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Digital Pulpit: A Thematic Analysis of Evangelical Leaders' Statements on Twitter in the Two Weeks Following the January 6 Capitol Riot

Is dually approved by the Harding University Honors College and the student's thesis advisor(s) with input from the entire thesis advisory committee.

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**Digital Pulpit: A Thematic Analysis of Evangelical Leaders' Statements on Twitter in the
Two Weeks Following the Jan. 6 Capitol Riot**

Everett Belle Kirkman

Harding University Honors College

Honors Thesis

Dr. Miller

Dec. 10, 2021

Abstract

White evangelicals overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. According to the Pew Research Center, 81% voted for him. That support baffled pundits at first but held up throughout his presidency. By the time the 2020 election season was ramping up, White evangelicals who supported Trump held more tightly to their beliefs, many taking to social media to convey their opinions. Since the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, over 600 outspoken Trump supporters have been arrested and charged for inciting violence in dispute of election results. This research is a thematic content analysis of the statements made on Twitter by twenty influential White evangelical leaders in the two weeks following the Capitol riot on January 6. Specifically, this research examines how White evangelical leaders framed in their tweets the events surrounding the Jan. 6 insurrection. American popular culture has been indisputably shaped due to evangelicalism — from Veggie Tales to purity culture. How did evangelicalism potentially shape the public response to January 6? This research identified two dominant emerging themes that help explain how evangelical leaders framed the Jan. 6 Capitol riots: (1) They were promoting evangelical practices, and (2) They were condemning violence.

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Introduction

Evangelicals make up a quarter of Americans (around 80 million people), according to the Pew Research Center (Pew, 2021). *Evangelical* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “good news,” or the “gospel.” Evangelical or “born-again” Christians uphold distinctive beliefs, according to the National Association of Evangelicals: lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience (often including baptism); the Bible is the ultimate authority; and Christ’s crucifixion as the redemption of humanity.

In 1968, Richard Nixon knew that conservative evangelicals could hold the key to his victory, and he knew Billy Graham could help him win them over. By the 1970s, evangelicals had come to play a vital role in “family values” politics. With the 1980s came Ronald Reagan’s popularity within the “Moral Majority,” a PAC to further a conservative and religious agenda, including the allowance of prayer in schools and strict laws against abortion. Without the evangelical voting bloc, a Republican presidential candidate had no hope of a path to the White House. Throughout these decades, evangelical leaders were key components of Republican candidates’ success. From pulpit preacher evangelicals like Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell to conservative activists like Phyllis Schlafly to authors Tim and Beverly LaHaye, to radio pioneer James Dobson, strong-willed, influential evangelical leaders shaped the course of American history and, in turn, the culture of evangelicalism seen today.

In the 2016 presidential election, White evangelicals overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump — 81% voted for him (Pew, 2020). That support baffled pundits at first but held up throughout his presidency. By the time the 2020 election season was ramping up, White evangelicals who supported Trump held more tightly to their beliefs, many taking to social media to convey their opinions. Following the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, over 600 outspoken

Trump supporters have been arrested and charged for inciting violence in dispute of election results (U.S. Attorney's Office, 2021).

I conducted a thematic content analysis of the statements made on Twitter by 20 White evangelical leaders in the two weeks following the capitol riot on January 6. I analyzed the period from January 6-20, 2021 — the day of the insurrection at the Capitol to President Biden's inauguration day. The 20 leaders were chosen from a list of the 100 most influential evangelicals in America, curated by Newsmax (Krausz, 2017). I narrowed this list to 20 based on (1) if the person was alive, (2) if they had a Twitter account, (3) their activity on Twitter during the period being analyzed, and (4) if they identified as White.

Evangelicalism has shaped American popular culture, but how did evangelicals potentially shape the public response to January 6? The basis of my research focused on one question:

RQ1: How did White evangelical leaders frame in their tweets the events surrounding the Jan. 6 insurrection?

Evangelical leaders today do not need a pulpit to communicate with their audiences. Social media has revolutionized culture, politics, and within that, evangelical culture and politics. In this research, Twitter is the medium through which individuals sent their messages (Elliott-Maksymowicz, 2021). I analyzed the content thematically, utilizing framing theory to evaluate, in context, what a reasonable person who viewed each tweet would gather from the message.

