time in which Invisible Children came about is part of this problem. A social movement that came about alongside the developing social media era was traveling an unforged path. Ways to transition followers from interest to participation had not yet been laid out for the movement to follow. Invisible Children was setting that path and becoming a learning tool for future social movements.

Ultimately, it was difficult for followers and members of the Invisible Children movement to impact and change the issues the children in Uganda were facing directly. Despite the connectivity that the digital realm provided, the distance from where the issue of the movement was happening and where the majority of the activism was taking place made making that final step from interest to activism much more difficult. However, it does not, and should not, diminish the work that Invisible Children has done, as it provides useful information for future movements and scholars alike to learn from. An appropriate argument is not to rid today's social movements of this type of digital activism, but rather to encourage those participating in what is often considered slacktivism to take their passion and momentum offline as well.

The digital arena provides a platform for more, and less mainstream, issues to come to the forefront. Digital activism allows massive spread of an issue that may not otherwise garner the same amount of attention. As opposed to diminishing this type of activism, the focus should be on how this first step can lead to more forms of activism that can ultimately lead to more change. An important critique of the Invisible Children movement is to focus on this follow-through step of more meaningful activism. A movement cannot stop with awareness, but bringing awareness to an issue should not be frowned upon as a part of a social movement.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the four key concepts of this research in the Invisible Children movement. First, I explored the relationship the movement has to youth. Importantly, the Invisible Children movement had a connection to youth in all three main

areas: the movement came about from a youth-affected crisis, the movement was also created and led by youth leaders, and ultimately, the movement's target demographic for involvement was youth.

Importantly, I also discussed the rhetoric surrounding the use of children, specifically, young black males, and the relationship with sympathy and pity that has to U.S. audiences. This critical look at the Invisible Children movement as a whole, looking both at their written and verbal rhetoric as well as their images and videos provides additional insight into virality of the movement and the overwhelming reaction to want to help or "save" these boys. This speaks to the initial draw to social movements, such as the Invisible Children movement, but the lack of deeper connection to the movement and those affected by the cause can be pointed to as to why that initial draw wanes.

The next section of this chapter explored the relationship between the Invisible Children movement and the digital sphere. This section highlighted the adaptability of the Invisible Children movement as a whole to the changing digital landscape in order to keep their movement alive and not get lost as much of their target demographic transitioned online.

Following the digital aspects of the Invisible Children movement, I broke down the components of a social movement, including a push for change, sustained interaction between those challenging authority and those in authority, and the movement being at least minimally organized, all important distinctions to make so as to better understand acts that may potentially be seen as disruptive.

In the final section of this chapter, I explored the activism done by the Invisible Children movement. Specifically, I first detailed the traditional and non-traditional and

digital forms of activism done over the years utilizing the Invisible Children's four-part model. The Invisible Children utilized their in-person presence to drive what seemed to be digital activism of the time; viewing their Kony 2012 video. But, and perhaps due to the movement being one of the first of the digital/social media era, the Invisible Children movement was not able to turn that digital activism into more than likes and shares, ultimately harming the movement and its reputation in the long-run.

Throughout this chapter I have highlighted the importance of youth to the Invisible Children movement and the impact that has had on bringing attention to the movement and getting young people involved in making change. In addition, I discussed how being adaptable throughout their development over several years helped Invisible Children navigate the changing digital landscape and the impact that had on keeping the movement relevant in the age of digital social movements. The ability to adapt and change is one of the strongest aspects of the Invisible Children movement as they pioneered the new digital landscape not only to continue sharing their message and purpose, but also to use new ways of connecting and sharing to create the most viral video of that time.

Finally, while the Invisible Children movement may seem like an example of what in digital social movements is often criticized as slacktivism, the movement's work demonstrates that raising awareness ultimately can be an important step from interest to participation for those thinking about or wanting to get involved. Beginning with low-risk, low-cost acts is an important step to get people, and perhaps especially young people, involved in causes that they otherwise may not be able to participate in. The most important aspect of this type of activism is that is indeed a stepping stone to more and

more meaningful participation and not a final destination ending with sharing a post or changing a profile picture filter.

The Invisible Children movement is an important case to study when looking at youth digital social movements because it incorporated youth at every aspect, from the catalyst for the movement (youth-affected) to the movement leaders (youth-led) and finally to the target demographic (youth-involved) for members of the movement. Not only has Invisible Children included youth throughout the movement, they also came about at a unique time as it relates to the digital world we are currently in. Finally, the insight Invisible Children movement brings to youth digital social movement studies as it relates to activism versus slacktivism and the importance of low-cost, low-risk activism that acts as a stepping stone to more impactful and meaningful activism. Through their media blitz campaigns, Invisible Children proved that digital social movements that focus on, are run by, and utilize youth can bring about attention and change to virtually unknown problems in seldom publicized places of the world.

Chapter 3: Bring Back Our Girls: Developing Digital Era Youth Social Movement Activism

Bring Back Our Girls is a social movement that began in 2014 after the terrorist group Boko Haram abducted more than 200 school girls from their school dormitory in Northern Nigeria. Boko Haram is an Islamic terrorist group which practices Jihad and has been active in Nigeria since 2002.[232] Translated to English, "Boko Haram" means "Western education is sinful,"[233] and thus, the group targets the education of girls with the purpose of exclusively keeping women in the household.[234]

After the death of their leader, Muhammed Yusuf, in 2009 while in police custody, Boko Haram developed an armed insurgency in an act of revenge for killing their leader.[235] Over the next several years, Boko Haram continued their attacks across Nigeria in their attempt to enforce Sharia law, even among those who were not Muslim.[236] In May of 2013, Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, declared a state of emergency in three northern states where the Boko Haram terrorist group had an especially strong hold, including Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, informing the people that parts of these states had been overtaken by groups who do not have allegiance with Nigeria.[237]

While this was not their only act of terrorism, the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls is one of Boko Haram's most worldwide recognized acts of enforcing their ideals.[238] This abduction marked the single largest abduction attributed to Boko Haram.[239] During the abduction, nearly sixty of the young girls managed to escape, leaving a total of 219 girls in captivity. Along with the abduction of the girls, the terrorists set fire to the school, burning a large part of the school and destroying school records, making it

increasingly difficult to account for the girls who were at the school and thus the girls who were missing.[240]

Faced with uncertainty about exactly who was missing, where the girls were, and how to get them back, family and concerned Nigerian citizens came together to pressure their government to take on Boko Haram in order to locate and safely rescue these young girls. The rally cry of this movement moved online with the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag campaign, and eventually spread across the globe, reaching global leaders and citizens alike, all demanding the same thing: to return these abducted girls back to their families and away from Boko Haram.

In this chapter, I delve into the Bring Back Our Girls social movement. First, I look at the impact youth has had on the movement, from being the catalyst of the movement, to the development of the movement, to the utilization of youth as a part of the movement's membership, and finally the impact of the rhetoric surrounding youth of the movement. Next, I discuss the impact digital technologies and infrastructure have had on the Bring Back Our Girls movement based on when and where the movement took place. I also address some of the digital concerns with this movement. Following the digital section, I explore what aspects of the Bring Back Our Girls movement made it and actual social movement. I conclude with a discussion of the activism that the Bring Back Our Girls movement has accomplished over the years, both traditionally and non-traditionally, and examine how their online activism fits into the four styles of Internet engagement.

The Role of Youth throughout the Bring Back Our Girls Movement

When it comes to the relationship the Bring Back Our Girls movement has with youth, the first place to begin is the relationship between those affected that led to the creation of the movement. As stated above, Bring Back Our Girls came about because young girls were the victims of a terrorist attack by Boko Haram for, and while, attending school. The next important relationship to explore is how youth have been involved in the leadership of the movement, which sets the Bring Back Our Girls movement apart from the other three in this dissertation because it was not originally created by young people, but rather brought in a prominent young voice to act as leadership within the group. Finally, as it relates to youth, I discuss the affect rhetoric surrounding the movement.

Youth-affected

While Boko Haram was not a new presence in Nigeria, the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls was a tipping point for members of the community, both those related to the abducted girls, but also for members of the community at large. This was an attack by a terrorist group that was explicitly directed at young girls. While this event directly impacted the girls in Nigeria, the abduction spoke to a larger issue around the world: the education of youth. Around the world, education for young people is a global issue with more than 263 million children out of school in 2014. This issue is even more prominent for girls who are out of school in places such as Sub-Saharan Africa at a higher rate than boys.[241] This direct attack from Boko Haram on these young schoolgirls is what led to the creation of this movement, creating the first, and strongest, direct relationship the Bring Back Our Girls movement has to youth.

Youth-led: An Outside Voice

Next, we look at the relationship youth have as the driving force of this movement. This movement was initially started at a protest by family members of the missing girls, and it quickly moved online, gaining the attention of many individuals across the world, including young female education activist, Malala Yousafzai, who eventually became a spokesperson for the movement while still a teenager herself.

Malala Yousafzai is one of the most well-known young girls who has been impacted by the violence directed at young girls and their right to an education. At the age of 11, Malala was encouraged by her father to speak out against the Taliban, which was extending its reach into her home region of the Swat Valley in Pakistan. In October 2012, fifteen-year-old Malala was shot in the head coming home from school; unbeknownst to her, the Taliban had issued a death warrant for the young girl due to her being outspoken over several years for girls' rights to an education.[242] Not only did Malala survive the attack, by her sixteenth birthday, she was speaking to the United Nations about this issue, for which she had been fighting for years.[243] The kidnapping of the Chibok girls in Nigeria was an issue that was close to Malala and her activism. Her passion for the cause ultimately led her Nigeria on her seventeenth birthday to be a part of the movement to bring the young girls back from their captors.

Malala met with the parents of the girls who had been abducted to show her support and put pressure on Nigerian president Jonathan to be more aggressive in his work to bring these abducted girls back home to their families. Malala expressed her desire to be a voice for the movement, continuing to speak up for the abducted girls until each of them had been returned safely and allowed to continue her education.

Malala not only reached out to the Nigerian president, but she also left a message for Boko Haram as well. She told them to reflect on their behavior and recognize what they are doing does not only not represent Islam, but is reflecting poorly on Islam.[244] A year after the abduction, with the majority of the girls who had been abducted still in custody, Malala wrote an open letter to world leaders, criticizing their insufficient efforts in the release of the Chibok girls.[245] At eighteen years old, Malala called on the new Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari to continue further action in releasing the girls and ending Boko Haram altogether. When Buhari responded to Malala that Boko Haram had been handled (though girls were, and are still, missing), Malala continued to push the president to continue fighting for the missing girls, and that this issue was not over until all the girls had been returned.[246] Over the years, Malala has continued to be a leading voice in the Bring Back Our Girls movement through her personal blog sites and social media accounts, and politically talking with and to global leaders to continue efforts to bring each one of the abducted Chibok girls back.

Malala is an example of youth leadership within the Bring Back Our Girls movement. While she was not an originator of the movement, she was an early contributor and ultimately became a loud voice of leadership for the movement. Because of her prior activism involving young girls and their right to education, her voice was a powerful aspect of this movement, regardless, and perhaps even in spite, of her youthfulness.

Youth-involved: Bringing Young People Together through Social Media

Next, when looking at the Bring Back Our Girls movement, youth have played an active role as members of the movement. The Bring Back Our Girls movement took place, in large part, on social media, specifically via Twitter through the use of the hashtag (#BringBackOurGirls). While the youth demographic may seem more disinterested in engaging in "traditional" politics, the use of digital media, such as using Twitter and hashtags, is a tactic that can be used to engage this specific demographic in a more social, entertaining, and authentic form of communicating than traditional media.[247]

According to the Pew Research Center, individuals who fall into the definition of youth for this research (13 – 29 year-olds) make up the top two largest user demographic categories based on age in the United States; 32% of 13–17 year-olds and 40% of 18–29 year-olds use the platform.[248] Worldwide, the 13–24 age demographic makes up 30% of Twitter users. (ages 25–29 are combined through age 34, but this group makes up another 29% of all Twitter users).[249] The age of Twitter users is significant because of the presence that the Bring Back Our Girls movement had, specifically on Twitter with their digital campaign.

As early as July 2014, the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag (#BringBackOurGirls) had generated over four million tweets, and while not all of those tweets were from youths, it is a relationship that cannot go unnoticed.[250] The following tweet heat map shows how the hashtag spread from April 23, 2014, to May 6 of that same year, exploding from a cluster of tweets happening almost exclusively in Nigeria to a mass of tweets around the world, with large amounts of tweets coming from the United States, Europe, and even Australia.[251] Taking into consideration the majority share of Twitter

that belongs to the youth, this is a significant connection for the Bring Back Our Girls movement.

Youth and Affect: Who are the "Girls" in Bring Back Our Girls

The use of the word "girls" in the movement's title *Bring Back Our Girls* highlights young people at the center of the cause. However, when looking at the ages of the abducted girls, most of them were mid-to-late teenagers. In many places, this age demographic could be, and is, considered "young women" or "young adults." The specific rhetorical use of the word "girls" in the movement could be seen as strategic in that youthfulness signifies a sense of vulnerability and elicits more sympathy and compassion from others.

Using the word "girl" in the name of the movement and in the globally used hashtag infantilizes the victims of the abduction. Many of the girls who were abducted, while still what I consider "youth" in this dissertation, were, in fact, in their late teens when abducted and many are in their twenties today. If the movement became known as "Bring Back Our Teenagers" or even "Bring Back Our Daughters," a different tone would be conveyed. What this means for the Bring Back Our Girls movement is that when people hear the word "girls," often, a *young* girl is what they picture, not a seventeen-year-old teenage girl. A young girl being abducted strikes a chord within people, a feeling a pity or sympathy, and people feel more inclined to help. Emphasizing the "girl" aspect of the abduction presents the abducted students as young and vulnerable, in need of help and protection. Referring to someone as a "child," and perhaps especially

a female child, ignites this emotional appeal to others that those girls need help, and is ultimately a useful tactic across movements.

Wrapped in the BBOG movement is also the fight for the education of girls worldwide. Bringing activist Malala Yousafzai in as a spokesperson, a young activist known around the world for her fight for the education of girls, also presents another unique rhetorical move. As Wendy Hesford denotes, critically, in the chapter *Spectacular Children* in her book *Spectacular Rhetorics*, education has been used as a part of a "rescue narrative" wherein education becomes the agent for change, meaning that education is seen as the way in which these youth can be helped/saved.[252] Portraying education as a way to rescue individuals, as the answer to problems, speaks to a Western idea of what should be. Intertwining the infantilization rhetoric along with the education as a rescue narrative creates an enticing situation for outsiders to get involved in.

Youth have had a direct impact on the Bring Back Our Girls movement throughout the various aspects discussed in this section. Specifically, this movement was created as a result of youth being directly affected in abduction from the Boko Haram terrorist group. While this movement was not as directly and explicitly driven by youth as the Invisible Children movement, it did include leadership from youth activist Malala Yousufzai as an important aspect of this movement. Additionally, the Bring Back Our Girls movement used affect rhetoric through their usage of "girls" to invoke an extra sense of pity and sympathy from outside members. Even though this choice may be somewhat infantilizing, it also sometimes even results in more donations and financial support for a cause. This, combined with the rhetoric surrounding the importance of

education and the idea and support for girls' education worldwide as a universal fix to many problems, laid the groundwork for an outpour of support from around the world.

A Hashtag Heard 'Round the World

The next important section to discuss for the Bring Back Our Girls Movement is the movement's relationship to the digital landscape. In this section, I explore the important digital aspects of the Bring Back Our Girls movement as it relates to the time the movement took place and the location of the movement. I also address the digital means that the movement used. Finally, I explore additional digital concerns the movement has had to consider and the implications of those concerns.

Non-digital Natives in a Digital World

As discussed above, the Bring Back Our Girls movement was not started by exclusively youth in the same way that the Invisible Children and the Never Again movements (discussed later in this dissertation) were. As previously mentioned, Malala Yousafzai was one of the only youth spearheads of the movement. This relates to the digital aspect of this movement as it relates to the discussion of digital natives and non-digital natives' impact on movements. With the majority of the Bring Back Our Girls leaders not belonging to the youth demographic, their innate relationship to the digital world was not as second-nature as it is for those who grew up with the technology advances that are available today. Because of their increased use of social media, digital natives process information differently than older generations.[253] These differences are evident, among other places, in the way digital natives relate to and use social media to

work to achieve their goals compared to non-digital natives.[254] The Bring Back Our Girls movement did use social media, despite the majority of their leaders not being digital natives, however, their execution of their social media usage and presence has not had the same impact and fluidity as other movements.

The impacts of the majority of the Bring Back Our Girls leadership not being digital natives can be seen in how they interact and run their various social media sites. To begin, the only social media page that is verified for the Bring Back Our Girls movement is their Facebook page. I discuss the implications of verified accounts on movements in the following section, but as it relates to the digital aspect, not having verified social media pages makes it difficult for followers or potential followers to identify which account is run by the actual movement. Digital natives are aware of the need to be verified on various platforms for consistency and ease of access for attracting and maintaining membership. Some even argue that getting verified, specifically on Twitter, has more to do with being good at Twitter than with the account user's identity.[255] This speaks to the leadership of the Bring Back Our Girls movement not being as digitally savvy as younger leaders may be, making finding and following the movement's account more difficult for those who are potentially interested in the movement.

Along with the difficulties around identifying movement accounts, the actual posts from the Bring Back Our Girls movement differ from those of digital natives as well. For starters, some of the platforms used by the Bring Back Our Girls movement have outdated content and have large gaps between postings. Additionally, much of the Bring Back Our Girls content is not directly created by the Bring Back Our Girls

movement, but rather postings from other sources that the BBOG movement shares, re-tweets (RT), or re-posts. While digital natives do share or RT content, they also include their own voice and add their own commentary on said content; in other words, they share while adding to the story. This kind of engagement is missing from the social media platforms from the non-digital natives behind the Bring Back Our Girls movement. As a result, the unique voice of the movement is missing.

