

**An Examination of the Public's Stance on the Black Lives Matter movement via  
Twitter**

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## **An Examination of the Public's Stance on the Black Lives Matter movement via Twitter**

Twitter is a commonly known social media platform for celebrities, politicians, reporters, and the general public to voice their opinions on social justice movements. With the 280-character count limit in mind, account holders strive to produce succinct messages about topics near to their hearts. The use of hashtags is an excellent way for users to express a clear message. Simple hashtags, such as #JusticeForBreonnaTylaor and #SupportBlackBusinesses, are easy to remember and prompt a sense of intellectual curiosity for the reader. Hashtags gather tweets related to important topics, which brings together online groups and prompts the user to conduct further research in an attempt to become more educated about the subject.

The Black Lives Matter movement has gained attention during the Coronavirus pandemic. With the academic year cut short and over 40 million unemployed, the majority of people have turned to social media as a way to preoccupy themselves. The media's current focus on broadcasting police brutality has angered many. Countless have left their homes to join in protests against the police department: demanding arrests for officers involved with George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's deaths (Zimmerman, 2020). Despite the general public's reminders that not all black people are malicious, some officers have failed to change their mindsets. Police Chief Donny Williams fired 3 officers after hearing their racist conversation at a protest (Lavery et al., 2020). Americans opposed to BLM have sparked their own movement called Blue Lives Matter, advocating for safeguarding the police (Mason, 2020). Proponents of Black Lives Matter inform the public that oppression has plagued Blacks for years. Police brutality is racially motivated and officers who wrongfully kill need to face consequences (Rickford, 2015). All Lives Matter is another belief that tries to discredit the work done in the fight for racial justice. Every race has value, but one is currently in more pain than the others (Carney, 2016). An incredibly effective way of combating racism is for influential organizations and public figures to support the cause (Phillips & Weissman, 2020).

Twitter is a platform that can be used for positive social change and to promote productive and uncomfortable conversations across the nation. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which created

the famous #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, was popularized on Twitter. It aims to fight against and raise awareness of police brutality and systemic racism, in a peaceful manner. In order to determine the different stances on this issue, 100 tweets that included the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag were collected and analyzed through coding.

### **Methods**

In order to collect the data about the BLM movement, I tested various hashtags, such as #ACAB and #DefundThePolice, to see which one produced the most results. I later decided that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag had the greatest number of tweets and selected it. I made a copy of a spreadsheet, referred to as “TAGS v6.1,” then allowed it to access my Twitter account. I proceeded to input the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in the box named “Enter term” to process data from Twitter. Initially the spreadsheet collected roughly 68,000 tweets, which caused me to filter out retweets, remove foreign languages, and delete excess tweets until only 100 remained.

Once the data was narrowed down, I started to categorize it. Eight new columns were added to aid in the coding process: Open code, Type of Poster (Newspaper/ Organization/ Non-profit/ Individual), Rhetorical Appeal Type, Type of Communication, User Stance on BLM, Rationale for Stance on BLM, User Age, and User Political Lean. Each tweet was coded based on these classifications. However, some boxes were left blank. For example, the User Age column was not applicable to *The Philadelphia Inquirer* tweet, because it is a newspaper. I examined the user’s profile picture, past tweets, and the organizations it followed to better understand the poster’s background. If the user had prior posts about the movement, I deemed them as supporters of BLM and more liberal. If I saw the user followed conservative politicians, then I classified them as right leaning. Although this identification system was not perfect, I was able to get a general idea of the values and intentions of each account holder.

After completing the coding process, three graphs and two charts were produced to visually represent the data. With the help of pivot tables, I was able to compare two types of code in relation to the number of tweets produced.

## Data Analysis

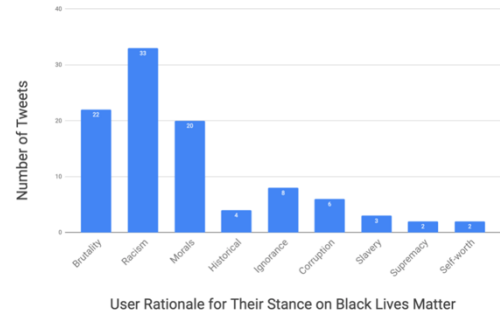
Figure 1 illustrates the poster’s rationale for their stance on the BLM movement. Racism is the most common reasoning at 33 tweets, followed by police brutality and morals at 22 and 20 tweets respectively. The rarest rationales were white supremacy and self-worth at two tweets each.

Figure 2 displays the two stances: for and against. 94% of the #BlackLivesMatter tweets were in support of the movement. The other 6% of tweets were highly opposed to it. The “For” section represents those who illustrated solidarity in the movement. However, the “Against” portion were those who failed to recognize the need to speak up against racial oppression in America.

Figure 3 highlights the rhetorical appeal utilized by the poster. There are three types of rhetorical appeal: Pathos, Logos, and Ethos. Pathos ties to emotions, logos focuses on logic, and ethos checks for credibility. Pathos and Logos made up 50% of tweets, meaning that none were primarily centered on ethos.