Literature Review

The religious right

Many modern evangelicals are not theologians, but they follow the lead of evangelical popular culture. Christian-based books, films, music, and clothing have shaped the belief of millions. Kobes Du Mez (2020) provides a sweeping account of the past 75 years of White American evangelicalism in *Jesus and John Wayne*. She analyzes how the Jesus of White American Christians was rebranded to an idolized rugged, masculine figure of Christian nationalism. In the 1940s and 1950s, American evangelism began its shift with a frenzy of patriarchal “gender traditionalism,” Christian nationalism, and militarism (Kobes Du Mez). Victorian Christianity was seen as weak, feminine, and overly emotive. In the twentieth century, American Christians were challenged to reconcile the aggressive masculinity that defined American culture with traditional Christian virtues. John Wayne became an early symbol of American toughness, and in turn, powerful, patriarchal Christianity (Kobes Du Mez, 2020).

American popular culture has been indisputably shaped due to evangelicalism, Du Mez (2020) said. Within society at large, evangelicals have also created a vast consumer culture that reinforces an uncomplicated and uncritical self-perception. From Christian radio to Christian publishing, to textbooks, and school curriculums that reinforce positive depictions of evangelicals, evangelicalism has a foothold in nearly every space. “The nation’s sins — racism, sexism, xenophobia, white nationalism — are depicted not as problems endemic to the tradition, but rather as departures from ‘true evangelicalism,’” Du Mez said in a piece for the New York Times. “Critical outsider accounts are either ignored or discounted as attacks, reinforcing an evangelical persecution complex. Because enormous profits are at stake in this evangelical

consumer culture, both financial and ideological motivations play into efforts to keep evangelical consumers within the fold,” (Kobes Du Mez, 2021)

In her book, *Unholy: Why White Evangelicals Worship at the Altar of Donald Trump*, Sarah Posner argues that Trump connects with evangelicals by voicing the legal, social, religious, and cultural grievances of the Christian right. She concludes that Donald Trump speaks to both the alt-right and the Christian right when he articulates the grievances of White America. Posner believes that these two groups were already connected by “a shared hostility to liberal democracy,” (Gross, 2020).

During the 2016 election, Trump promised to abolish the Johnson Amendment, which barred pastors from endorsing or opposing candidates from the pulpit since 1954. Religious liberty issues have recently gotten tangled in debates over reproductive rights, contraceptive rights, or LGBTQ+ rights. Trump first announced his plans to a group of 45 pastors gathered in the White House around him. (Zauzmer & Bailey, 2017)

Regarding the promise to bar the Johnson Amendment, Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Dallas and one of the 45 gathered around Trump, and one of the pastors present at the White House claimed it was a hindrance. “It’s time to take the muzzle off pastors and allow them to speak openly,” Jeffress said in 2017. (Zauzmer & Bailey, 2017)

Another leader in the group of 45 assembled around Trump was Ralph Reed, chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition. After dinner and discussions of lofty conservative plans the president had for the future, Reed said, “These folks walked off the White House about 10 feet off the ground,” (Bailey, 2017).

“I think evangelicals have found their dream president,” Jerry Falwell Jr., former president of Liberty University, said of former President Donald Trump in 2017. “I’ve never seen a White House have such a close relationship with faith leaders than this one.”

Trump was first viewed by White evangelicals as simply the lesser of two evils. Hillary Clinton, the 2016 democratic nominee for president, on the other hand, was seen by conservative White evangelicals as the greatest evil. Trump’s rhetoric recalled an earlier version of American religious nationalism introduced by Reagan. He was a businessman, not a politician, and that was refreshing to many. Gorski (2017) argues that “the proper response to Trumpism is not to double down on radical secularism but to recover America’s civil religious tradition.”

On Jan. 6, as members of Congress attempted to finalize the Electoral College vote count to confirm President Biden as the winner, thousands of protesters broke into the U.S. Capitol. The riot-turned-attack resulted in five deaths and over 600 arrests in the months that followed. House Democrats soon introduced articles of impeachment against Trump, for allegedly inciting the crowds. For example, in Trump’s speech prior to the violence breaking out, he told the crowd, “We’re going to have to fight much harder,” (Jervis, 2021).