Time: A Double-Edged Sword for the Bring Back Our Girls Movement

Despite not being led exclusively by digital natives, one benefit the Bring Back Our Girls movement did have going for it was the time in which the movement developed and gained worldwide attention. The Bring Back Our Girls movement most popularly chose Twitter as the social media platform to spread their message, though the campaign spread across other popular platforms such as Instagram and Facebook as well. In the Spring of 2014, when the Bring Back Our Girls movement first appeared on Twitter, the platform had around 260 million monthly active Twitter users globally.[256] In addition to the amount of users on Twitter in 2014 globally, broadband access was also on the rise. By the end of 2014, fixed-broadband penetration was reported to have reached nearly 10% of the globe, mobile-broadband was said to have reached over 2 billion subscribers, accounting for 32% of the world, and there was a total of three billion Internet users globally.[257]

While the timing of this movement benefitted Bring Back Our Girls with worldwide access to the internet and broadband internet access growing, the relevance of Twitter was on a decline. In 2014, Instagram became more important than Twitter for

youth users, LinkedIn ranked more popular than Twitter among U.S. adults, and Snapchat came in as the youngest social network with more than 60% of Snapchat users ages 18-24.[258] Outside of the United States, in 2014, Twitter fell below other social media sites including QZone, Google+, LinkedIn, and Instagram in terms of popularity and usage.[259]

What all of this means for the Bring Back Our Girls movement is that though Twitter was still a popular platform in 2014, it was not the most important or most used platform by youths, nor was it the most popular for the older demographic of adults inside the United States. Keeping all of this in mind, Twitter still skewed heavily toward U. S. users, with 143 million of the worldwide Twitter accounts being registered to users in the United States.[260] If the Bring Back Our Girls movement was trying to reach the U. S. audience, then Twitter would definitely be capable of reaching them, and it did. However, even with the majority of platform users being U. S. users, the platform was still not the most important or valued platform for those users. This means that while U. S. users would have, and be on, Twitter, it was not their main social media platform of choice, and if the Bring Back Our Girls movement wanted to spread their message and create sustainability through their social media presence, relying heavily on Twitter might not lead to the worldwide payoff that the movement was aiming for.

However, while not the most popular site across the world, or even the most popular in the United States where it skewed the heaviest, Twitter does have advantages that LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook did not offer, such as the ability to connect with social networks based upon interest rather than personal connection. (Facebook is currently including more of this type of engagement opportunity with Facebook Groups, but in 2014, the connections users had were much more direct and personal). This is one

of the biggest advantages that the Bring Back Our Girls movement had through its Twitter use. They were able to get their message out to wider audiences than if they had started in a more insulated platform like Facebook or Instagram. Once the message spread to users via Twitter, those users could then search out the movement on various other platforms and follow accordingly.

The time in which the Bring Back Our Girls movement came about had its pros and cons. In 2014, broadband penetration was spreading, and because of the decrease in the cost of mobile devices, access was becoming more available to more people worldwide. On the other hand, the social media platform most utilized by the Bring Back Our Girls movement at the time was on a decline for both youth and adults alike. Twitter was still their best option at the time, though, as it had the advantage of allowing users to see and follow information based on interest in the content, and not a personal connection to an individual.

Location, Location, Location: The Benefits and Struggles of the Location of the Bring Back Our Girls Movement

The next important aspect as it relates to the digital nature of the Bring Back Our Girls movement is the location of the movement. When looking at the location of the movement, I examine both the location where the movement started, in this case Nigeria, as well as the location to whom the movement is reaching out. In this section I discuss the implications of location, including access, infrastructure, and the state of Nigeria as a country as the movement came about.

The digital aspect of the Bring Back Our Girls movement started in Nigeria with the first use of the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls coming from a Nigerian lawyer, Ibrahim

Abdullahi on April 23, 2014.[261] The importance of this movement starting in Nigeria as it relates to the digital aspect of this movement is important to examine. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), there were over 83 million active mobile internet subscriptions by the beginning of 2015.[262] In 2014, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimated that 43% of Nigerians had access to the internet, an increase from 2013 where only 38% of Nigerians had access.[263]

In Nigeria, and in much of the world, the increase of access to the internet was spurred by mobile devices that were internet-enabled, which provided affordable services to mobile users.[264] The low cost of data services made mobile internet access attractive to many youth in Nigeria with costs as low as $17 a month (USD) in January 2014, a price that dropped to $7.50 a month by April of the following year.[265] This price was significantly lower than fixed wireless access (FWA) that cost $63 a month in 2014.

The ability for individuals in Nigeria to access the internet is important as it relates to the digital aspect of the Bring Back Our Girls movement. With upwards of 80% of the Nigerian population having access to mobile phone services, this would allow individuals in that country the ability to access and share information through nontraditional media and social media platforms.[266] However, access does not mean easy or complete access. Below I discuss some issues that are related to digital access and infrastructure in Nigeria.

While mobile usage in Nigeria is growing, and mobile teledensity nears 100% and with over 65 million active internet subscriptions,[267] the quality of the service available to the people of Nigeria is still lacking. According to the ITU, mobile broadband penetration was only 10% in 2013.[268] Internet speeds averaged just under 2 Mbps in 2014, with a

worldwide average of nearly 4Mbps.[269] This means that for the majority of internet users in Nigeria, while they have access to the internet, that access is not seamless, it is slow, and ultimately for 90% of those using the internet, they are not getting the full benefits the Internet has to offer just by simply having access to the internet. Even for those who have access to broadband, that service can still be limited. It is reported that only 0.1% of Nigerians had access to fix-broadband internet in 2013, meaning only around 15,000 subscribers were accessing consistent broadband speeds greater than 4 Mbps.[270]

Not only do many Nigerians have slower internet speeds, but they also have to deal with infrastructure issues like power outages, which impacts their ability to use the internet and their mobile phones. Many Nigerians have reported they have to use private generators in order to maintain their connection to the internet during the frequent power cuts the nation was experiencing in 2014.[271] With power outages reportedly occurring daily between five and seven hours per day, many Nigerians must rely on alternative electricity in order to utilize their technology, among other things.[272] The financial burden of having to pay for expensive back-up sources of energy not only puts a strain on the individual citizens of Nigeria, but it has also caused many cybercafes in the area to close.[273]

The issue of access to the adequate broadband and proper infrastructure to maintain the access to and functionality of the internet and mobile devices creates a battle for those using digital media as a platform for their social movement in Nigeria that social movements located elsewhere do not have to deal with. In addition to the location of the movement and the access and infrastructure posing a challenge for movement

leaders, these issues also make it more difficult for the people where the movement is taking place, in this case, Nigeria, to be as involved and invested in the movement.

However, as it so happened, the city of Port Harcourt in Nigeria was named as the World Book Capital of 2014, and Obiageli Ezekwesili, the first person to promote the hashtag, spoke at the event honoring the selection of Port Harcourt as the World Book Capital of the year. This event brought international attention, and, during her speech, Ezekwesili called the audience to work together in the rescue of the school girls.[274] In addition to having a strong hashtag, the Bring Back Our Girls movement got international attention from this World Book Capital event that helped aid in the spreading of the movement and cause.

The final aspect related to location I want to discuss is related to the ultimate reason for this movement: the terrorist organization Boko Haram and their grasp on Nigeria at the time. During this time, Nigeria as a whole was facing a large threat from Boko Haram. In May of 2013, President Jonathan declared a state of emergency in three northern states, including Borno, where the Chibok girls were abducted, stating that these three states had already been overtaken by the radical group.[275] Because of this ongoing and wide-spread control of Boko Haram across Nigeria, this, understandably, takes time, attention, energy, and resources from the people of Nigeria that, under different circumstances, could be put toward other causes. Looking at this from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the people of Nigeria were fighting for more basic necessities, constantly, against Boko Haram, including safety, and without being able to fulfill that need, it becomes difficult for other needs to take priority. This means, while families are

worried about their own safety, it might be difficult for them to find the time, energy, or ability to fight alongside the Bring Back Our Girls movement.

This is actually a strong argument for why the Bring Back Our Girls movement needed to reach out internationally. With local resources limited, extending the call for help and support to other places and people who are not dealing with the same immediate threats and needs as those on location in Nigeria is a way to gain a level support the movement might otherwise lack.

As mentioned above, the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag spread across the globe and was able to reach and multiply across locations with more openly available access to digital means and infrastructure. Great Britain had Internet connection in 84% of households in 2014.[276] Additionally, in the United States, around 80% of U.S. households had high-speed Internet connection.[277]

Reaching these locations across the globe was important for the Bring Back Our Girls movement because of their digital access and infrastructure. With more widely accessible Internet in places like Great Britain and the United States, the Bring Back Our Girls movement was better able to reach larger audiences through their digital campaign, despite their own limited digital access. While this will not solve their problem, garnering an international following is something that can benefit a movement, because, as discussed earlier, the size of a movement is important to its longevity and ultimate success.

Adapt or Disappear

Next, in relation to location, I want to explore the spreadability of the Bring Back Our Girls movement. Specifically, I look at the ability of the movement to spread based on the relationship the movement has to the digital realm, keeping time and location in mind. Then, I look at issues concerned with spreadability, including echo chambers and censorship.

The Bring Back Our Girls movement, despite facing the challenges of being located in Nigeria, a part of the world with below average broadband speeds and access, still managed to spread their message across the world. The ability to spread their message was, in large part, due to the use of their social media hashtag. The use of a hashtag allows a message to spread from network to network, creating new connections and building new networks. Hashtags allow users to come together for the same cause under one phrase that is easily searchable and easy to use. And while finding the "official" social media accounts for the Bring Back Our Girls movement was not streamlined, searching for and following the hashtag was, and it helped the movement spread far and wide.

The way to create an effective hashtag is similar to some other common communication techniques; be unique to your cause, be concise and clear, and evoke emotion.[278] Research on the use of hashtags on social media have found methods to creating strong ones. The Bring Back Our Girls hashtag did this; the hashtag was directly related to their cause and the tweets they shared along with it, it was concise and clear, and it also managed to evoke emotion through the imagery created through the use of the word "girls." In addition to the emotional response from the use of the word "girl," the

hashtag also made a personal connection with those who used it through the use of the word "our." The hashtag never got changed to #BringBack*Their*Girls or #BringBack*TheNigerian*Girls, it remained and spread with the use of "our" girls.[279] This connected all of the users of the hashtag personally to the missing girls. Those who shared that hashtag were taking personal relation and claim to the missing girls. They were not girls in the abstract. These 200+ girls were the world's girls.

This hashtag created a connection between those who started the movement and their audience to feel a connection to the girls who had been abducted. Not only did it make a personal connection through the hashtag, the hashtag also identified the specific outcome the movement was aiming to obtain. The hashtag was specific, it was clear, it related directly to the movement's cause, and it made the connection to the intended audience. These methods helped the spreadability of the Bring Back Our Girls movement on social media through their use of rhetorical digital techniques.

Internet Engagement: Brochureware

Brochureware is essentially when a movement uses the Internet to share information about their cause. The Bring Back Our Girls movement sent out brochureware to spread their message to a wide audience at an incredibly fast rate that would not have otherwise been possible coming from this specific group of movement leaders. As mentioned earlier, the fact that the Bring Back Our Girls movement was organized and led by women, and more specifically young women, made it difficult for their voices to be heard and taken seriously based on their specific cultural dynamics. The

use of brochureware as a means of moving this movement forward gave those voices a way to spread and spread quickly.

Internet Engagement: E-Mobilization

E-mobilization is a mix of traditional and non-traditional activism.[280] The Bring Back Our Girls movement engaged in e-mobilization through their use of online communication in order to coordinated offline activism, specifically their marches and international government involvement in their mission. Across the globe, BBOG rallies were scheduled and documented via social media.[281] In addition to scheduling offline rallies, the Bring Back Our Girls movement organized a Social Media March via Facebook for May 8, 2014.

This type of Internet engagement also works as a powerful recruitment tool, which is exactly what the Bring Back Our Girls movement needed in order to add additional outside pressure to their government. This type of activism is powerful in that it allows a movement to gather a large following, which then results in attention from traditional media. For a movement that felt ignored by their own government, international media attention was a positive step for to get attention from large audiences, who would, ultimately, add additional pressure to their government.

Internet Engagement: Online Participation

Finally, the type of activism that the Bring Back Our Girls movement used on a global scale was what is essentially online participation, specifically *flash activism*. Flash activism is a form of activism where a movement gains a lot of attention in a very short

period of time, similar to the power of a flash flood.[282] Just like a flash flood, the power of flash activism is not in its longevity, but rather in its massive and quick onset. Flash activism was seen through the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag, which spread around the world with millions of engagements in a short timeframe. The benefit of flash activism is that movements that have this form of activism often have larger audiences than something that was achieved offline, and the size of a movement is an important aspect of the success of a movement.[283] One of the reasons why flash activism is able to gather large amounts of engagement is because this form of online participation is low-stakes. In addition to being low-stakes, it is also low-cost, as the cost to participate in a movement online is much lower than physically participating in a movement, and thus it is much easier for people, especially young people, to engage.[284]

The Bring Back Our Girls movement came about in a significant time where not only was social media growing rapidly, but so too was access to the internet, specifically in Nigeria where the movement was centrally focused. Unfortunately, the main platform used by the Bring Back Our Girls movement, Twitter, was on the decline both in popularity with youth and adults alike, all of which created a dynamic landscape for this movement to navigate in.

The location of the movement as it relates to the digital aspects of the movement have also shown to be important as it relates to access, infrastructure, and the ability to spread the message. While access and infrastructure are both growing in Nigeria, broadband speeds are still below the world average, and issues with power outages lasting for hours at a time add difficulties to continue spreading the message via the digital world. The issue of communicating digitally was not only stunted by power

outages, but individuals who wanted to push through that obstacle were also then faced with the expensive option of needing a personal generator to supplement electricity, adding an additional strain to those who were trying to enact change.

Digital Limitations: Some Battles Proving Harder than Others

As it relates to the digital realm, the Bring Back Our Girls movement faced some additional limitations to consider as well, including echo chambers and censorship. Below I explore the impact these concerns had on the movement throughout the development and continuation of the movement.

The issue of echo chambers is one that every social movement that utilizes digital media must consider. While the arguments that echo chambers are a troublesome hindrance to social movements in the digital sphere may not be as significant as they once were, it is still an important aspect the Bring Back Our Girls movement has had to manage.

To begin, the Bring Back Our Girls movement struggled with echo chambers in that the only people originally talking about the movement were those in Nigeria who were already active in the movement. This was a necessary aspect of the movement; people in Nigeria did need to be the ones talking about, tweeting about, and bringing attention to the movement. However, the conversations happening within the country were not proving to be sufficient to propel the movement forward enough to create the change they were aiming for.

As the movement moved outside of Nigeria, the argument against the real impact this movement could have is that it only reached those who were already engaged in

political activism, and then those are the only people who ultimately engage in the movement's activism. However, the Bring Back Our Girls movement was using social media in order to get attention from a large audience, and from important international figures in order to put enough pressure, both internally and externally, on the then-Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. Having individuals who were already politically active but had not heard about, or were not already working to rescue, the Chibok girls learn about the Bring Back Our Girls movement and then begin participating helped the movement gain the attention it was searching for.

In fact, people involved in political activism perhaps had more power and weight behind their tweets than the average person. For example, seeing people such as First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, CNN reporter Jim Clancy, United States Secretary of State John Kerry, and the United States Department of State tweet in support of the movement led to political action offline and added social pressure to those in power who had not yet put effort in to support the movement.

Another area of concern about echo chambers comes from partisan ideologies only listening to and hearing similar partisan ideologies. However, the Bring Back Our Girls movement was not divided by political agenda, like some social movements. That lack of division made it easier for individuals across various political ideologies to come together in support of this movement. There was no real echo chamber here for the movement to get stuck in from a political ideology perspective, at least not abroad.

Additionally, as Ibrahim Adbullahi, the first person credited with tweeting the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag, stated, nearly everyone has girls in their lives, and the

hashtag appealed to almost everyone because of that.[285] This helped keep the Bring Back Our Girls movement from falling completely into the trap of an echo chamber through its digital communication. Because the movement was not appealing to just one type of person, a divisive belief system, or a controversial topic, the movement was able to gain traction with a wide variety of individuals. With large amounts of online discussion of the movement, traditional media then began covering and discussing the movement.[286] And, as studies have shown, media coverage has the ability to influence policy,[287] which is ultimately what the leaders of the Bring Back Our Girls movement wanted: governmental changes that protected and brought the missing girls back from the Boko Haram.

Bring Back Our Girls' large appeal to virtually any and everyone was an advantage for the movement. This was an advantage that helped them avoid one of the bigger concerns for digital social movements of echo chambers: keeping the message stuck and repeating amongst the same group of individuals, at least from a political mindset. The movement did struggle with echo chambers in that it struggled to reach people outside of those who initially cared, and perhaps adds to why the movement fizzled out in the way that it did.

The second potential limitation the Bring Back Our Girls had to face was that of censorship. In 2014, Nigeria's freedom on the net status was considered "partly free," scoring a 33 out of 100 (zero being the best and 100 being the worst).[288] The categories used to determine the level of freedom on the internet include obstacles to access (10 out of 25), limits on content (8 out of 35), and violations of user rights (15 out of 40), again, the closer to zero, the closer to being considered free. I have discussed limits concerning

access above, and for this section, I focus more specifically on the limits on content and violation of user rights issues that Nigeria has faced.