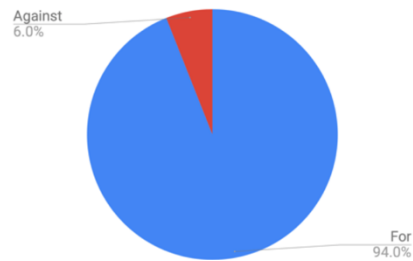
**Figure 1**

*The Effect of User Rationale on the Number of Tweets*



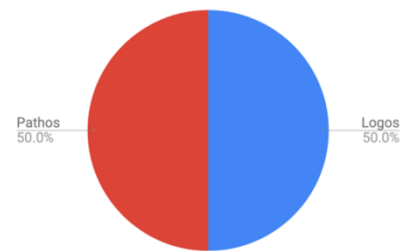
**Figure 2**

*Count of Stance on Black Lives Matter*



**Figure 3**

*Count of Rhetorical Appeal Type*



**Figure 4**

*User Rationale for Stance on Black Lives Matter v Political Lean*

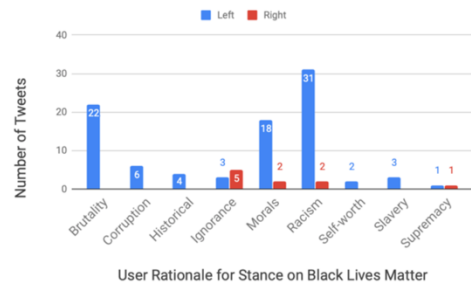


Figure 4 displays the most popular rationales for each political party. The more left leaning posters primarily tweeted about BLM from a racism, morals, and police brutality standpoint. However, the more conservative posters' rationales derived from racism, morals, and ignorance.

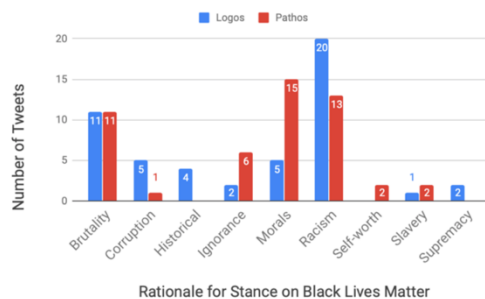
Figure 5 compares the user's rationale for their stance on BLM with the intended rhetorical appeal. A different rhetorical appeal took precedence over the three most common rationales; racism was from a logos angle, police brutality was balanced, and morals was from a pathos standpoint.

### Discussion

After analyzing the Twitter data, it is abundantly clear that the majority of Americans are in support of this movement, as seen in Figure 2. However, there has been opposition to BLM which was mainly directed towards the protesters. @GeorgeMunkelwil responded to conservative @MrAndyNgo's tweet about Blacks mistaking Hans Christian Heg's statue as a confederate one. Those who tore down Heg's statue were unaware that he was an abolitionist and Civil War veteran. @GeorgeMunkelwil decided to capitalize on this misunderstanding and denounce the BLM movement by tweeting "Black Live Matter apparently is run by idiots.#BlackLivesMatter." Ignorance is the highest rationale for right leaning posters, as seen in Figure 4. Opposers, like @GeorgeMunkelwil, are missing the greater picture. This is a fight against racism and brutality, as highlighted in Figure 1. Liberal @antoinettevamp posted a video of four police officers wrongly arresting a black man in Valdosta, Georgia. They violently pushed him to the ground after he repeatedly informed them that he was coming back from Western Union and committed no crime. @antoinettevamp angrily tweeted "// And still they claim the police are not racist. Bullshit! #BlackLivesMatter." Emotional tweets like this are a result of posters baffled by police officers'

Figure 5

User Rationale for Their Stance on Black Lives Matter v Rhetorical Appeal Type



interactions with Blacks. Police brutality centered tweets and tweets in general are balanced in the sense of rhetorical appeal, as described in Figure 3 and Figure 5. Videos typically provoke an emotional response, while stories told by writing and photographs take a more logical approach. @She\_Identity commented on @\_SJPeace\_ 's post about a 1959 fire in Wrightsville, Arkansas. 21 of the intended 69 Black men died from a room that was purposely set on fire. Many managed to escape the trap, but this is evidence of America's racist past. @She\_Identity wrote "@\_SJPeace\_ Thank you for reminding us of our history. STOP Killing black people! Just stop it and change these systems that perpetuate this evil thinking. Ya'll want to know why we are angry? This is why! #BlackLivesMatter #DefundThePolice." Yes, Blacks have not always made the best decisions at protests, but that does not negate the fact that racism is a prevalent concern in America.

### **Conclusion**

It is understood that a handful of people, like @GeorgeMunkelwil, will continue to be unbothered by racism and discrimination, while poking fun at distressed blacks. This movement cannot change the manner in which Americans think but hopes that the emotional stories and logical reasonings will shed light on the present-day vices. The collected data was a small sample size of internet discussions and is by no means a representation of the entire population's views. Its intent is to gauge where people roughly stand on the movement. Coding tweets is an excellent method to understand the intent behind an account holder's post. At first glance, every tweet supporting BLM seems homogeneous, but after careful evaluation, it is clear that each tweet aims to attack different malpractices. Some posters are more composed and wish to argue from a logical basis, while others want to provoke an emotional response from the reader. This study proves that most people using the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag are for the movement but have a unique way of expressing their emotions.

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