Rep. Adam Kinzinger (Illinois) was one of ten House Republicans who voted to impeach former President Trump and received backlash from evangelicals and republicans alike. One concerned constituent was even convinced Kinzinger was possessed by demons, because of the choices he made (Green, 2021).

In the wake of the riots at the U.S. Capitol, some evangelical leaders have continued fueling Trump’s allegations of widespread voter fraud. Robert Jeffress, a senior pastor of a 14,000+ member First Baptist Church in Dallas, for example, said he had “absolutely no regrets”

over his “enthusiastic support of Trump over the past four years.” He and other leaders stand by the notion that Trump is “without doubt the most pro-life and pro-religious president in history,” (Jervis, 2021).

In the same way that some White evangelicals viewed Hillary Clinton as the greatest of evils in the 2016 election, vice president Kamala Harris received similar derogatory remarks. Several Southern Baptist leaders have referred to Harris as “Jezebel.” Tom Buck, a senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Lindale, Texas, tweeted, “I can’t imagine any truly God-fearing Israelite who would’ve wanted their daughters to view Jezebel as an inspirational role model because she was a woman in power.” Experts say this type of comparison has historically been made to justify racial violence against Black women, (Branigin, 2021).

While Harris, during the campaign and throughout the transition into her new role, was viewed as a “Jezebel,” Trump continued to be viewed by his avid supporters as a hero. “I think God calls all of us to fill different roles at different times,” former White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said. “And I think that he wanted Donald Trump to become president,” (Hayes, 2019).

According to Du Mez, evangelical support for Trump was not merely a pragmatic choice. It was, rather, the culmination of an embrace of militant masculinity. A masculinity that enshrines patriarchal authority and condones the callous display of power, at home and abroad. “By the time Trump arrived proclaiming himself their savior,” said Du Mez, “conservative White evangelicals had already traded a faith that privileges humility and elevates ‘the least of these’ for one that derides gentleness as the province of wusses. Rather than turning the other cheek, they’d resolved to defend their faith and their nation, secure in the knowledge that the ends

justify the means. Having replaced the Jesus of the Gospels with a vengeful warrior Christ, it's no wonder many came to think of Trump in the same way," (Kobes Du Mez, 2020).

White evangelicalism

Wong (2008) highlights the differences between evangelical identity and individuals' political affiliations and attitudes across racial groups. White evangelicals, she finds, hold more conservative views than Black, Latinx, and Asian American evangelicals. She finds that the more conservative attitudes held by White evangelicals are driven by a shared sense of discrimination and persecution (Wong, 2018).

In her book *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America*, Butler (2021) argues that the Religious Right was not born out of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, as some believe, but, rather, racism. Butler says racism is what brought White religious conservatives together, dating back to colonial America. She identifies anti-Black racism as central and woven into every facet of White evangelical ideology. Her argument addresses the racist roots of White evangelical beliefs, and how they have been used to support slavery and condemn Communism throughout time. Opposition to issues in more recent years, such as abortion and LGBTQ+ equality, she says, are all resting on a foundation of White supremacy (Butler, 2021).

Framing Theory

The concept of framing theory is that the communicator focuses their audience's attention on events, and places them within a field of meaning. Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about how to process said information. The framing of an event affects how the event itself is perceived by the

framer's audience. Frames work to organize or structure the meaning of a message (Goffman, 1974).

Goffman (1974) first hypothesized the theory and said there were two distinctions within primary frameworks (primary as it is taken for granted by the user): natural and social. Both natural and social distinctions assist audience members in interpreting the data they perceive (Goffman, 1974).

While natural frameworks identify events as physical occurrences, and not attributing social forces to the interpreted causation, social frameworks view events as purely socially driven occurrences. Within a social framework, other people's external goals and manipulations cause an effect. Social frameworks are built upon pre-existing natural frameworks. Goffman (1974) said these frameworks, and the frames that they create, greatly influence how data is interpreted, processed, and communicated to others. Goffman (1974) argued that, whether they are aware of them or not, individuals are capable users of these frameworks.

The 20 individuals I evaluated each framed their messages in ways that influenced their audiences' perceptions of Jan. 6, the violence of that day, and the political unrest that ensued for months to come.