Online media in Nigeria is generally free from restrictions, and, as of 2014, authorities had not blocked or filtered out content, in large part due to the complexities of the internet infrastructure, making it difficult for authorities to carry out filtering or censorship.[289] However, issues that have happened in the past, as they relate to content or websites being inaccessible, have been documented as technical issues rather than governmental intervention.[290] In 2013, a filtering device from the company Blue Coat, a company known for monitoring and filtering and is used in countries such as China, Russia, and Bahrain, was discovered on private ISP in Nigeria, causing concern when it comes to filtration and censorship of content. Additionally, in 2015, a local Reuters correspondent was arrested under allegations of espionage as it related to the 2015 election.[291] Citizens suspected this was an act of censorship by their government to keep the outside world from gaining information about their upcoming election. These instances of control and censorship create a feeling of uncertainty when it comes to what Nigerians feel they are able to see and say online.

While on the surface social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are freely available and highly popular in Nigeria, government officials have made statements about clamping down on social media.[292] This was seen, in part, due to online communication that has been critical of the government on the internet, and the government's response has given Nigerians the impression that online censorship is on the horizon.[293] With the threat of censorship seeming impending for Nigerians, this could impact the way they communicate online in one of two ways: first, as a result of potential

increased censorship, this could cause an influx of creating and sharing critical communication about the government while doing so is still a possibility, but it could also lead to self-censorship with the threat of government intervention looming.

Self-censorship is a form of censorship that is not top-down and implemented by the government or authorities directly, but rather it is when the individual chooses to not communicate in what might be considered controversial or critical rhetoric in order to avoid any potential consequences from the government. While the Nigerian constitution includes freedom of expression and of the press, actions that have been taken cause pause for individuals as to what they do or do not say online.[294] Citizens in Nigeria do practice a level of self-censorship, but in recent times have become more open about discussing previously taboo topics online. Unfortunately, this freedom from self-censorship has not expanded to all topics. Nigeria's anti-LGBT climate has caused many individuals to filter what they discuss as it relates to their sexuality online and even self-censor personal information.[295]

The self-censorship is not only seen on an individual level, but also from journalists throughout the country as well. For instance, during the coverage of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election, there was a large number of violent attacks against journalists by both Nigerian security forces and militant groups. These attacks led to journalists self-censoring and cautiously reporting on the elections in order to avoid a similar fate.[296]

Self-censorship, as it relates to the Bring Back Our Girls movement, is important because a large portion of this movement criticized the way the government had been, and was currently, handling the kidnapping of the girls and their rescue. Leaders and

members of the movement did not believe the government took the abduction seriously and, as such, were not doing enough to return all of the abducted schoolgirls home safely. Being critical of the government, while technically legal in Nigeria, still posed potential threats to individuals and reporters alike. This threat was especially high during the 2014-2015 years as Nigeria was in the midst of a presidential election, and being critical of the current president and leadership put his future as the president of Nigeria in jeopardy. This is why the ability to spread the Bring Back Our Girls message outside of the country and across the world benefited the movement; if concerns of censorship within the country gave individuals pause on speaking out or speaking out as frequently and critically against the government as they felt necessary for fear of governmental retaliation, those outside of the country could do so without that same fear.

Bring Back Our Girls as a Social Movement

The following section explores the Bring Back Our Girls movement's will to change an element of the current social structure, the sustained interaction between those challenging authority and those in authority, the desired shift from what is to what ought to be, the organization of the movement, and ultimately the size of the membership. Below I examine each of these established criteria that are used to classify a social movement and discuss their significance and impact as it relates specifically to the Bring Back Our Girls movement.

The first element of a social movement is that it must be striving for a change in the current social structure. As discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, while defining a social movement is complex, one of the most common threads seen across

scholars is the notion of creating change, of shifting from how things currently are to how the members of a movement think they ought to be. The Bring Back Our Girls movement, at its core, is rooted in this desire for change.

From an outside view of the movement, the BBOG movement may not seem to be working to change elements in the social structure of post-2014 Nigeria. However, as one delves deeper into the movement, it is clear that this movement was more than just a call to action to retrieve these abducted girls. Leaders of the Bring Back Our Girls movement felt that the government was not working in favor of the people and was not working hard enough to return the abducted girls from the Boko Haram. This need for change in the current structure is what ultimately sparked the movement. Adding to the change in social structure, the Bring Back Our Girls movement has been a women-led, young-girls-affected issue, which in and of itself has also challenged the social structure of the patriarchal, male-dominated society of Nigeria.[297] Women calling for change in the male-dominated social and political structure in Nigeria have contributed to the social movement status of the Bring Back Our Girls movement.

On top of the female leaders within Nigeria calling for attention to the abduction of youth female school students, Pakistani youth female education advocate Malala Yousafzai became an international spokesperson for the movement. Malala represents a change in an element of the current social structure as well. Yousafzai was shot in the head by the Taliban in Pakistan for very similar reasons the Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria: the perception that the pursuit of education for young girls was seen as evil, bad, sinful under certain interpretations of Muslim law.[298] Not only did Malala continue her education after surviving being shot in the head, she continued to

push for the change in the culture surrounding female education by becoming an advocate across the world. As she joined forces with the BBOG movement, at the still young age of sixteen years old, she represented a change that the other leaders and members of the Bring Back Our Girls movement wanted to see in their current social structure: an educated, empowered, young woman whom people listened to and valued.

The significance of BBOG being women-led and directly impacting young girls is an important one to consider when studying this movement. Specifically when examining the Nigerian political realm, women today still have a minimal role in politics with their rights being protected only as recently as 1979.[299] Additionally, women have been, and continue to be, marginalized in both the public and their private lives in Nigeria.[300] With the Bring Back Our Girls movement, the leaders are working to prioritize these young girls who were abducted for simply obtaining an education, a threat that young girls are particularly vulnerable to in the country. Women and young girls pushing for the advocacy and protection of other young girls in Nigeria is a shift in the current social structure.

On a political level, leaders of the BBOG movement have had issues with how the then-president Goodluck Jonathan handled the initial abduction of the girls as well as his response thereafter. When the abduction initially happened, Jonathan made no official statement. Two days after the abduction, Jonathan went on a political rally where he still did not comment on the girls' abduction or what he planned to do to ensure their safe return.[301] Jonathan's lack of response to the abduction is, in part, what spurred the movement to seek change in the social structure. Leaders of the movement did not feel as though the girls who were abducted were valued by their president, and felt instead as if

his upcoming reelection campaign was more important than the safe return of his own youth. This is when international attention to the movement was not only valued, but also, some felt, needed, as a way to put pressure on the Nigerian president to act as the leader of the country and make efforts to rescue the girls of Chibok.

All of these efforts for change relate to the current social structure in Nigeria, from young girls being allowed an education to the voices of women being valued and taken seriously in the political realm to ultimately simply seeming to value the lives of the girls who had been abducted. They represented a shift that this movement was attempting to make from what is to what they strongly believed ought to be. Young girls *ought* to be able to get an education safely. Women *ought* to be able to express their voices and be heard and taken seriously in politics. The lives of the girls who had been taken by the terrorist group Boko Haram *ought* to be as important to the president, to the country, and to the world as any other girl in the world.

The significance of this shift from what is to what the movement believes ought to be is a large one to examine from the perspective of an international social movement, especially a social movement that is situated in Africa and spreads to Western countries. Questions around Western aid to African countries are wrapped in colonialism and the *white savior complex*.[302]

This relationship between the West attempting to help "develop" or "fix" African countries and the Bring Back Our Girls movement is essentially because of Westerners seeing the ideas that Boko Haram hold as "backwards": that Western ideas and ways of life are wrong and that girls should not be in school and getting an education, among other things. So, this particular case of wanting to shift from what is to what ought to be

is a unique intersection of the Western ideas and norms becoming a part of Nigerian culture. This creates a difficult idea of what to fight for when studying this case as it relates to what the role of the West ought to be. On the one hand, is intervening and pushing Western ideals and beliefs on a different culture with a different set of values what ought to be? On the other hand, is intervening simply in the best interest of the young girls who were abducted, and thus what ought to be? Leaders of this movement argue the latter; they believe strongly in the pressure that the West can provide to their current government to act on behalf of these abducted young girls.[303]

In fact, it was only after the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag spread internationally, getting attention from prominent political figures that Nigerian president Jonathan finally spoke publicly about the abduction.[304] It was through this international attention that youth activist Malala Yousafzai became involved in the movement, and it was only after his meeting with her that Jonathan agreed to meet with the parents of the abducted girls.[305] The attention and intervention from the West and others across the globe in and of itself is a shift away from what some view as what ought to be done when it comes problems taking place in Nigeria and elsewhere.

It is not just the attempted shift from what is to what ought to be that makes the Bring Back Our Girls movement a social movement, it is during this attempted change, the continued interaction between those who are challenging authority and those who are in authority that is important. This is a complex area for the BBOG movement as well, because, from a global perspective, that conversation has very much dwindled. However, the local voices that have been challenging the authority from the beginning continue to

do so to this day. The other complexity here is wrapped around to whom the movement is speaking; the Nigerian government, Boko Haram, or both.

When exploring the communication between the Bring Back Our Girls movement and the authority of the Nigerian government, it has been complicated from the day of the abduction. Starting on April 14, 2014, the Nigerian government had not been clear on the severity or the intervention the government had made in relation to the abducted girls. The government originally stated that around 100 students were missing, while parents and girls who had escaped were saying more than 200 girls were still missing, and two days later the government finally came out stating that most of the girls had been returned and only eight remained missing.[306] By mid-April, a government source attempted to explain the discrepancy with the number of girls missing. The communication between the BBOG movement continues in this way, back and forth, at, rather than with each other, until intervention from youth activist Malala Yousafzai met with President Jonathan and convinced him to meet directly with members of the BBOG movement and parents of missing girls.

The dialogue between local BBOG members and the Nigerian government has, and continues to be, tense. Bring Back Our Girls protests were banned from the capital in the summer of 2014, citing a security threat as the reason.[307] The president of Nigeria at the time of the abduction called the movement politically motivated.[308] The movement continued to accuse the government of not caring enough or doing enough for the return of the girls.[309] Eventually, Jonathan was even accused of rejecting an offer from Britain to rescue the Chibok girls, which he denied.[310] This type of communication from those most intimately involved in the movement and the government they have been trying to

work with is, in fact, sustained, albeit strained, but meeting the qualification for Bring Back Our Girls to be a social movement.

The communication between BBOG and the Nigerian government escalated as the movement gained international attention as well, when followers of the movement reached out with the same message: Bring Back Our Girls. This communication was less sustained, but represented more of what Bennett and Fielding refer to as *flash activism*, discussed more below.[311] This communication happened in large amounts and happened very quickly, and the impact of this communication from the members of the BBOG movement to the Nigerian government added pressure to President Jonathan to speak out on the abduction and ultimately to live up to the responsibilities to the Nigerian people.[312] The communication from the movement to the government did not end with Jonathan, and the newly elected president Muhammadu Buhari addressed the missing girls in his inaugural speech, promising the government would not claim they had defeated Boko Haram until all of the girls were freed.[313]

The communication from the people of Nigeria and those communicating internationally via social media to 'Bring Back Our Girls' has been mostly directed to the Nigerian government, calling for their intervention to return the missing girls. Even with this direct pressure on the Nigerian government, as of Spring 2020, there are still over 100 girls missing.[314] The fact that there are still so many girls who have not been rescued and returned home highlights, to some, the inefficiency of the Nigerian government, and is argued to be the reason Goodluck Jonathan lost the 2015 election.[315] However, it was not the Nigerian government who abducted the girls, but Boko Haram, and communication directly to Boko Haram had been limited.

Though limited in their communication to Boko Haram, BBOG youth leader Malala Yousafzai, has multiple times reached out directly to Boko Haram, calling on them to think of their own families, especially their daughters and sisters, and to release the school girls back to their families.[316] In response to Malala's requests, and the Bring Back Our Girls movement as a whole, Boko Haram released a video, mocking the Bring Back Our Girls movement.[317] So while the majority of the communication to and from the BBOG movement has been with the Nigerian government, there have been instances where communication has gone to and from Boko Haram as well.

The next aspect that sets a movement apart is their organization. The Bring Back Our Girls movement is organized when it comes to leadership, events, and the message of the movement. The movement began at a protest and the hashtag was first shared by a Nigerian lawyer, Ibrahim M. Abdullahi, and while this is where the call to "bring back our girls" originated, Abdullahi is not the leader of the movement. The movement's leadership consists of five women; Aisha Yesufu, Florence Ozor, Maureen Kabrik, Dudu Bakam, and Oby Ezekwesili. Each of them had important roles in putting pressure on the Nigerian government, even through regime change, to return the missing girls. The women have organized daily meetings at the Unity Fountain in Abuja, along with over 200 protests inside and outside of Nigeria between 2014 and 2018.[318] The five original leaders of the movement only stepped down from their leadership roles when Ezekwesili announced her run for president, and the other four women joined in her campaign, noting that this was the next step they felt they had to take in order to ultimately achieve the movement's goals.[319] The change in leadership in 2018 resulted in the following

taking the various positions within the movement: Yassin (coordinator), Nifemi Onifade (spokesperson) and Gapani Yanga (sit-out coordinator).[320]

The movement's organization is significant because having clearly identified leadership helps those who are rallying around the movement know who to look toward for guidance, information on events, and any results that may or may not be happening. The specific leaders of the BBOG movement also came about naturally in a grassroots nature. Similar to other grassroots movements such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (now Mothers Against Destructive Decisions) and the Million Mom March, Bring Back Our Girls developed from a local group of individuals who have come together to solve a problem, collectively advocating for change. A social movement developing from the ground-up as a grassroots organization is a positive step in developing a strong social movement.

However, the positive impact of a grassroots movement does not end at the singular group development, but rather requires multiple local groups developing around the cause in various locations that are organized by various individuals who are not in power but are fighting for the same cause of the movement as a whole.[321] This is where BBOG did not continue with their grassroots development. While the movement began with grassroots leadership, the movement was mostly centered around that leadership and did not have groups around Nigeria or the world starting their own "chapters" of the BBOG movement to keep the it moving. This lack of spreading of the movement makes it difficult as it relates to the impact and longevity of the movement as a whole.

In addition to the organization of the movement, in the digital world that the Bring Back Our Girls movement has infiltrated, their digital organization is also

important. Bring Back Our Girls has an organized website with easily viewed contact information for current leaders including phone numbers, email addresses, and social media handles. In addition to contact information, details on upcoming protests and sit-ins are also organized on the website along with their mission and goals. However, while the website does have this information, it is not very detailed, and can leave those wanting to become more involved in the movement looking for more.

In addition to their somewhat lacking website, BBOG's social media are not easily found or identified, in part, due to their lack of verification. If one begins on the BBOG website, there are links to the Bring Back Our Girls Facebook and Twitter, however, the social media pages are difficult to find on their own. Neither the Facebook nor the Twitter accounts are verified, which can make identifying which page belongs to the actual movement difficult for those who want to be involved. Not having verified social media accounts, especially for a movement that uses social media, is a hindrance in the organization of the Bring Back Our Girls movement that has made growing and sustaining membership difficult.

Exploring the membership size is the next important aspect when looking at a social movement. Membership size is significant as it relates to the longevity of a social movement, and ultimately sets movements apart from pressure groups, lobbies, and campaigns.[322] The Bring Back Our Girls movement has explicitly expressed the value that outside pressure and attention brings to their cause and the impact large membership has had on their movement.

At the height of the Bring Back Our Girls movement, those showing support for the movement had utilized the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag more than one million times

in less than three weeks.[323] In under a month, the movement had amassed around two million uses of the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag, with posts coming from prominent political figures such as Michelle and Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and David Cameron, as well as celebrities including Kerry Washington, and Chris Brown.[324] The seemingly large size of membership and attention from celebrities and politicians via digital means are what brought international attention to this movement, which ultimately put pressure on the Nigerian government to respond to the abduction. The U.S. government, the British government, and even the United Nations all got involved, reaching out to the Nigerian government to discuss how they could assist in safely rescuing and returning the missing Nigerian school girls.[325] The impact of the massive following of this movement in a short amount of time is what finally led to a response from the president of Nigeria, something that the movement had been waiting for since the abduction happened.

However, after the popularity of the hashtag campaign died down, the number of followers of the movement fell as well. Looking at the social media pages, for example, the Twitter profile that is linked on the Bring Back Our Girls has 35,000 followers, and their official Facebook page has just over 8000 followers.[326] The Bring Back Our Girls movement is not exclusively online, though, so while this is one metric to use when looking at current followers of the movement, it is not the only one of significance for BBOG. In fact, daily protests and sit-ins in Abuja, as well as weekly and bi-weekly events held in Lagos, are still attended by members of the movement regularly, though those numbers, too, are dwindling.[327] As national and global attention refocused on

various other events, the Bring Back Our Girls movement lost followers, and many to this day are not aware of the status of the missing Chibok girls.[328]

The fluctuation in the membership for the Bring Back Our Girls movement has significant importance to the movement as a whole. When followers were massive and attention was directed right at Nigeria and the missing young girls, the Nigerian government could no longer avoid the situation and had to make efforts to find and rescue the girls. However, as attention and membership waned, the government's involvement in rescuing the girls also dissipated. The wide international attention did not bring all of the girls home, but it did put a magnifying glass on how the Nigerian government was handling the abductions and gave a louder voice to those who had been fighting on the ground in Nigeria from day one to rescue the girls.

As membership faded over the years, knowledge of the situation, and some might argue, care for the missing girls, too faded. Sizable membership has had a direct relationship with the longevity of the Bring Back Our Girls movement here. There are still many people in Nigeria fighting for the return of the girls, but globally, that fight is no longer there, and, six years later, more than 100 girls are still missing.

The sizable membership is a significant factor in the sustainability of a movement, and unfortunately for BBOG, the large membership that developed internationally through digital means dissipated over time as other news stories took precedence and the missing Chibok girls received very little international attention, resulting in a decline of followers. In Nigeria, though, some followers are still showing up daily, weekly, and bi-weekly to protests and sit-outs to keep the Nigerian government's attention on the 100+ girls who are still missing some six years later.

From the ultimate shift from what is to what ought to be, to the communication between the movement and the Nigerian government, to the organization and use of social media platforms, and ultimately the fluctuating membership size, the Bring Back Our Girls movement is indeed a social movement, but it is clear to see that some aspects of this movement have impacted the longevity and potentially even the impact that the movement as a whole has had over the years. Next, I will look at the specific forms of activism Bring Back Our Girls has done over the years both traditionally and non-traditionally, as well as discussing the four styles of Internet engagement, and finally I discuss the connections among youth, digital, social movement, and activism.

Bring Back Our Girls Activism

The BBOG movement has utilized both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism. First, I look at where the movement started, beginning with a very traditional form of activism, a protest. Nigerians began marching immediately after the young girls were abducted from Chibok. The protest was originally meant to be a one-day event in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. However, a relative of an abducted girl begged for the small group of protestors not to leave, arguing that the government would forget about the people of Chibok and the abducted girls if the group disappeared.[329] The protests did, in fact, continue with several hundred attendees marching in the rain toward the National Assembly, nearly all dressed in red and carrying signs to find and return the missing girls.

The purpose of these protests taking place in different parts of Nigeria was to bring together the people of Nigeria, rich and poor, "the high and the low," people with influence coming together with people from Chibok who felt they had no influence.[330]

All of these Nigerian people's voices came together with the hopes of getting national attention from the Nigerian government. With such great attention and voices expressing their concern over the issue, the government could not ignore the abduction and they would have to come together and "do the right thing" to rescue the abducted girls.[331]

The Bring Back Our Girls marches continued, with a march on the Nigerian Defense Headquarters in Abuja on May 6, 2014. After the movement grew international attention via social media, people around the globe began joining in protests at the Nigerian embassies in London, Los Angeles, and New York.[332] By June 2014, however, the Nigerian government had banned demonstrations about the abduction of the Chibok girls, citing a security threat to citizens in the capital.[333]

This ban has not stopped the Bring Back Our Girls movement from continuing with their activism in both traditional and non-traditional settings. To date, there are daily gatherings in Abuja at the Unity Fountain from 5 p.m.–6 p.m., and in Lagos there are gatherings every Saturday at the Falomo Roundabout and every other Saturday at the International School from noon to 1 p.m.[334] These gatherings may not be as massive as the original protests, but members of the movement continue to show up and fight for the still over 200 missing girls of Chibok.

The use of traditional forms of activism by the Bring Back our Girls movement is significant because it first relates to the grassroots nature of this movement. Bring Back Our Girls came about from a group of locals who were intimately connected to the girls who had been abducted and all came together to try and get the attention of their government. There was no "higher up" who attempted to control the movement or its

members, but rather a group of equals who all worked together toward a similar goal of bringing back the missing girls.

While the Bring Back Our Girls movement began with and continues to utilize traditional forms of activism like protests and sit-ins, they gained international attention through their use of non-traditional forms of activism. On April 23, 2014, the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls was first used after being chanted at the World Book Capital celebration in Port Harcourt. The phrase spread via Twitter across the globe and was used by celebrities and world leaders alike. Within a month, the hashtag was shared on Twitter alone more than four million times.[335]

This form of activism, while non-traditional, was an avenue in which the message about the abducted girls from Chibok, and the dangers of Boko Haram that the people of Nigeria have to face every day, was able to reach an audience that otherwise might not have heard or cared about. However, simply posting a photo holding a sign that says "Bring Back Our Girls" or sharing a tweet using the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag alone is not where the use of non-traditional activism stopped for the Bring Back Our Girls movement. This movement also worked to incorporate both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism together in order to not just make their cause known but to also ultimately make change and rescue the abducted Chibok girls.

Bring Back Our Girls has used social media to spread their message across the world. With their ultimate goal being to put pressure on the Nigerian government to pay attention to the people in this poorer part of Nigeria and to act on their behalf in the rescue of over 200 young girls, international viral attention was right on course with what the movement needed. This international attention was not exclusively through social

media, though. Florida Representative Frederica Wilson, for example, is a U.S. Congresswoman who continues to fight at the congressional level to rescue the abducted girls of Chibok.[336] California Representative Barbara Lee, a representative to the U.N. General Assembly, has also worked to bring bipartisan collaboration on the issue.[337] And Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi continues to wear red on Wednesdays to show solidarity with the Bring Back Our Girls cause, working to make sure the girls are not forgotten in the U.S. Congress as they continue to work toward their release.[338] Outside of the United States, the International Red Cross and Swiss government mediated the release of twenty-one Chibok girls following two months of negotiations in 2017, three years after they were abducted.[339] This international effort from everyday citizens to political leaders speaks to the impact of blending digital and traditional activism.

Lost in the Aftermath of a Flash Flood of Activism: Why Bring Back Our Girls Seemed to Disappear After their Massive Hashtag Campaign

From a global perspective, the Bring Back Our Girls movement used digital activism most notably to spread awareness. However, the use of digital activism was taken on more by followers of the movement than movement leaders themselves. The hashtag campaign blew up internationally, but the Bring Back Our Girls movement's digital footprint aside from that has been rather small. Below I explore implications of the movement relying so heavily on their digital activism and not planning for the future.

Much of the conversation surrounding the Bring Back Our Girls movement focuses on the digital activism that the movement became known for, their hashtag campaign.[340] The #BringBackOurGirls campaign gained international attention with celebrities and politicians, along with average everyday people suddenly flooding Twitter

along with other social media platforms with a very clear call to action: returning the abducted Chibok girls. In a few short weeks, the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag had been used over a million times worldwide.[341] And while this is an impressive and viral aspect of the movement, it is virtually where the digital activism ends.

To date, the Bring Back Our Girls digital presence has remained limited aside from the hashtag campaign. The movement leaders continue to post on their social media accounts, but those posts are less forms of activism and more information sharing, reminding people how many girls are still missing and how long it has been since they were abducted. There are fewer instances of calls to action, fewer international and digital rallies being organized, and fewer ways for members to get or stay involved with the movement.

The movement has not had an official end, and there are still dozens of girls missing, of course. But based on the digital presence of the movement, both from leaders and followers alike, that is an easy conclusion to draw. The Bring Back Our Girls movement essentially got lost online without a follow-through of next steps of where to go or what to do after sharing their selfie along with the hashtag.

As communication scholars continue to study social movements, specifically digital social movements, this is an important lesson to take away from the Bring Back Our Girls movement. This movement has shown that massive amounts of people around the world can, and will, rally around an important cause. People are even willing to move further than simply sharing content about the cause and including their personal image attached to the cause as seen with the selfies as a part of the hashtag campaign. Bring Back Our Girls also shows the power of this kind of attention through large and

widespread gathering of not just everyday Internet users, but also political leaders with potential international pull and power. The Bring Back Our Girls movement seemingly had the perfect storm of digital activism in front of them. They brought together a large, captivated audience through anger at atrocious act and had powerful forces that seemed ready and willing to intervene however they could. Nevertheless, the movement still seemed to fizzle out without all of the girls being returned.

Activism, Slacktivism, Both, or Neither?

A common question surrounding the Bring Back Our Girls movement is whether the acts of the movement were activism or simply feel-good slacktivism from a group of young online people with no real vested interest in the movement or the end result, whenever it may come. Research has shown, though, that young people are, in fact, using social media as a way to connect with others and to produce and share information.[342] These are steps to being a part of participatory culture, which is ultimately changing the way people operate and their expectations about how to approach various activities ranging from learning and creating to civic and community engagement. So, by this understanding, young people may not, from a traditional perspective, be seen as participating in activism, but to these people who engage in and embrace participatory culture, this is, in fact, seen as a productive kind of activism.

Below I explore additional ways in which the Bring Back Our Girls movement worked to overcome the issue of slacktivism using the Clark and Marchi's ladder of political engagement to highlight the importance of each step taken, and where in this climb the movement struggled.

Sharing: The First Step Up the Ladder

Sharing content is the first step of moving up the ladder of political engagement. This includes sharing content about the movement, retweeting or sharing a post from the movement, either from leaders or other members, and ultimately doing what one can to spread the movement's message far and wide. This is important for social movements because it is through this first step that individuals are really able to bypass gatekeepers of traditional media and to share and attempt to make known the issues that they are concerned with.

The Bring Back Our Girls movement did exactly this. They used social media to create their own news. They created a hashtag that spread across the world and gained attention to a cause that they deemed important. It was not just the leaders spreading and sharing their message anymore. Because of their use of digital technologies, outsiders were able to hear about this cause and they, too, were able to share the message. It was through this step that the BBOG movement was able to circumvent traditional media by going through nontraditional means in order to get the worldwide attention that they decided their movement needed. Their ultimate hope was to put pressure on their own government to act.

This first step is relatively low-stakes for those who participated in it, though. That means that British people who shared tweets with the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag were not really risking much by doing so; they were not sticking their necks out for the cause through a share. The low cost of this step is not to be diminished, though, because it is the first step toward future engagement. If individuals are not sharing information

about the movement online, then they are not likely to continue to climb the ladder for that particular cause. This is the first step that shows true interest in a cause.

Inserting Oneself into the Story: A Second Step Up the Ladder

Next, the BBOG movement provided participants an opportunity to insert themselves into the story on social media through the use of the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag campaign. This campaign was two-fold in that there was the hashtag attached to tweets shared across social media, but the movement also encouraged participants to take pictures of themselves holding a sign that said #BringBackOurGirls. These were two ways where members can insert themselves into the Bring Back Our Girls story. Specifically, including a picture holding a sign that said #BringBackOurGirls, by including the hashtag in the post, individuals of no political or social significance got the sense of being included in making a change.

Posing in a picture along with the hashtag not only appealed to the youth, it potentially gave them a sense of empowerment and agency. Research on images of oneself that are shared online (selfies) highlights various reasons why people share these images online. For instance, Cruz and Thornham have found consistently that selfies have been a source of empowerment feelings for individuals who post them, and those selfies help individuals build identity performance in the social media era.[343] As it relates to the Bring Back Our Girls movement, the posting of selfies with the Bring Back Our Girls hashtag was not only an easy way for individuals to participate in the movement., but also to build an identity of someone who cared, of someone who wanted to be a part of the change to rescue the abducted Chibok girls.

While this was a way for individuals across the globe to insert themselves into the story, the Bring Back Our Girls movement did not provide additional ways, resources, or steps for those who became interested in the movement to do much other than post their pictures or share the hashtag. The inserting oneself into the story ended digitally with the pictures and hashtags. Without a step forward, interested participants were not able to take the final step of making the story their own in order to fully transition from interest to participation.

Making the Story their Own: Where Bring Back Our Girls Fell Short

What this movement lacked, was the ability for users to make their own story as it related to the Bring Back Our Girls movement. Because of the distance those outside of Nigeria were to the cause, both physically, and perhaps even emotionally insofar as it came to being able to relate to the mass abduction as a whole, it was difficult for this movement to sustain its massive influx of attention. Those who had been involved in the movement thus far were not as easily able to connect emotionally with the cause enough to move into more tangible forms participation. There was also difficulty, especially without the explicit help from movement leaders, for followers of the movement to make the story their own to push them into the actual participation stage of activism.

The inability for users to make the story their own resulted in a disconnection from the movement at large. Without more direction, simply sharing a post or retweeting a tweet seemed sufficient enough because there was nothing more that other users outside of those immediately affected knew to do; they had no other connection to the cause other than sharing the tweet and/or photo using the hashtag.

This speaks to some of the difficulty of social movements reaching out internationally might face. A movement can create their own news and make their cause popular, and it can give people a way to participate through a hashtag campaign, but if others are not able to make the story their own and connect on a personal level and do something on the ground, those followers' engagement in the movement wanes. As a chart from Topsy shows, the hashtag hit its peak on April 10, 2014, and immediately began declining just one day later.[344] For a social movement that is already physically distant from those being vocal on its behalf, not having a clearly established next step forward leaves too much ambiguity and difficulty for followers to make the movement their own, take it up, and become active participants outside of online engagement.

With no clear next steps and this lack of connection, the Bring Back Our Girls movement is often dismissed or labeled as a lesson in slacktivism of what *not* to do. But there is more to learn here than simply brushing this movement of as a failure because of lazy, young people only willing to click the 'Share' button. The takeaway from this movement as a whole is the importance of looking for and planning for the next step. After getting the rally cry to bring back the girls spread across the globe, then what? What was the movement's next step? What was the next step for the followers of the movement? Without that clearly denotated and shared as widely as the hashtag itself, participants, and specifically outsiders, will not know what else to do and how else to contribute. Taking a look at the ultimate end result and then working backward, step by step, as much as possible, lining the path from point A to point B is an important step to keep digital social movements from getting lost in the aftermath of their flash flood activism.

I do not, of course, argue that issues as complex as negotiating with terrorist groups like Boko Haram can be solved with a more detailed plan from movement leaders. I am arguing that for the movement to stay in the forefront of people's minds, to continue getting political and international attention, a movement cannot rest on one large swell, but rather continue to build from swell to swell.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the Bring Back Our Girls movement, starting with the unique connection BBOG has to youth, moving into the relationship the movement has with the digital realm, what makes Bring Back Our Girls an actual social movement, focusing on the specific activism that has been done over the years, and finally ending on a discussion of the efforts of the movement in relation to the argument of activism versus slacktivsm.

In the section focusing on youth, I highlight the connection the movement has had with being youth-affected, midly youth-led, and the involvement of youth as online activists. I concluded the youth section with an important discussion about the implications behind the rhetoric used throughout the movement, including the use of "girls" in the movement's name, and the idea of education as a rescue narrative. By bringing attention to the young age of the girls who were abducted, and drawing on the emotional appeal, especially of those in the West, of the importance of education, created an image of a vulnerable person that they should help. Drawing upon the need to help the vulnerable, and this idea that education is the answer to help "save" people is perhaps some of the strongest moves the Bring Back Our Girls movement made in their existence.

Where their connection and usage of the digital realm fell short or became disjointed, the emotional connection to the movement was what got so many people invested so quickly.

I ended with a discussion on where and how the Bring Back Our Girls movement stalled and fizzled out due to a lack of future direction and inability for members to connect deeply with the cause and make it their own. While the initial emotional connection to the movement drew in people, the distance between them and the movement made it difficult to have a deeper connection to the cause. The issue was far away, the problem seemed like something out of their immediate ability to change, and so, outside of sharing Tweets and posting pictures as forms of support, there were no real next steps for those online activists. I concluded with what I argue future digital social movements, and scholars in the area, can learn from this movement as opposed to brushing it off as a complete failure.

Chapter 4: Parkland: Contemporary Digital Era Youth Social Movement Activism

On February 14th, 2018, in Parkland Florida, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School experienced six minutes that would change their lives forever as shots rang through the halls of their campus, resulting in seventeen lives lost. The shooting at MSD was the eighth school shooting of 2018,[345] but the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas refused to let their tragedy be reduced to nothing more than just a one-day headline where government officials offered "thoughts and prayers" and where the same type of tragedy could shake the lives of other young people while they did nothing more than attend school.

Over the next two years, student leaders from Marjory Stoneman Douglas have organized and promoted student walk-outs across the country, one of the largest youth protests that the United States has seen since the Vietnam era,[346] city hall meetings, and a national tour focusing on the youth vote in the 2018 midterm elections. The national tour included information sharing, voter registration, and information about voting, which ultimately culminated in what turned out to be the largest youth turn-out in a midterm election that the U.S. had seen in the last 40 years.[347]

This chapter explores the Never Again movement from its inception through the following two years. First, I explore the impact of youth on the movement from various angles, including being youth affected, youth led, and youth involved. I then discuss the rhetoric surrounding youth and the movement as a whole. Next, I look at the relationship the Never Again movement has had with the digital realm, including the time in which the movement came about, and the location of the movement as it relates to its

connections and infrastructure, and then potential digital concerns that the movement has faced. Following the digital section, I discuss what it means to be a social movement and how the Never Again movement fits into the specifics designated in this dissertation. I then break down the traditional and non-traditional activism that the Never Again movement has done over the years and provide insight on the argument of activism or slacktivism. Finally, I end on key lessons we can take away from the Never Again movement as a whole for future youth digital social movements and research in the same area.

The Youth Say Never Again

The main areas of specific focus as it relates to youth are the movement being youth-affected, youth-led, and youth-involved. The Never Again movement was created explicitly and directly as a result of an act of violence targeted at youth. The shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas on February 14, 2018, took the lives of fourteen students along with three staff members. The attack on the school and the murder of more than a dozen young people is where this movement's relationship to youth begins.

Youth-affected

Mass shootings in the United States are not uncommon. A *Metro News* article reported on forty of the most highly publicized mass shootings in the United States (involving a lone active shooter or pair of active shooters) since 2000, highlighting that this list is merely a glimpse into the list of mass shootings that have happened across the country.[348] Since the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School, the United States has

seen more than 230 school shootings, and over 228,000 children have seen a shooting happen at their school, not including those that have taken place at colleges or universities.[349] The shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas was not, by any means, the first school shooting to take place in the United States, and it was not the last school shooting in the United States, with twenty-two school shootings happening in the first half of 2019 alone.[350]

Due to the frequency of mass shootings, or even more specifically, school shootings, the Marjory Stoneman Douglass shooting does not stand out because of the shooting itself, but rather because of what unfolded after the shooting. The students of MSD were determined to not let the tragedy that just unfolded before their eyes be just another name on the list of mass shootings in the United States, and, thus, immediately began to act. The following section explores the youth-led aspect of the Never Again movement.