Twitter as a medium

More than 330 million people use Twitter as a platform for communication. One study, conducted by Katarzyna Elliott-Maksymowicz, Alexander Nikolaev, and Douglas Porpora, evaluated political argumentation via Twitter. Identifying a tweet as a speech act, they demonstrated how much argument can be communicated by singular speech acts, or singular

tweets, by the virtue of the enthymematic quality of public discourse (Elliott-Maksymowicz, 2021).

In their study of structural layers of communication on Twitter, Bruns and Moe (2021) described the range of communicative purposes Twitter is used for, distinguishing three layers of information exchange. Tweets range from personal tweets and conversations with close friends to discussions within specific communities, to “broadcast-style statements from well-known individuals and brands to their potentially very large retinue of followers,” (Bruns, 2021). The majority of the content analyzed in the following research falls into the third category, although some would be categorized in the second.

Using Twitter as the medium, I analyzed the statements made by 20 evangelical leaders in response to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol. The individuals’ framings of the events that day affected how their audiences on Twitter may have perceived the events.

Objectives and Methods

Sample

I conducted this research in an attempt to identify the frames in which these 20 specific evangelical leaders used to address the Jan. 6 insurrection. Using a list of the 100 most influential evangelicals in America, curated by Newsmax, I narrowed my sample to twenty evangelicals (Krausz, 2017). I narrowed the list based on (1) if the person was alive, (2) if they had a Twitter account, (3) their activity on Twitter during the period being analyzed, and (4) if they identified as White.

The evangelical leaders' Twitter accounts I analyzed include Andy Stanley (@AndyStanley), Anne Graham Lotz (@AGLotz), Annie F. Downs (@anniefdowns), Beth Moore (@BethMooreLPM), Dave Ramsey (@DaveRamsey), Eric Metaxas (@ericmetaxas), Franklin Graham (@Franklin_Graham), Jerry Falwell Jr. (@JerryFalwellJr), Joel Osteen (@JoelOsteen), John Hagee (@PastorJohnHagee), John Piper (@JohnPiper), Johnnie Moore (@JohnnieM), Max Lucado (@MaxLucado), Mike Huckabee (@GovMikeHuckabee), Mike Pence (@Mike_Pence), Paula White-Cain (@Paula_White), Ralph Reed (@ralphreed), Robert Jeffress (@robertjeffress), Steven Curtis Chapman (@StevenCurtis), and Tony Perkins (@tperkins) I analyzed every Tweet from each evangelical leader from January 6 - 20, 2021.

Instrument

I observed, analyzed, and gathered meaning from the twenty individuals' Twitter activity over the course of the identified time period. I considered each individual tweet as individual acts of speech within themselves. I took note of each person's retweets and quote tweets, but did not

consider the responses sent by their followers unless they continued the conversation with that audience member.

Procedure

I utilized Twitter's advanced search to focus on tweets within the chosen time period from each Twitter user. I then compiled the tweets into a spreadsheet, creating several columns to differentiate between information. First I noted the date of each tweet, followed by the time each tweet was posted. Then, I copied and pasted the text. The next column included the number of retweets, then quote tweets, then likes. The next column was titled "comments," in which I included any additional media that was within the tweet, such as a video, photo, or link to an external website. The final column was in-line memos or immediate takeaways of what a reasonable person viewing the tweet would gather.

The in-line memos generated the original, largest group of codes I worked with. From there, I combined codes into similar groups and narrowed them down to the most frequently occurring and most relevant to this specific research. I then sorted through the remaining codes, grouped those together, and searched for emerging themes. I continued analysis, reviewing identified themes, searching for additional themes, defining and naming themes. I identified two overarching themes, each with sub-themes within them (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Results