Youth-led

One of the first Marjory Stoneman Douglas students to make headlines was seventeen-year-old David Hogg, who returned to the school the day after the shooting to speak to the press. Hogg spoke out for the youth, for students who have to live in a society where they practice active shooting drills in class, and for those who, like him and his schoolmates, have experienced these acts of violence in the place where they are supposed to be getting an education. Two days after the shooting, students gathered together alongside organizer Cameron Kasky with the intention of "rewrit[ing] the entire national dialogue about school shootings."[351] The group established their main priorities,

along with a hashtag to rally behind. Shortly after the group formed, the Never Again leaders began organizing nationwide walkouts, large national and international demonstrations, and voter registration campaigns, ultimately culminating in a push for youth voters to show up at the polls. While the movement has been almost exclusively led by youth on a global level, youth play one final, and very important role in the Never Again movement.

Youth-involved

The Never Again movement's goal has been to change gun legislation, and while that large task may not seem, or be, in the hands of young people, the Never Again movement leaders set out to prove that idea wrong. Because the movement was created as a result of *another* youth-affected school shooting, the movement was seeking those youth voices as the powerhouse of the movement. Like with all the cases of this study, non-youth participants are, of course, a part of the movement, but the Never Again movement was hyper-focused on connecting with, motivating, and ultimately mobilizing youth voices.

The one-month anniversary walkout took place at schools across the United States with students of various ages participating, some even against the behest of their school's administrations, who threatened suspension for participating. The Never Again movement involved youth most notably by developing and organizing the March for Our Lives event. According to the *Associated Press*, March For Our Lives, which took place less than six weeks after the massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas, was one of the largest youth protests since the Vietnam War.[352] The protest focused on bringing about

the gun reforms that students originally outlined just two short days after the school shooting. The Washington, D.C. protest brought over 800,000 attendees, including many students.[353] Along with the massive protest happening in D.C., large protests were also taking place simultaneously in various cities across the United States, including Boston, Minneapolis, Houston, and the students' hometown of Parkland, Florida.[354] These protests did not just take place in large cities in the United States, but also in over 800 other marches that happened in smaller U.S. cities.[355] It even inspired sister marches across the globe in other countries, such as France, Germany, England, and Brazil.[356] Speakers at these events were youth, attendees were also youth, and the signs and posters were made by the youth and spoke to this issue that has been impacting them directly.

Outside of the walkouts and protests, the Never Again movement focused on getting the youth registered to vote and then making sure that those young voters would turn out to vote in the 2018 midterm elections about six months later (along with the longer-term goal of a massive youth turnout for the 2020 Presidential election). Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement Freedom Riders of the 1960s, who traveled across Mississippi to register African American voters, the Never Again leaders toured the United States in the summer of 2018 in what they called the Road to Change.[357] On this tour, they made stops across the United States getting youth educated, registered, and motivated to vote in the Fall.

Along with nationwide participation from the youth with the Never Again movement in the United States, youth from across the globe have participated in various Never Again movement events as well. Students in Israel, Tanzania, Iceland, and Great Britain participated in the March 14 school walkout from their respective countries,

showing their support for the movement and making their voices heard across the globe in protest of gun violence.[358]

While youth from other countries are not able to participate in U.S. elections and voter registration, and their countries do not seem to have the same gun crisis that the United States is witnessing, youth across the globe recognize this issue and the importance of their voice in the matter as well. An eighteen-year-old from Finland who protested in Denmark commented that he believed he had an impact on this cause, stating that we all live in a global world, and no issue is only a local issue anymore.[359]

The work of the Never Again movement has not stopped either. The movement continues to focus on gun reform at the state and federal level, they continue to encourage and help young people register to vote in the United States, and they provide helpful voting information, such as how to find polling locations, mail-in voting information, and voter rights. The leaders continue to connect with youth as youth themselves, many just voted in their first presidential election this Fall.

Throughout each of these steps, the youth leaders from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School took charge and pushed forward with their agenda for political and social change related to gun reform through their communication and various movement activities. The Never Again movement represents a youth social movement that was developed and led by youth as a result of those youth being directly affected by another school shooting. Throughout their work, the Never Again movement have had their eyes on big state and federal goals, but they have focused their attention to youth as those change agents. I next explore some of the affect rhetoric from the Never Again

movement and how the emotional responses elicited have contributed to the movement as a whole.

"We're Children": The Rhetorical Impact of Youth on the Never Again Movement

The students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas present an interesting dynamic as they relate to youth and the rhetoric surrounding them. Student David Hogg is popularly quoted as saying, "Please… we're children. You guys are the adults. You need to take some action, and play a role. Work together, come over your politics and get something done."[360] Through statements like this one, Hogg and his classmates explicitly highlighted the youth aspect of this tragedy. While speaking eloquently and passionately, Hogg's words reminded his audience that he and his fellow schoolmates were, in fact, children who had been attacked in their school. And they were; all of the students at MSD were just high school students, most under eighteen years old, many of them even just fourteen, as the shooting took place in the Freshman Building. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, there is a sense of vulnerability, and an innate desire to protect children, but Hogg, in that moment, was pleading with the "adults" to do something, because, as children, they did not feel, and on that day were not being, protected.

With that in mind, though, the Never Again leaders knew simply being "children" was not enough. After all, no sweeping federal changes happened after the mass shooting took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012. MSD students felt like the country could "shrug off 20 dead first graders" and not make changes, so they and others asked what chances this group of teens might have.[361]

With the MSD students caught in between the adults who are supposed to "do something" and the young children of Sandy Hook, the Never Again movement had to find a way to navigate somehow not quite belonging to one, and not quite belonging to the other. They are both, and neither, children or adults. The group is still somewhat vulnerable and in need of some protection, and yet they are old enough, perhaps wise enough, to know how to fight for that protection themselves. Bradley A. Serber argues that this is actually an advantage that these students have that victims of other shootings and those advocating on their behalf did not have. Focusing on their dual status as young adults, or soon-to-be adults, he argues that as *young* adults, they retain some of the vulnerability and hope of children, like those from Sandy Hook Elementary, but as young *adults*, they have the autonomy that those young students lacked in their ability to understand the situation and speak up for themselves.[362]

The Never Again leaders have worked through their activism to push the boundaries on both of those categories. They have focused on the fact that so many school shootings have happened, that kids are in school to learn (a place that, by law, children under a certain age are required to attend in some form), and that they are not doing anything to cause these shootings, but rather are simply just taking tests and editing videos and studying history like they are supposed to be doing. By all counts, students are doing all the right things, and are *still* being targeted and attacked in their schools. This is a resounding message from the Never Again movement, and this type of rhetoric is used as a means to garner some more of that sympathy from outsiders, from lawmakers, and from voters. Put simply, the message is, "students are fish in a barrel, *help*." They speak to other students about how this could happen anywhere. It happens at

normal schools across the country, and that instills this idea that any school could be next. While statistically speaking, the reality of a school shooting happening to many U.S. school students may not be a reality they actually face, the perception, and fear, of this threat seems very real for youth in schools across the country, and as a result, youth have joined the movement and become active participants.

But on the other side of their communication, the Never Again movement is using powerful rhetoric to motivate the youth to make the changes they wish to see themselves. They do not exclusively use fear as their only weapon, however. The Never Again movement makes it a point to each youth they are speaking so that they can make a difference, that they can make change. The Never Again movement does not just *talk* about changes youth can make. They show up. They traveled the country to get people registered to vote, they attended town hall meetings, and they voted. The youth turned out to vote in historic numbers for the U.S. midterm elections of 2018 with an estimated 31% of youth participation compared to just 21% only four years prior in the 2014 midterm elections. Of course you cannot link *all* of the increased youth voter turnout to the Never Again movement, but they definitely played a role in mobilizing other youth to vote.. Their words and actions sent a powerful message to other youth that this is an important cause, that this cause is worth fighting for, and that youth can affect change.

The Never Again movement has strong ties to youth in every aspect. The movement came about as a result of youth being directly affected by an act of violence, the movement has been, and continues to be, led by youth activists, and finally youth have been major players in the activism by the movement over the last two years. In addition to the role of youth throughout the movement, Never Again also uses rhetoric

around being able to get both the attention of, and hopefully help from, the "adults" by reminding them that they are just kids and they are being shot at, and in schools of all places. They highlight their vulnerability and plead for someone to help them. On the other hand, the Never Again movement does not let their being a group of youth activists stop them from enacting change themselves. In fact, the movement specifically uses rhetoric that empowers other youth and motivates them to become active in civic engagement and to show up and make their voices be heard. The Never Again movement has a distinctive advantage of balancing in this unique area between vulnerable youth and articulate activists because they fall into this "young adult" or "soon-to-be adult" category where they are not quite one or the other yet. This is not the only advantage the Never Again movement has as it relates to their age demographic, but it is an important one. Below I explore the movement's relationship to the digital realm.

#Digital: How the Never Again Movement Incorporated Digital Aspects

As it relates to the Never Again movement and the digital aspects of the movement as a whole, I explore three main areas, including the time in which the movement took place, the location of the movement and its followers, and the digital means that have been and continue to be used by the movement. I then discuss specific digital concerns that the movement faces as it relates to the areas mentioned above.

The Right People at the Right Time: How Age and Time Benefitted the Never Again Movement Leaders

As explored in the previous chapters, the relationship a movement has to digital technology is tied to both the time and place that the movement comes about. The Never

Again movement and its leaders have a strong relationship to digital technology. To begin, the Never Again movement started in 2018. At this time, globally, the number of internet users reached just over four billion, representing 53% of the world's population.[363] At this time, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram were the number one, number two, and number seven, respectively, most used social platforms on a global scale, with Twitter and Snapchat ranking at number eleven and number sixteen.[364] Additionally, the annual growth of social media users worldwide in 2018 was 13%, with nearly one million new social media users every day over the previous year. These data represent the growth of not only internet use worldwide, but also the growth of social media across the globe. Much of the internet user growth that took place leading into 2018 was driven by affordable smartphones and data plans with over 200 million people getting their first mobile device.[365] As of January 2018, there were over five billion unique mobile phone users, equating to nearly 70% of the population at that time.[366]

While these numbers might seem high, at the beginning of 2018, more than four billion people were not connected to the internet.[367] However, the timing of the Never Again movement as it relates to 3G or 4G network coverage worldwide obviously plays to their advantage. Comparing these numbers to those of 2014, the percentage of uncovered individuals has nearly halved by 2018, dropping from 25% to 13%.[368]

In addition to the large amount of internet and social media users across the globe, the founding members of the Never Again movement have intimate connections to the digital world, all being born within the turn of the century, many falling into what generational expert Meagan Johnson refers to as *Linksters*, as this group is the first to grow up being linked to technology from birth.[369] Quite literally growing up with

technology, the youth leadership of this movement are digital natives, meaning they are "native speakers" of the digital language.[370] This means that the leadership, and much of the following, of the Never Again movement have a native pulse on how to use digital technologies and social media that appeal to others in that same demographic; developing a hashtag is not a second thought, but a natural part of developing a social movement, sharing information via Twitter and Instagram is *the* way to connect with members, not *a* way to connect with members. This is not to say other generations cannot learn and adapt to these technologies and ways of communicating – some better than digital natives – but, those who are referred to as "digital immigrants" have to adapt, and often come along with an "accent" that shows that they are not quite as native in the digital realm.[371]

Benefits of Location: How Being U.S.- Based and U.S.-Focused Benefited the Never Again Movement

The time in which the Never Again movement came about and the fact that the leaders and many members are digital natives are not the only advantages that this movement has as it relates to digital technology. The Never Again movement also is centrally focused in the United States. The event that sparked this movement happened in the United States, and the movement is reaching out to members primarily in the United States, though the message and support has spread worldwide. The significance of the location of the movement is related to both to access to infrastructure as well as issues of censorship.

The Never Again movement is located in the, United States and that serves the movement a great advantage in terms of digital communication. According to the Digital in 2018 special report, North America has 88% internet penetration rate, compared to the

12-27% internet penetration rate in Central and Eastern Africa for the Invisible Children movement that is affecting Uganda, and the 39% internet penetration rate in Western Africa where the Bring Back Our Girls movement is located in Nigeria.[372] With more of the population in North America having access to the internet, the Never Again movement has been able to reach a greater portion of individuals in the region where the catalyst that started the movement took place. This not only helps the leaders spread their message through digital means because of their access, but it also allows more individuals in North America to hear about the issue and the proposed solutions that the movement is promoting.

Over 80% of U.S. Americans own smartphones, and 96% of youth 18-29 years old own smartphones.[373] Smartphones make documenting and sharing aspects of social movements easier than relying on desktops or laptops, and they also allow leaders and members of the movement to document and share their experiences in real-time across various media platforms. The ability of the Never Again movement to share their content to the majority of Americans is an advantage this movement has that other movements that arise in other places of the world with less internet and smartphone penetration do not have.

In addition to an 88% internet penetration of the North American population, 95% of the population has broadband mobile connectivity in this region.[374] Having broadband connectivity is high-speed internet access that is faster than dial-up and always on, which is an important factor to consider when examining digital social movements.[375] The ability to connect to the Internet seamlessly is important in times of tension, specifically in times of tension with one's own government or government officials.

The Never Again movement has been actively working to change aspects of the U.S. government and go against a powerful lobbyist group, the National Rifle Association (NRA). The Never Again movement's ability to reach out to its members continually to spread and share information, to contact members of U.S. Congress, and to reach out to leaders of the NRA are all significantly easier due to the ease of access to digital infrastructure and the ability to spread their information to large portions of the people directly impacted by the Never Again movement's cause.

Digital Activism: The Four Styles of Internet Engagement

To study Internet engagement, I continue again here, as I did in my previous chapters, with Earl et. al's work, which helps classify various types of work done on the Internet by movements to better understand the intricacies of what has been done online.

Internet Engagement: Brochureware

Brochureware is how movements spread their messages through the Internet. Essentially a digital brochure on the issue at large that does not require paper, printing, or traveling/mailing out physical documents to people. This is especially significant for the Never Again movement because of its low cost and wide reach. Because this movement was so exclusively run by youth, without huge financial backing, and because they were working so quickly, the use of brochureware to spread their message was especially important. In just over a month from when the shooting took place at their school, this movement was able to spread the word to over 800,000 individuals to join and/or start their own marches across not just the U.S., but also around the world, for the March for

Our Lives event. The movement continues to take advantage of digital technologies to share their message, be it on voting registration, early voting, or election day materials. Because of the dynamics that make up this movement, brochureware is one of their most-used forms of Internet engagement.

Internet Engagement: E-mobilization

In tandem with brochureware, the Never Again movement engaged in e-mobilization. This is when a movement uses the various tools on the Internet to bring people together in-person. Of course, this has most prominently been seen with the Never Again movement in their work on the March for Our Lives event. This is very closely tied into their online organizing.

Internet Engagement: Online Organizing

Online organizing is when a movement organizes an entire campaign or event exclusively online and does not require a physical place to meet in order to plan. While the movement leaders did meet with each other in person to plan and execute the March for Our Lives, they did not have to physically meet with people around the world to organize and plan massive protests elsewhere. The movement has local chapters throughout various places in each state, and even within other countries, which all worked together through the use of digital technologies to plan and organize this march all without ever having to physically be together. This speaks to the ability of the movement to be so widespread as well. Because they did not need to meet face-to-face to organize, they could grow bigger than their physical reach.

Internet Engagement: Online Participation

Finally, online participation is when movements participate in activism that takes place exclusively online, such as signing petitions, coming together to attack a company or deny them service, virtual sit-ins, etc. The Never Again movement fostered online participation, in part, through their online work to put pressure on companies who either took money from or had special deals and privileges with the NRA. Members of the movement took to social media and questioned companies about their support for the NRA and threatened to pull their patronage if they did not distance themselves from the NRA. Companies such as Delta Airlines, MetLife, and Hertz all cut ties as a result of this pressure.[376]

This type of activism is incredibly important in today's digital age, not only because so many potential patrons are online, but because so many companies are also so predominantly on social media as well and are very easy to find and publicly contact. The Never Again organizers were able to flood a company's account right after a mass school shooting with questions about who they are aligned with, tagging the company in posts about how other companies have cut ties, and asking why this company had not done the same. This type of online participation acted as a type of social pressure cooker. With the spotlight on these companies to make a decision, and with all eyes on them, even a non-decision is a decision. This gives a lot of power to those online activists, and, as the Never Again movement has shown, this can result in actual changes, and thus should not be overlooked as a form of activism.

A Divisive Subject: Echo Chambers

The ability for a movement to spread its message through digital platforms, like social media, also comes with some potential setbacks. One of the biggest concerns when it comes to this type of communication through social media is the creation of echo chambers. As discussed, an echo chamber is a phenomenon when an individual online seeks out and is then surrounded by similar or reaffirming views that that person already has on an issue. Research on this topic has shown that people are more likely to search out similar opinions than to search for differing opinions. This practice reinforces divisive forms of information rather than content that challenges a person's ideas or beliefs.[377]

Because the Never Again movement came about and has worked heavily online, it is important to consider the potential impacts of echo chambers and issues of political engagement, even though the research on the topic is conflicting. As leaders and followers of a movement, being conscious of falling into these potential holes could ultimately halt a movement from growing. As I discuss in more detail in the activism section below, there is evidence that the Never Again movement is not just an echo chamber, but is reaching people in different regions and across party lines in the United States in order to create change.

Land of the Free, Home of the Shadowbanning: Issues of Censorship in the United States

In the United States, the government is not able or allowed to censor content that is put out or spread, barring a few specific cases, such as instances of libel or slander.

This lack of government censorship has allowed the Never Again movement's message to be shared and spread to the masses across the country through digital means.

However, while the government cannot censor content, private companies do have the ability to censor content. This issue of private censorship does cause reason for concern. For instance, according to law professor Danielle Keats Citron, companies are using blunt algorithms to filter out hate speech with vague definitions, which could lead to more filtering and removal of content, which will "likely include critiques of hate speech and dissenting speech."[378] This is a type of censorship is called algorithmic censorship, and it can be detrimental to a social movement. For example, with the Occupy Wall Street movement, when the movement was surging and gaining massive media attention, the hashtag #OccupyWallStreet was nowhere to be found in the trending topics. This was seen as censorship by Twitter, but was marked up as the result of a complex algorithm.[379] Today, some argue that social media platforms, like Instagram and Twitter, participate in what is called *Shadowbanning*. Shadowbanning is the partial censorship of online accounts, pulling their content, shutting down pages, and/or making their hashtags not show up in searches, all the while not informing the owner of the page these changes have been made; instead, it happens in the shadows.[380] With shadowbanning, the censorship is often not realized until the effects of that ban have happened.

So, while government censorship may not be of concern for the Never Again movement, potential censorship from private companies, such as Twitter, Facebook, and even Google, is important for the movement and its followers to consider. If content disappears or if a large event does not show up on the "Trending Topics" of Twitter, this

could impact the movement's reach and potential future activists for the movement. Specifically for the Never Again movement, which relies heavily on the Internet and those complex algorithms to promote and keep their movement in the trending topics and on others' newsfeed to gain more attention and followers for their movement, this is a potential concern that they have to be aware of and address.

The Never Again movement has a unique relationship to the digital sphere that social movements of the past have not enjoyed, but a relationship movements of the future will move beyond. This movement came about during the height of social media and a time where the internet and internet access are growing at rapid rates. While there is still a digital divide, in 2018, more than half of the world's population had access to the internet in some capacity, and in the United States, that number was even higher. This period of time, coupled with the fact that the leaders, and many followers, of the Never Again movement are digital natives, creates a perfect storm for digital communications to take place and spread across the U.S. and other parts of the world.

The movement must, however, be aware of and attempt to work against the creation of echo chambers where their message is only being shared among those who already agree with their message and make sure they utilize digital technology to reach outside of that sphere. The Never Again movement taking place almost exclusively in the United States means that the movement does not have to worry about censorship at a governmental level, however, private censorship is something they need to be aware of when utilizing platforms provided by these companies.

Ultimately, due to the youth-led and youth-involved components of the Never Again movement, along with the location in which the movement is taking place and the

lack of governmental censorship in the United States, the Never Again movement has a strong and natural connection to the digital realm. The ability of the young people involved with the movement to navigate multiple platforms, know how to reach out to other youths, and find ways to attempt to make change. The variables that contribute to the Never Again movement create a unique environment for this type of social movement to come about, gather followers, and work toward making change.

Never Again as a Social Movement

The definition of a social movement for this research highlights a few important areas: a change of an element of the current social structure, sustained interaction between those with authority and those who are challenging that authority, a shift from what is to what organizers think "ought" to be, at least minimal organization, and finally, sizable membership. The Never Again movement touches each of these requirements, making it a social movement, which I will explore below.

The first component of being a social movement is to discover if the movement is working to change an element of the current social structure. The Never Again movement's ultimate goal is to change legislation that is currently in place in the United States in relation to gun control. According to their website, this movement has a "peace plan for a safer America."[381] In this plan, the Never Again movement details six steps to address their plan for a safer America ownership, using the acronym CHANGE. Their first step is to Change the standards of gun ownership.Second, they want to Halve the rate of gun deaths in 10 years. Third, they want accountability for the gun lobby and industry. Fourth, the movement wants to Name a director of gun violence prevention. Fifth, they

want to Generate community-based solutions. Finally, they want to Empower the next generation. Each step listed above is a movement toward changing elements of the current social structure, with the overall goal to change the current social structure of the ease of accessing a firearm in the United States with little federal involvement on the issue of mass shootings, and a gun lobby that has run Washington without any repercussions.[382] These are big goals for a movement, but goals that are indeed aimed at changing the current social structure as it relates to firearms in the United States.

One of the biggest messages of this movement is to work toward changing both legislation around gun control and the mass shooting society that U.S. Americans live in. The movement highlights the legislation that citizens currently abide by, which makes gun access too easy in many instances. Along with laws and policies, the movement draws attention to and hopes to change the U.S. culture that has become desensitized to mass shootings in schools and directed at children, to the point to where these events happen and "thoughts and prayers" are sent, and then society moves on, waiting for the next one to happen to send more "thoughts and prayers." Marjory Stoneman Douglas senior Delaney Tarr stated that "we've had enough of thoughts and prayers… we are coming after every single (elected official) and demanding that you take action, demanding that you make a change."[383] Both of these issues seek to change what currently "is" in the United States to what they believe "ought to be."

The next aspect of a social movement looks at the sustained interaction between those in authority and those who are challenging said authority. The Never Again movement has reached out to authority figures, including members of congress, both nationally and locally.[384] Members of the movement have been in contact with those in

authority in a variety of ways, including going to local legislation buildings, contacting members of Congress, directly interacting with political leaders in Town Hall events, and directly responding to government officials and NRA members via social media communication. The Never Again movement also uses social media, most specifically Twitter, to engage continually with those who are in authority.

The next aspect of this movement that makes it a movement is the organization this movement has. To be considered a social movement, the group must be at least minimally organized. The Never Again movement is organized on a nationwide level as well as at a local level. Their website promotes finding local chapters with a zip-code search to help individuals "organized with other high school and college students near you."[385] The official website is also an indication of the organization of the movement, with forms to join the movement,[386] information on registering to vote,[387] and how to donate to the movement.[388]

The movement has a few prominent leaders, including David Hogg, Emma González, Cameron Kasky, and Jaclyn Corin, all students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School at the time of the shooting. Each of these leaders are verified on Twitter,[389] along with the March For Our Lives Twitter account, which is used to continue tweet information for the Never Again movement.[390] On Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the March for Our Lives accounts are also verified.[391] Being verified on these platforms helps with the ease of accessing those heavily involved in the movement leadership. A verified Facebook page is one to follow for information that is guaranteed to be connected with the movement, comparted to a page that is not verified and could be run by any number of people who are not in direct connection to the movement.

In addition to verified accounts, membership size is important. Again, there is difficulty in figuring exact number of members of any given social movement with both an online and offline presence, but the March for Our Lives official website has information stating that their social media followers amount to over 1 million across the March for Our Lives verified accounts, leader Emma González has more than 1.6 million twitter followers, and the other three young leaders collectively have an additional 1.5 million twitter followers. Perhaps the biggest event that is a testament to the size of this movement is the amount of people who participated in the March for Our Lives on March 24, 2018. Various reports mark the attendance of the march in Washington, D.C., anywhere from 200,000[392] to over 800,000[393] attendees at the single location. According to The Washington Post, between 1.3 and 2.1 million protesters took part in the march across the United States.[394] Marches were held across the United States in cities like Manhattan, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Parkland, and more, including smaller cities across the country such as Wichita, Kansas and Corpus Christi, Texas.[395] Outside of the U.S., several cities globally also participated in this March, with over 100 solidarity marches outside of the U.S. including marches in Geneva, Sydney, Tokyo, Edinburgh, and London.[396] Outside of physically being a part of the March for Our Lives Marches, over 3.3 million tweets were sent with the hashtag #MarchForOurLives on the March 24.[397]

In their short existence, the Never Again movement has managed to create a strong and, thus far, sustainable movement through their strong organization. The strength of the Never Again movement begins with their approach and development as a movement. With local chapters throughout the country, the Never Again movement has

identified local issues and mobilized those local members, while ultimately working toward not just local and state changes, but changes at the federal level as well.

Not only has the Never Again movement developed as a movement in a grassroots style, but it has also adopted a grassroots mentality when it comes their activism as well. This relationship of starting from the ground-up when building a movement has translated to the way the Never Again movement has tackled their issues and overall cause. With the overall goal to create a nationwide adjustment of gun reform, the movement has worked from the ground-up to achieve their goal.

Never Again and Activism

In this section, I explore the activism that the Never Again movement has done over the past two years. First, I discuss traditional and non-traditional activism, as well as activism that blends the two types together and a discussion of Internet engagement. I then explore the relationship between youth and activism, followed by the connection between activism and the digital realm. Finally, I end with a discussion of the Never Again movement and activism or slacktivism and what we can learn and take away from this movement as a whole.

Traditional and Non-Traditional Activism: A Connected Approach

The Never Again movement has set their goals boldly to "end the gun violence epidemic in America," but it is the steps they have taken and continue to take to get there that mirror the grassroots development of the movement itself.[398] Starting with the large goal to end gun violence in the United States, the movement has essentially worked

backwards to obtain that goal; starting from the bottom and working their way up to their goal through their activism.

The movement focused on bringing the youth voice to the forefront of political conversation. They went on tour to educate young people about their politicians, specifically to inform them of who takes money from the NRA and who has a voting history of supporting or not supporting gun reform, in order to help them better understand who and what they were voting for. Much of this information aspect of the movement has been done through non-traditional digital means. Through the use of social media, the Never Again movement shares information and resources to help those who are following the movement learn more about the cause from a holistic perspective; they are not just demanding that followers show up and do something, but they are also presenting information to support their reasons for their call to action through the use of digital technologies.

According to the March for Our Lives website, the first form of activism the Never Again movement took was organizing what turned out to be the "largest single day of protest against gun violence in history" with the March for Our Lives protests that took place across the globe. Planning for the March began just four days after the shooting took place at MSD, and the group of youth leaders encouraged young people across the country and beyond to join. The protest focused on bringing about gun reform and reportedly brought over 800,000 attendees to the Washington D.C. protest alone.[399] Along with the massive protest happening in D.C. large protests were also taking place simultaneously in various cities across the United States.[400] The March for Our Lives protests did not just take place in large cities in the United States, but protests also took

place in over 800 other smaller U.S. cities.[401] More than two million people participated in the March for Our Lives protests,[402] with demonstrations being held in 387 congressional districts, making up 90% of all U.S. voting districts and with the protests reaching across party lines.[403]

The March for Our Lives protests took place in both red and blue districts, including 28 of the 33 "red to blue" districts identified by Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.[404] This bipartisan participation across locations and districts in the United States shows how the Never Again movement, and the March for Our Lives event specifically, managed to avoid the digital pitfall of echo chambers by only reaching to a demographic who already agrees with them. This speaks to the ability of social movements today that do use, and even heavily use, social media to gain followers, to garner support. It shows that they can organize activism to reach outside of their own interest groups and spread their messages to a wide variety of potential future members of the movement, and to transition that online presence to large offline activism as well.

In addition to U. S. activism, March for Our Lives marches were happening across the globe in other countries, such as, France, Germany, England, and Brazil, with activists showing support from Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Venezuela.[405] This global support speaks to the spreadability of the Never Again movement, as the problem occurs most frequently in the United States, and the ultimate goal of the movement to change U.S. legislation, and yet, support from around the world still poured in for the cause. The Never Again movement had the advantage of having the digital infrastructure to spread their message worldwide, the leaders were all digital natives who knew how to use the digital realm to get their messages heard, and

ultimately, the movement as a whole had to worry very little about censorship of their message even as they argued against some of the oldest Untied States legislation in the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution.

As a way to reach their large goal of changing gun control laws in the U.S., the Never Again movement set their sights on the 2018 midterm election, the Never Again movement focused their attention on bringing continued awareness to the issue of gun reform, local leaders' stance on the matter, and registering new voters. The group visited schools, townhalls, and college campuses to share information about their cause and ultimately work to help youth register to vote. During this national tour, the Never Again movement continued to engage in both traditional forms of activism and digital forms of activism. The Road to Change was more of a traditional type of activism by the Never Again movement. This specific form of activism follows closely to what Leslie Crutchfield discusses in her book *How Change Happens* as the 10/10/10/20 = 50 tactic.[406] This specific technique came about through the LGBTQ movement in an attempt to get same-sex marriage legalized in the United States. Instead of setting their goals as trying to get all fifty states to completely legalize same-sex marriage, they made the decision to get ten states with full marriage, ten with civil unions, ten with some form of relationship recognition, and the other twenty states with non-discrimination laws.[407] This plan essentially focuses on making smaller, local changes rather than focusing on large federal reforms. This change happens through local advocacy, going town to town, state to state, and making small wins that build momentum. With this momentum and connection with people on a more individual level, the movement is then able to work together to make bigger changes down the line.

The Road to Change essentially took on aspects of this format through their visiting of towns across America, stopping at colleges, town halls, and other local venues to engage with individuals on a personal level about making changes in their local elections. With the ultimate goal of changing federal regulations as they pertain to guns in the United States, the youth leaders of the Never Again movement began tackling the issue on smaller, more localized levels in order to build momentum and support to lead to bigger statewide and ultimately federal reform. The Road to Change was not only about sharing information with young people, but the Never Again leaders also focused on getting youth to register to vote for the upcoming 2018 midterm elections. And while the number of reported new registered voters is impressive, their website citing more 50,000 new voter registrations throughout the national tours,[408] it is not only the number of new voters the movement registered that is important to look at, but also how the movement went about getting those voters registered.

While touring the nation was a display of more traditional activism, it was the registering of youth voters where the Never Again leaders begin engaging in more modern and non-traditional forms of activism. In forty-nine of the fifty U.S. states, excluding North Dakota, an individual must register to vote in order to cast a ballot.[409] As of January 2020, thirty-nine states plus the District of Columbia allow online voter registration. This digital option to register to vote supplements the traditional paper-based process for individuals who have state-issued driver's licenses or identification cards.[410]

Through both their website and a unique t-shirt design, the Never Again movement worked to make online voter registration even simpler for new youth voters. On their website, the Never Again movement has a short form to fill out, including an

email address and zip code, which then takes the new voter to the more detailed form, which asks for all the personal information required to vote, including address and ID number.[411] While the online form on the movement's website is a more non-traditional type of voter registration than the paper registration process, the movement went even further with their clothing.

Jammal Lemy, the creative director for March for Our Lives, set out to design clothing with the hopes of encouraging more youth voting. In an interview with *Dezeen*, Lemy expressed his desire to mobilize young people across the country and said that the group needed a shirt that would "help personify what (their) message was."[412] Lemy designed both t-shirts and hoodies with the image of an American flag, with the top left corner being a blue QR code in the place of the stars, and the stripes giving the appearance of a barcode. The QR code in the top left of the image is scannable by digital scanners such as smartphones through their standard camera function. Scanning this code takes individuals straight to the movement's voter registration page.

Through his design, Lemy also used visual rhetoric with the flag symbolism. He notes that the design came about after looking at tactics the NRA use. The National Rifle Association often utilizes the image of the American flag in their campaigns and has garnered major support, in part, built off a feeling of patriotism. The use of this symbol in the Never Again scannable clothing was done with the intention of highlighting the vast differences between the NRA and the Never Again movement. Lemy contends that the Never Again movement is also patriotic, that the movement believes in the political system that exists in the United States, and this image represents both of those aspects in

one.[413] Through these shirts, the Never Again movement leaders say that around 10,000 people have registered to vote using the shirt alone, as of August, 2018.[414]

The use of the QR codes on clothing that link right to voter registration forms through something as common in American youth as smartphones speaks to the ability of the Never Again movement to not only identify their target audience, but also unique ways to reach that audience. According to Pew research, 96% of U.S. youth from ages 18-29 have smartphones, meaning that most of today's youth have a smartphone with the ability to scan these QR codes.[415] Additionally, while QR codes began with a bumpy start, the use of QR codes today has not only improved, but QR codes are also very popular in messenger apps with younger generations, such as Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, LinkedIn, and Instagram.[416] The Never Again movement tapped into a technology (smartphones) that most youth in the U.S. have, and a technology feature (QR scanning) that young people are familiar with and utilizing regularly in their social media usage.

Following the Road to Change tour, the Never Again movement held events across the nation with over 200 mayors, called Mayors for Our Lives. In these events, the movement claims to have helped register over 800,000 people on National Voter Registration Day, setting an all-time record.[417] According to the Miami Herald, Never Again leader David Hogg announced on MSNBC's show *Morning Joe* that the movement would be working mayors across the nation in a bipartisan campaign to register the newest generation of voters.[418] The purpose of this kind of activism was to get mayors help make sure students in their cities were informed and able to easily register to vote. This type of activism resembles more traditional activism in that it

involved more of the person-to-person interaction. However, the Never Again movement did use both traditional and digital media to spread awareness of this event by speaking on television, posting on social media, and even providing a form on their website for individuals to email their mayors asking them to sign the pledge and join the movement to educate and get young people registered to vote.[419]

After the National Voter Registration Day event and the end of the Road for Change tour, the social media for the Never Again movement (Amarch4OurLives on Twitter, marchforourlives on Instagram, and facebook.com/marchforourlives) began promoting their next step of activism, Vote for Our Lives. This form of activism was targeted at the 2018 U.S. midterm elections. Historically, national voter turnout for midterm elections is below 50%.The 2014 midterms had the lowest turnout nationally from 1978 until today, with only 41.9% of voting-aged citizens voting.[420] The Never Again movement focused their attention at making sure young voters were not just registering to vote, but now, taking the next step and actually getting out and voting, be it early voting, absentee ballots, or voting on November 6.