Through this sample group, I evaluated the ways in which these 20 evangelical leaders framed their messages in response to the events of Jan. 6. After transcribing the tweets, and thoroughly and comprehensively coding the data, I identified two dominant emerging themes that help explain how evangelical leaders framed the Jan. 6 Capitol riots: (1) They were promoting evangelical practices, and (2) They were condemning violence. Of the 20 individuals studied, 15 (Lotz, Downs, Moore, Metaxas, Graham, Falwell Jr., Hagee, Moore, Lucado, Huckabee, Pence, Reed, Jeffress, Curtis Chapman, and Perkins) directly mentioned the January 6 riot, responded to someone who directly mentioned it or retweeted a tweet directly mentioning it. Of those fifteen individuals, eight explicitly condemned the events that unfolded on January 6, although for varying reasons. The five individuals who did not directly reference January 6, (Stanley, Ramsey, Osteen, Piper, and White-Cain), were active on Twitter during the two weeks but continued to tweet generalized, often scripture-focused messages, or their tweets focused on promoting their own books, podcasts, or sermons. Three of the individuals (Stanley, Piper, and White-Cain) who did not directly tweet about the January 6 riot did tweet an original tweet in remembrance and celebration of the life of Martin Luther King Jr. on January 18. Stanley and Piper's MLK tweets were sent using Sprout Social, and White-Cain's was sent using Hootsuite. All individuals who posted original tweets regarding the events surrounding Jan. 6 sent them via their iPhones or the Twitter web app.

Promoting evangelical practices

Within this umbrella theme, I found that, overwhelmingly, the individuals were invoking prayer, promoting alleged American values, and seeking to protect their own First Amendment

rights. All three of these subthemes were often communicated under the guise of all being evangelical practices or values in and of themselves.

Prayer was suggested, and at times called for, by these individuals to their audiences for differing reasons. Some calls for prayer were unrelated to the riot, or political social unrest, and came in a steady stream of other vaguely inspirational, often prosperity-gospel-oriented messages. Many of Osteen's tweets, for example, fell into this category. Three days after the riot, he tweeted, "God never does His greatest feats in your yesterdays; they are always in your future. The scripture says, 'The path of the righteous gets brighter and brighter.' What God has in front of you is more fulfilling, more rewarding than anything you've seen in the past."

Curtis Chapman only tweeted once during the selected time period. In his tweet, from the night of January 6, he said, "Words can't describe the sadness that I feel as I watch the events currently unfolding in our country & in our world today. As a response, it's with a heavy yet hopeful heart that I share a new song with you...as a prayer...a cry...a Desperate Benediction." He linked a video recording of his prayerful song as well.

Several individuals, multiple instances each, promoted alleged American values — with the root argument being that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and should remain that way and/or repent and return to its heritage. These individuals also made their statements with confidence and God-ordained authority.

On January 16, a Twitter user, in response to Jeffress' promoting his sermon, "How Should Christians Respond to Joe Biden?" asked, "After all that's happened and your close ties to an insurrectionist, do you really think you're qualified to tell American Christians what they should be doing?" Jeffress replied with a succinct, "yes."

Those that sought the protection of their own First Amendment rights called out Twitter itself, big tech in general, big government, and/or mainstream media (MSM) as the stripper of their rights.

Condemning violence

Another frequent commonality I found within the sampled group was a condemnation of violence. However, while a few individuals argued that violence was not the way to win any argument, or that the Jesus they knew would not have stooped to violence as a tactic, others compared the violence seen on January 6 to the actions of a number of their liberal nemesis.

In a quote tweet pointing out that those with similarly held beliefs as January 6 rioters are likely in churches and spaces nationwide, Downs said, “Every bit of this is heartbreakingly true. May God have mercy on us.” Then, she created a thread, continuing in a second tweet with: “Also I know some of you don’t share my faith, but if you’ve considered Jesus and His teachings and the people who stormed the Capitol make you fairly sure that Jesus isn’t for you, THAT Jesus isn’t for me either. That was not Gospel behavior. He’s so much better than that.”

In response, one of her followers asked, “There’s more than one Jesus?” Downs replied, “No, but I think the way He was portrayed by the people praying in the Capitol is not true to His character - He is the Prince of Peace.”

On the other end of the spectrum of the sample group, tweets compared the riot on January 6 to Black Lives Matter protests or actions of “Antifa” protesters. Some even suggested that the push to break into the Capitol building, and the inciting of unrest and violence in the first place, were Antifa members in disguise.