Kicking off their Vote for Our Lives tour at the University of Minnesota, the Never Again movement partnered with Giffords, a nonprofit organization led by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, which works to tackle the gun violence crisis in the Unite States.[421] This event was scheduled for late October and was promoted as a "townhall and tailgate party" that included free food and giveaways.[422] The following week, the tour visited Florida International University (FIU) where they bussed people to polls with refreshments, music, and raffles every twenty minutes for two hours, followed by two and a half hours of "dorm storming," where students were taken from their dorms

to the polls to vote via golf cart, and finally ending the evening with a campus cookout.[423] Events like this continued across college campuses over the next two weeks through the November 6 election. The movement was once again, reaching their demographic in ways that appealed to them: they came right to college students, and provided a fun, tailgate/party atmosphere, some events even encouraging Halloween costumes and promoting a "haunted ride to the polls" in order to get the youth voters in colleges involved and excited about being a part of the democratic process.[424] Some of the events that were held across the nation were attended by musicians such as DJ Roxci and DJ Khaled.[425]

In addition to the Vote for Our Lives campaign, the Never Again movement joined forces with over twenty other youth-led organizations to participate in the national Walkout to Vote project on election day. This project encouraged students of every age, demographic, and geographical location to walkout of their schools on election day to go to the polls and vote on election day, or to encourage those who can vote if a student is not eligible to vote.[426] Working with other movements in a coalition like this is one of the positive consequences that Earl discusses with online social movements. The argument here is the benefit of using the online realm to connect with other movements because, while each of the different movements or organizations may not have every issue in common, they are often able to connect with one another and find common themes within their movements to support one another on. [427]

Even scholars who are skeptical of the impacts of online activism do note the importance of utilizing the internet to build these coalitions.[428] For example, with the Walkout and Vote project, the Never Again movement joined forces with Bridge the

Divide, an organization for youth to bridge the divide between Republicans and Democrats in order to participate in conversations that are collectively important for the future.[429] These two groups have different overarching goals, but through the connections that are made possible through the internet, both the Never Again movement and Bridge the Divide are able to come together for a common cause. This connection ultimately brought followers of each group together which, added momentum and numbers to the individual movements as well as the collective effort they were working toward together, in this case, Walkout to Vote.

On November 6, the day of the 2018 midterm election, the Never Again movement's local chapters went to work canvassing their local communities, marching, bussing, and even parading to the polls. Even youth activists of the movement who were not old enough to vote yet spent the day phone-banking, calling people in their areas and encouraging them to go out and vote. The movement posted memes and videos, shared tweets and pictures on Instagram, included celebrities, and highlighted members of various local March for Our Lives chapters. Just as the youth of this movement used what Clark and Marchi term *collective journalism* to communicate with each other about what was going on in their schools and neighborhoods and to expose what they viewed as important and in need of an urgent response, the movement used this same type of model on election day to highlight what they found to be newsworthy: youth voting.[430] The movement leaders and participants went to social media, this time not to voice their concerns in order to mobilize their communities, but instead to highlight the impact the youth were having as a community and to encourage more and more people to join the movement.

While there is no way to make a direct connection between the work the Never Again movement did prior to the 2018 midterm elections and the results of those elections, voter turnout was the highest for a midterm election it had ever been in the last four decades. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, youth turnout for 18–29 year-olds went from 20% in the 2014 midterm elections to 36% in 2018, a 79% increase, the largest for any age group.[431]

Throughout their larger acts of engagement, the Never Again leaders continually spoke to local and national media, met with Senators and Representatives, and proposed legislation.[432] The group of youth leaders sat in town hall meetings, made phone calls, made their presence known, and, as Florida Governor Rick Scott stated, "turned tragedy to action."[433] They coupled their face-to-face communication and more "traditional" forms of activism with unique types of digital activism as well. Their digital activism ranged from tweets to leaders to digital PSA videos to memes to QR codes on t-shirts. Through every step of activism that the Never Again movement did, they were able to engage their followers in a way that moved them from this idea of youth being disinterested in politics to driving interest in the issues and ultimately to youth participating in various forms of activism.

The Never Again movement created their own news. They took their concerns, which they felt were not being addressed or addressed well enough, and made them public concerns. These included issues that directly impacted the youth, that disproportionately impacted people of color, and issues that were not getting solved that were resulting in youth dying. The movement spread their messages like wildfire through social media, reaching young people and people of color, and shared their concerns and

plans for change. Their momentum eventually gained the attention of traditional media as well, garnering even more publicity, reaching more individuals who could relate to their cause. Leaders and members of the movement across the country found their place and inserted themselves into the story. Youth across the globe related to the movement's cause on different levels, for various reasons, but all finding something within the movement that spoke to them, something worth fighting for, and they began inserting themselves in those places, making room for all of the stories and all of the connections, all for one cause. The youth then began building the overarching story through the use of digital media. They used the hashtag and the filters and tagged the movement and movement leaders, each part of which contributed to creating story as a whole.

These three steps are all parts of the ladder of political engagement. [434] These steps are how youth move from simply being interested in politics to being participants in the political sphere in today's social media age. It is through this work, throughout the entirety of the Never Again movement, to date, that the youth leaders were able to engage their followers over social and digital media without weakening their movement to mere "clicktivism" or "slacktivism." The ability to create their own news, to allow followers to insert themselves into the story, and ultimately allow those followers to build their own stories. In these ways, the Never Again movement has done that has managed to keep the momentum around their cause going for over two years.

Activism or Slacktivism

Because the Never Again movement was so wrapped up in youth, from leadership to involvement, and because the movement implemented digital aspects so naturally

throughout every step of their activism, they often get criticized as being a movement of slacktivism, rather than recognized for the activism done throughout all of their work. Below I explore the ladder of political engagement a final time as a conversation against the critique of slacktivism directed at this movement.

Throughout their activism, the Never Again movement used digital means to help move their followers from interest to participation, following Clark and Marchi's ladder of political engagement nearly perfectly. The first step of this movement involves sharing the story, the second step is inserting oneself into the story, and finally, the last step is when followers of the movement take the story and make it their own through personal connections to the content. Below I discuss how the Never Again movement made this possible and how their movement participants went from online to offline in their attempt to make change.

Sharing: Step One of the Ladder

The first aspect of digital activism that moves individuals from interest to participation is their ability to share content. Specifically, this comes from the ability for users to find, sort, and share content that they feel connected to, content that matters to them. This is different from simply getting content from mainstream media, these users are sharing information and content that they are explicitly connected to. For the Never Again movement, this was an important part of their strategy. Leaders of the movement knew that the traditional news media would disappear from their lawns and town shortly after the shooting and move on to the next big story. But the students of MSD did not

want their story to be forgotten that easily, so they took to social media to make sure it was not.

The Never Again movement has created and shared many hashtags depending on the specific event they were focusing on at that time, along with their movement's namesake hashtag, #NeverAgain. These hashtags provided a way to spread their message and help others share it as well. The most popular was the #MarchForOurLives hashtag. This specific hashtag was used in over 3.3 million tweets during the week of March 24, 2018.[435] In a pull of 63,000 sample tweets that used both the hashtags #NeverAgain and #MarchFourOurLives between March 23 and March 25, multimedia artist Erin Gallagher made a graph that shows how many impressions these two hashtags alone made in the span of two days: nearly three million impressions, which means those 63,000 tweets were seen three million times.[436]

In just this small example, it is clear that participants of the Never Again movement were able to make their voices heard and were actually sharing the story and cause to a large audience. This wide reach does not even include the days before the march and the conversations happening online during the planning and organizing stages of that movement, or the days after either as participants and followers continued to talk about this one event.

Inserting Oneself into the Story: Step Two

The second step of moving from interest to participation is the ability for followers of a movement to be able to insert themselves into the story. The Never Again movement followers were able to engage in this step relatively easily. One way in which

individuals could insert themselves into the story of the Never Again movement digitally was through Snapchat. On March 14, the day of the nation-wide school walk-outs, there was a Snapchat filter available that said "What _____'s schoolday looks like" with various city and school names filled in the blank based on their location.[437] While this filter was not created *by* the Never Again movement, it was used by the Never Again movement participants and gave them a way to insert themselves into the story of that day. Whether the student was able to join the walkout, or their school was prohibiting walkouts, whether they were joined by huge crowds or if they were the lone walkout in their location, anyone with a Snapchat account could take a picture or a selfie and share it with others participating across the nation.

The walkout was not the only time Snapchat was used by members of the movement. During the March 24 March for Our Lives protests, Snapchats were being shared from all of the various locations where these events were taking place. On Snapchat, there is a feature called Snap Maps where anyone can view the world map and see hotspots where a lot of snaps are being posted at that time (e.g. Disney World is usually a hotspot because there are generally a lot of people posting from Disney World). During the March for Our Lives protests, Snap Maps was alight with hotspots worldwide during the March for Our Lives protests. [438] This highlights the mass influx of participants and the dominant social media presence the Never Again movement; participants were inserting themselves into the story, and they were doing so en masse.

Making the Story their Own: The Final Step

The final step that the Never Again movement was able to accomplish through their digital work, which helped push followers from interest to participation, was the ability for those people to make the story their own. It is in this step that young people bring in their feelings toward the issue, where they make connections to their lives and their feelings on the issue.[439] It is in these moments of involving one's own emotions that Zizi Papacharissi states that the affective public is formed. These are people who are bound together for a cause through their shared feelings and emotions on an issue. As discussed above, while statistically it may not be highly likely that most students in the United States will be in a school shooting, their perception, and their feeling like it is possible is a strong, and shared, emotion that brings this group together on this issue.

The fight for a safe place for kids to learn was the resounding chorus among those movement participants. They have come together over the feeling that "enough is enough" a chant heard throughout the protests and movement as a whole, that something has to change to protect kids. The group has come together with a feeling of being fed up with the NRA telling them that "nothing could have been done to prevent this" and that "good guys with guns stop bad guys with guns." They collectively said "we call BS," a quote from MSD student and Never Again leader Emma Gonzalez.[440]

Emotionally connecting over an issue that they shared feelings on was never an issue for the Never Again movement. From the rhetoric used by the leaders to help solidify that school shootings like theirs could happen anywhere, that there was nothing special about them or their school, to the frequent *enough* occurrence of mass and school shootings that take place in the United States, followers of the movement felt a deep and

personal connection to the cause. Additionally, the leaders instilling in these young people the feeling that they could make change, and that if they wanted change they had to be the ones to do something about it, also connected the members of the movement emotionally.

The Never Again movement did not have to go door-to-door or school-to-school to talk to students. They did not even need to rely on traditional forms of media to cover their movement, even though they still benefited from traditional media covering their work. The movement leaders and their followers took to social media and flooded the system where other students most likely already were and shared their message. They inserted themselves into the story, and they connected on an emotional level to the cause, and this is what has led the Never Again movement participants from interest in the movement to participation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it is not the accomplishment of the biggest, flashiest goal of a movement that determines the impact of that movement. In the digital activism world, the ability to share, to allow others to relate and connect, is what leads to impact. The ability to build a base of followers who feel they have a stake in the cause will lead them to participation. As the Never Again movement has shown and done, participation at the lowest level, at the grassroots level, has the ability to lead to larger goals. Without this first and most important step of moving from interest to involvement, the biggest goals will never be achieved. For the Never Again movement, accomplishing the biggest goal of gun reform at the federal level cannot be done without first tackling the smaller ones,

informing youth voters, registering those voters, getting those voters to the polls over and over again. This movement highlights the importance of, and provides the steps to, achieving goals through a youth digital social movement.

As with all digital social movements today, the argument of whether the work being done is true activism, or just slacktivism without any impact comes up. The Never Again movement has integrated both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism throughout its entirety, from speaking directly to news reporters, to posting on social media, to organizing protests, to creating QR codes to put on t-shirts to register voters. The Never Again movement has had a very specific goal to change legislation on gun laws in the United States, and they have used, and continue to use, both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism to work toward achieving that goal. The combination of these two types of activism has helped the Never Again movement reach large audiences, make traditional news, and enact real change. The movement worked to move followers from interest to participation through their continual engagements online that encouraged offline actions, such as marching, registering to vote, and ultimately going out to vote. Through the use of both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism, the Never Again movement is able to avoid falling into the slacktivism criticism.

While the Never Again movement is not a perfect movement, if a perfect movement even exists, it does provide insight into how movements that come about and benefit from digital technologies when leaders and members alike who are familiar with and have access to said technology run the show. Additionally, an important aspect of this movement is the ability to, either through digital technology or face-to-face, connect on an emotional level with those whom the movement is trying to engage and motivate to

act. Future research can and should continue to study the Never Again movement as their leaders continue to age, learn, and fight for radical change in United States gun regulation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I look across each of the cases for similarities and differences as they relate to the important aspects of this dissertation including the relationship between the movements and youth, digital, and social movement activism. I then move into addressing the specific research questions of this project, including my findings on how with youth in the forefront of these movements, they used affect rhetoric as a means to promote and gain support for their movement, and how youth digital social movements have evolved over the years. It is in these collective reflections that I discuss what scholars and activists alike can learn from these movements and as we move forward.

Cross-Case Analyses

Youth

When looking across each of these cases and their relationship to youth, the first striking note is that each of these movements all came about as a result of youth being the victims of an attack. The young boys of Uganda being taken by the Lord's Resistance Army in the night and forced to be child soldiers spurred the Invisible Children movement, the young girls of Nigeria being abducted from their school by Boko Haram became the cause of the Bring Back Our Girls movement, and finally, the school shooting and death of fourteen students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas in the United States became the catalyst for the Never Again movement.

Youth are viewed, almost universally, as a vulnerable population, susceptible to harm, not necessarily able to protect themselves from potentially harmful situations. Consequently, adults often feel the need to help and/or protect them from those

situations.[441] This is seen through anti-smoking campaigns delivered at schools to help educate and protect children and young adults from the dangers of smoking, safe-sex education provided to teens and pre-teens to help give them the tools to be able to protect themselves from harmful situations such as sexually transmitted infections, and in higher education with the extra precautions one has to go through with the Institutional Review Board when studying children, who are listed as a vulnerable subject population.[442]

While experiences and opportunities vary across the globe for youth, organizations such as Save the Children argue that children in every country are at risk of violence and that every child deserves to grow up safe from this harm.[443] It is this overarching understanding of youth and that they deserve to be safe and protected that seems to elicit the implementation of these movements after youth have been attacked, where they are not safe or were not adequately protected. This common thread across each of these cases leads to the first research question of this dissertation: with youth in the forefront of these movements, how have they each utilized affect rhetoric as a means to promote and gain support for their cause?

Specifically, the implications of using terms related to youth within these movements is an important aspect to consider. The Invisible Children movement has the word "child" in their name, signaling to those who simply hear about the movement that youth, this vulnerable population, are the focus of the movement. Similarly, the Bring Back Our Girls movement refers to the kidnapped Chibok girls as "girls" though many of the girls are in their middle to late teens and could be seen as "young adults." However, the use of "girls" signals to those who are exposed to the movement that, again, these are young, vulnerable, females who are in need of outside help.

While a youth term is not in the Never Again movement's name, the Never Again movement does emphasize youth in all aspects of their movement; from being the ones who speak to the media, to having young people speaking at events, to creating public service announcement-type videos that emphasize the youth and their relationship to gun violence, they keep youth in the forefront and as the face of their movement. This continual reminder from the movement that youth are the ones being impacted by the current gun violence and laws, that the youth are the ones making political waves, highlights the vulnerability of this group, but also the power that they have, the 'no more' attitude they have toward the violence they are having to face at school, in a place that is supposed to be safe.

By keeping youth in the forefront of each of these movements through their rhetoric, each movement is tapping into the emotions people have in relation to youth and children to evoke a more urgent response. If children are being kidnapped in the middle of the night to be turned into child-soldiers, that elicits a more extreme response from people than saying adults are taken and turned into soldiers. The same can be said for the Chibok girls who were abducted, the emotional response to that is stronger than saying even teenagers or young adults were taken from their school.

The youth who were victims of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school shooting were not the youngest school shooting victims, and they weren't the oldest victims of a school shooting in the United States either, with mass shootings happening at colleges and universities as well. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas students fell right in between these two groups; they were still young enough to be seen as youth, as a vulnerable group in need of protection, but they were old enough to be their own advocates, to be the voice

driving for change. Their voices and faces being the driving force behind the Never Again movement reminds people that *they* were the victims. This has a double-impact on those who hear their message. Their rhetoric along with their physical presence and appearance together are what make the connection between this movement and affect rhetoric significant.

The next similarity across the cases is the aspect of being youth-led. The two cases that have the most similarities in this way are the Invisible Children movement and the Never Again movement. They were both started and run by individuals who themselves are youths. The three recent college graduates who traveled to Uganda and created a movement around the humanitarian crisis they saw unfolding in front of them in route to a different humanitarian crisis in Darfur and the students who survived the school shooting in Parkland, Florida in the United States and within forty-eight hours of the event created what has become a worldwide movement for gun reform in the United States are the most similar in their youth-led aspect. The Bring Back Out Girls movement, while was not originally started or run by the youth, was supported, associated with, and partly led by youth activist Malala Yousafzai.

Cross comparison of these movements and their youth leadership shows that having young people who are more familiar with the current digital technologies helps movements use them in ways to connect with potential members and sustain a following for more than their first quick flash of attention. Future research in this area could focus on whether this adaptability from these digital natives continues on throughout their lives and later activism, or, if technology outpaces them and the older they get the more difficult it is to keep up with and continually adapt to.

All three cases emphasized the youth as part of, if not their main, target demographic for their movements. This is not to say that they expected the youth to solve the problems, make the policy changes, or physically go rescue other young people, but they did empower other youth to be a part of solving the problems, vote for leaders who would make the policy changes they were looking for, and use their own voices to bring enough attention to these issues that other youth would be saved and would be rescued. The Invisible Children and the Never Again movements had similar patterns in their traveling to places where young people were localized; both movements made stops at colleges, universities, and high schools. At these stops, the youth were encouraged to engage with each movement by contributing funds, by participating in events, and by registering to vote. While their goals of being at the colleges, universities, and high schools were not identical, both the Invisible Children and Never Again movements went directly to the youth and got them involved in their movements and did not just rely on their messages reaching them via technology.

The Bring Back Our Girls and Never Again movements were similar in their getting youth participation via technology concerning their movement and issues. The use of specific hashtags helped rally youth online to engage with the movement and message. The use of social media, as will be discussed in a future chapter, was a key way to engage the youth demographic in the movement, and it is a place where voices that are traditionally not as listened to or valued are able to be expressed and heard.

Finally, the last connection that all three movements have in relation to youth is how they used youth in their affective rhetoric. Specifically, all three movements drew attention to the vulnerability of the individuals they were attempting to help. The

Invisible Children movement and the Bring Back Our Girls movement explicitly highlighted the youth in need of help in their movement name, strategically using "children" and "girls." This rhetorical move, while not necessarily nefarious in nature, does have an affective impact on those who see and hear it, picturing young children who need their help. While the Never Again movement did not explicitly use a term for youth in their name, they did explicitly refer to themselves as kids and children throughout their activism. Again, directly drawing attention to the young age of those who were attacked worked as a plea to get listeners to forget everything else and remember their instinct to protect children–that that should come first before everything else.

While the three movements share similarities amongst them when it comes to their relationships with youth, they also differ in important ways as well. Specifically, the movements engaged youth differently, stemming, in part, from when the movement began, as well as differences due to those leading the movement. The Invisible Children movement began in the early 2000s, during a time when the social media platforms that are commonly used among youth today were either not around, such as YouTube (2005) Twitter (2006), Instagram (2010), and Snapchat (2011), or they were still in their early stages of implementation including Facebook (2004). This created a difference when it came to the ways in which the Invisible Children reached the youth at the time compared to the Bring Back Our Girls and Never Again movements. Both of these movements came about after these major platforms were not only developed, but also had been used for bringing social groups together prior to either movement's usage of them. This difference in *how* the youth were reached and engaged by the movements is significant.

Prior to the use of these digital media platforms, connecting with youth was done through more direct, interpersonal relationship-building connections between the movements and the individuals they were attempting to engage. Invisible Children went from school to school, university to university, talking with the youth there, screening their videos and engaging those young people in a direct one-on-one manner. One of the main points of emphasis for the Invisible Children movement is the interconnectedness of individuals around the world, that no person, community exists in isolation, and they place high value on the work they do on an interpersonal level. As technology developed alongside the movement, Invisible Children was able to use new technology to reach large masses of youth and share their videos without having to physically be in those places, even though their roots were started on a person-to-person, face-to-face level of communication.

The Bring Back Our Girls movement and the Never Again movement both came about in a more developed social media era and thus had a different experience and relationship with connecting to youth through digital means. Individuals who have grown up with today's technology view technology as a seamless method for interacting and communicating with each other, and social media is a major contributor in how younger generations manage their interpersonal relationship.[444] Because of this shift in how the youth interact and manage relationships, it is a logical move for both the Bring Back Our Girls movement and the Never Again movement to use digital means as their way of connecting with and getting the youth involved with their movement. The use of digital means to share their message with youth also helps the message extend outside of

physical boundaries and restrictions of where the leaders of those movements are able to travel.

The Invisible Children movement began their work by creating a movie in Uganda, they then had to travel to schools and universities (mostly across the United States) to share their movie and sell their merchandise to these young people in person. However, the Bring Back Our Girls and Never Again movements were able to reach well beyond places they could physically travel to and get youth across the globe seeing their videos, their messages, contributing to their causes in ways in which the Invisible Children movement was not able to do during the beginning stages of their movement.

The movements also differed in part with their engagement with youth because of the leadership of the movements themselves. The Bring Back Our Girls movement leaders were not themselves youth leaders, and while they did have youth activist Malala Yousafzai as a leading voice in the movement, she and other young people around her age were not the ones in charge of, or running the movement at its core. This impacted, in part, the movement's familiarity and ability to navigate the digital platforms in sustaining ways to help lead to more lasting change. The youth demographic makes up the majority of the users of major social media platforms worldwide, and with the leaders of the Bring Back Our Girls movement not being youths themselves, connecting to the largest audience on social media that is a different demographic than that of the leaders is different from communicating to people who belong in the same age demographic and are equally as savvy digitally such as what the Never Again movement was able to do.

Communicating across generations poses more potential interpersonal communication barriers to overcome than communicating to individuals within one's

own generation.[445] The added difference of the Bring Back Our Girls movement having non-youth leaders communicating through platforms that are used in masses by the youth adds another level of difficulty to the Bring Back Our Girls' ability to relate and connect with youth about their movement.

Additionally, the location of the movement creates differences when examining the engagement that does, and that even *can* take place. In Central Africa, 12% of the population uses the Internet, in Western Africa, 41% of the total population are users of Internet, 50% of the total population in Northern Africa uses the Internet, and in North America, 95% of the population uses the Internet.[446] If a larger portion of the population has access to and uses the Internet, connecting to the youth of a particular region is impacted by overall Internet users in that region. The differences in Internet usage makes a difference in engagement with these social movements through the Internet and social media.

Digital

Each of the three cases of this dissertation have a unique relationship to the digital sphere, including the time in which they came about, the age of those involved in the movement, the location in which the movement took/is taking place, and ultimately the infrastructure and means available to those who created and engaged in the movement itself. Though unique, these cases all have similarities that are important in the discussion of youth digital social movement activism.

Across each case, there is a relationship between the time in which the movement came about and the digital era. The Invisible Children movement came about at the

beginning of the digital era, but they have continued to function as a movement throughout the last decade when both the Bring Back Our Girls and Never Again movement have also come about. The three cases have similarly navigated through the digital landscape by using social media to reach out to their followers, gain attention, and share ways to act.

Through the use of hashtags, videos, and social media exposure, all three social movements have made themselves known through their social media presence. The Kony 2012 media blitz from the Invisible Children movement that became the most viral video of the time, the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag campaign that gathered international attention from not only civilians, but also political leaders, and the March for Our Lives worldwide protest for gun reform from the Never Again movement that was organized and spread almost exclusively online. Despite the different times in which these movements came about, they each were able to take advantage of digital means to massively spread their specific message.

In addition to the time in which the movements came about, the age of the creators and followers of the movements in relation to the time the movements came about has impacted their relationship with the digital realm. Specifically, the Invisible Children leaders, while youth, were close to, but not exactly, digital natives. However, their youth was an advantage in their relationship to the digital realm. As the movement moved forward and the digital era progressed, the young age of the leaders enabled them to adapt to the changing landscape and produce content and relate to followers in the newest digital ways.

The leaders of the Bring Back Our Girls movement, however, were not youth or digital natives, and thus, were not as seamless in their digital connection with the movement and followers. BBOG did use the hashtag, a popular form of communicating on social media, but they did not create other content to continue their presence digitally and continue to engage followers on digital media. The age of the movement leaders will not always mean a lesser ability to adapt and implement digital technologies, but it is an interesting aspect that sets this movement apart from the other two in this study, and the digital presence of the Bring Back Our Girls movement was definitely lacking in comparison.

The Never Again movement stands out as a youth digital social movement because of their relationship to the digital realm based on the leaders and many of their followers being digital natives and their integrated use of various digital platforms. The Never Again movement spread across different social media sites, utilizing them in unique ways, all to reach and connect to as many people as possible and provide places for others who were or wanted to be involved in the movement to gather digitally. In addition, the Never Again movement did not remain exclusively online with their digital work, rather, this movement used their digital reach to motivate people to act together offline.

Evolution of Youth Digital Social Movement Activism

The activism done across the movements are strikingly similar, and yet importantly different at the same time. To begin, each movement has utilized both traditional and non-traditional forms of activism. They have had rallies and protests,

walk-outs and sit-its, letters and tweets sent to political figures. Important to note about each of these movements is the interplay between traditional and non-traditional activism. This is where I really explore the research question about how youth digital social movements have evolved over the twenty-first century. The relationship between the movements and activism leads to the findings of the research question: how have youth digital social movements evolved throughout the twenty-first century?

As discussed throughout, as the times change, so too will social movements change how they use digital means as a part of their movement. The Invisible Children movement used digital technologies as a secondary aspect of their movement. They used more traditional forms of connection and activism to move people online to watch their Kony 2012 video, talking about it at gatherings and events, sending emails, and even through the Kony 2012 kit filled with posters and stickers to post around town for those who purchased the kits that encouraged others to go online and watch their video. Moving forward in the timeline, the Bring Back Our Girls movement used digital technologies via their hashtag campaign to reach and share their cause with people across the globe, but there was no additional offline component for most users outside of Nigeria to participate in, and even the ones in Nigeria were somewhat limited. The most recent movement of this study, the Never Again movement, essentially flipped the order of using both digital and traditional activism from that of the Invisible Children movement. The Never Again movement used digital technologies to reach their audiences and share their message, much like the Bring Back Our Girls movement, but they then directed their followers offline to participate in various different forms of traditional activism, like marches, walk-outs, and voting.

This is an interesting insight into youth digital social movements that sometimes get a bad reputation for one or more of the aspects that make them the focus of this study. Young people and their use of digital technologies for activism is not minor or dismissible forms of slacktivism; they are not all simply slacktivists who only care about their image and appearing to support a movement. As discussed throughout this dissertation, young people do see the work they are doing online as engaging in civic and political activism, they do *want* to make change and they do *want* the world to be a better place, but they each uniquely define that. What these young activists need, though, is direction. Young people know how to use social media today, they know how to use it effectively in various ways, but it is true that tweets do not end wars and shares do not return missing children.

Young activists need direction, through the digital technologies that are available and familiar for them to use, of what the next step of their activism needs to be. Youth will share, they will post, they will tweet, they will live-stream, and, we have seen, that youth will also show up, at least sometimes; they will walk out, they will march, they will register, and they will vote. Having direct, explicit, communication through whatever medium reaches them, of what their next step is, is the key to keeping youth social movements moving and not getting stuck in the digital vortex of only liking and sharing content.

Overall, when communication scholars study youth social movements, and social movements as a whole, it is difficult to not look at their big, overarching, goals and say whether or not the movement was successful or whether or not the activists did anything,

but it is not always the big moves that contribute to social movements that are the most significant.

As I have stated, the purpose of this dissertation is not to place a value judgement of whether these social movements have been successful or not. I do, however, believe the way we study and talk about social movements, especially youth social movements, is important. I am arguing that we can be critical of social movements without deeming them a complete failure simply because goal number one was not "achieved." Did the Invisible Children movement bring an end to the stronghold the LRA has in Uganda? No, they did not. But did they accomplish other things throughout the movement, like the Crisis Tracker and helping with getting clean water and marketable skills for women there? Yes, and that is not something to shrug off and say "the movement was a failure." Similarly, did Bring Back Our Girls bring back all of the kidnapped Chibok girls? No, but it brought back some of them and hasn't given up the fight to find the rest. Did Parkland end mass shootings once and for all? No, but they also made a difference by registering young people to vote, encouraging companies to divest from the NRA, and fighting for gun reform.

When we broadly speak about these movements, we ignore the intricacies that have taken place that we can learn from, what has worked well for the movement, what obstacles they have faced and how future movements can work to overcome them, and what we can learn about potential pitfalls that come with digital movements and how future movements can try to avoid them. Not everything the Invisible Children movement, the Bring Back Our Girls movement, or the Never Again movement have

done are necessarily moves all future social movements should implement, but there are aspects from each that future social movements can learn from nonetheless.

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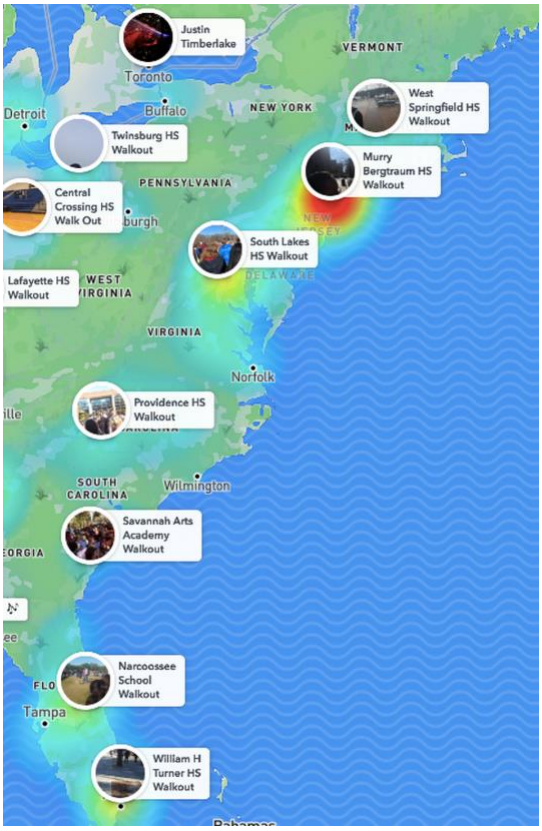
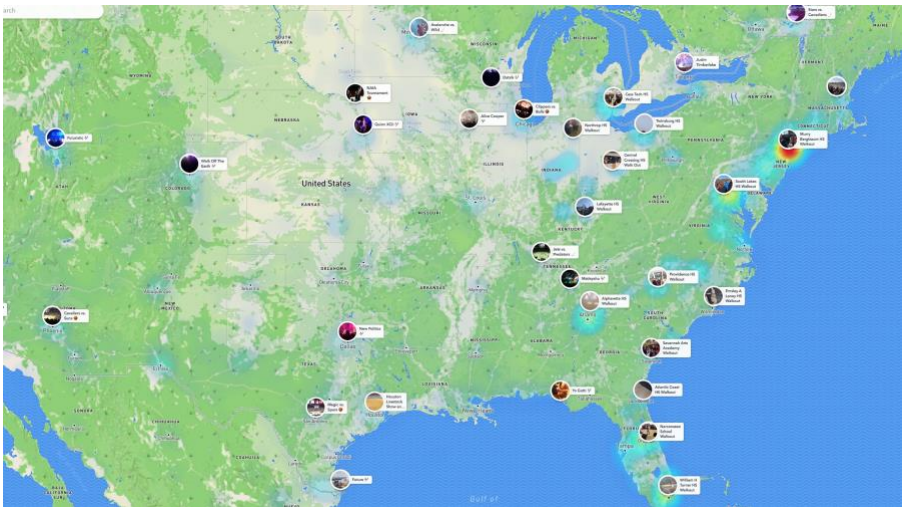
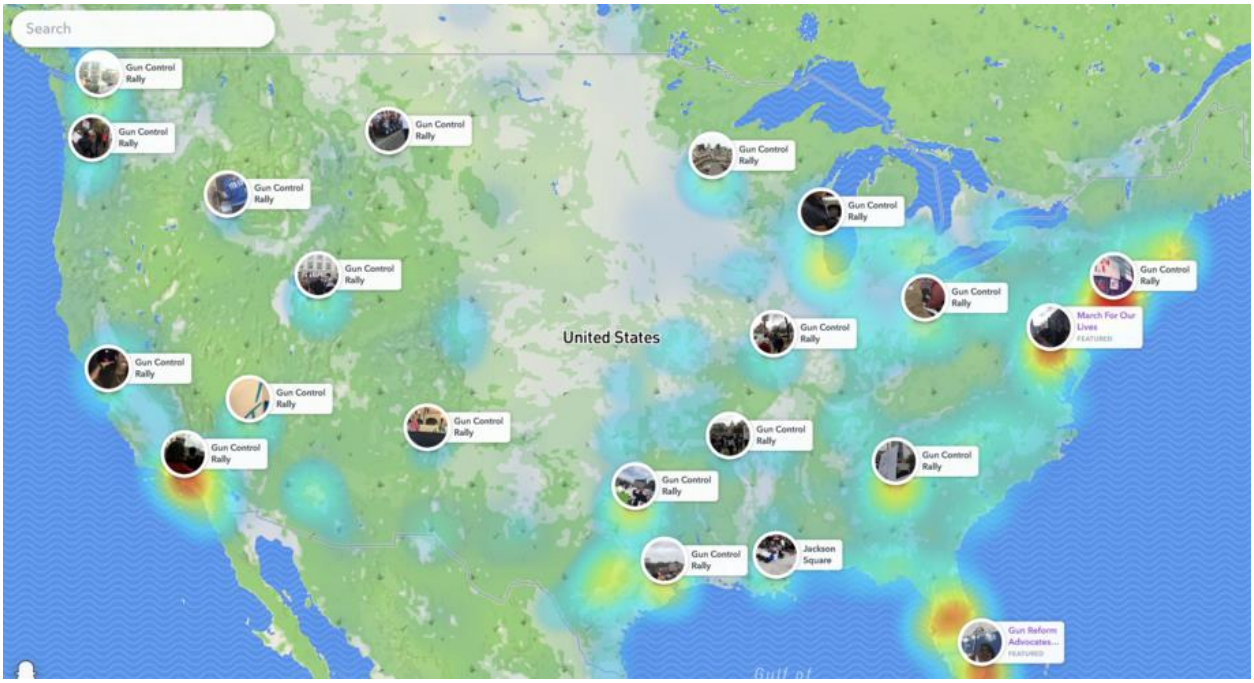


Snap Maps for March 14th walk-outs (from Mashable: https://mashable.com/2018/03/14/snapchat-national-walkout-day-filter/)



Snap Maps for March 14th walk-outs (Tony Morrison, March 14th, 2018, 10:04 AM, https://twitter.com/THETonyMorrison/status/973937933353934849?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E973937933353934849&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.businessinsider.com%2Fsnapchat-snap-maps-student-walkouts-on-gun-violence-photos-2018-3)



Snap Maps for March 24th March for Our Lives Protests (dailykos.com)

Snap Maps for March 24th March for Our Lives Protests – Dallas to Chicago to Boston zoomed in (dailykos.com)

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