Huckabee, in a quote tweet on January 10, said, “EVERY conservative I know condemns Capitol violence. But almost ALL press/Dems (repeat myself) excused violence. Arrogant, elitist, & bigoted ‘news’ folks like Cuomo & his ilk are never shut down by Twitter. Why not? They stoked & ignored violence. We consistently condemned it.”

Huckabee is part of a sect within the sample group that consistently condemned the “liberal agenda”: big government, big media, and big tech, alongside condemnation of violence. These individuals often claimed over this time period that any correlation to these groups was also causation of the unrest that ensued in violence. On the morning of January 6, for example, Perkins said, “Any question about CNNs distain for Bible believing Christians?” in a quote tweet. On January 14, Hagee tweeted, “As a whole, untainted journalism in America has died. Truth is ignored in the blinding lust for sensational headlines.”

Within condemnation of the liberal agenda, a couple of individuals also condemned “cancel culture” in their tweets. Metaxas called on his audience to boycott corporations that “canceled” his friends and colleagues multiple times throughout the sample period. On January 19, he tweeted, “The 80 million Americans who voted for Donald Trump now being demonized in our once-free media STILL have the power of the purse. So Kohl's & BedBath&Beyond etc who "cancel" patriots like @realMikeLindell must now learn how many of us used to shop there. It is time. #CCCPBoycott.”

There were two main sects within those that condemned violence: those that condemned the violence as a stand-alone statement, and those that intertwined the condemnation with condemnation of additional presupposed evildoers.

In the midst of a thread on Jan. 19, Moore tweeted, “We sinned grievously in wedding evangelicalism to a political party. This wasn’t just about policies. It was also about power. Position. Access. Neither political party represents the breadth of Christ’s concerns for people. The gospel is so much bigger. My generation is so” (1/3) “deeply indoctrinated that I don’t know if we’ll be willing to face this train wreck & do this differently. I hope so. But I do believe you believers in your 20s, 30s, 40s could be the ones that begin to fight for policies across parties that reflect Christ’s heart for people.” (2/3) “We are Jesus people. Above all else. Our loyalty is to Christ. His way is good and right and true and just. We can do this differently. The devil himself cannot keep us from repenting. Only our own pride can,” (3/3). Moore was the only individual in the sample to downright object to tying evangelicalism to politics, specifically one political party. Moore was also the only one to blatantly object to both mainstream political parties.

Discussion and Limitations

Du Mez (2020) argues that evangelicals did not cast their vote for Donald Trump despite their beliefs, but because of them. Trump's presidency, she says, was then the fulfillment of the evangelical White majority's most deeply held values (Du Mez, 2020).

Trump promised Supreme Court appointments that would protect the unborn. He promised "religious liberty" security. He vowed to put an end to the Johnson amendment, and he became the first sitting president to address the March for Life rally in 2020. Trump spoke White evangelicalism language—not in the form of theology or lived-out faith, but in the form of the politicized religion that makes up a large part of the religious right (Zauzmer & Bailey, 2017).

This research allowed me to identify and make meaning out of the support for Trump from White evangelicals in the United States. It also allowed me to identify overarching themes of the messaging that popular leaders communicate with their audiences. The themes connecting a majority of the tweets identified during this time period speak to greater ethical beliefs and moral qualms held by these twenty evangelical leaders. And, more largely, their audiences who may interpret their words as influenced or inspired by God's own word.

This research attempts to answer relevant questions that Americans (and others internationally) may continue to have, in the months and years following the Capitol riot. These twenty individuals have made many statements regarding the events of January 6 since January 20. Some of those statements may have added to the context in which their original reaction statements were made. The congressional hearings on the riot itself are currently ongoing. Once rulings have been made regarding the events that unfolded that day, more context and

commentary will likely continue, adding depth to this research and opportunities for similar studies with different individuals, or within a different time period.

The sample group itself is not equal in terms of male:female ratio, or a variety of evangelical, economic, or educational backgrounds. Using the Newsmax list, however, my options were limited. An even ratio was not able to be achieved given the qualifiers I chose to use to narrow the scope of research.

The research conducted fills gaps in existing literature, specifically in the realm of qualitatively researching personal statements on social media as a medium. As more research using Twitter as a communicative medium progresses, this research could be improved or updated.

Reflective Statement

Communication is power. This research made me meditate on the effect that the written word, even via social media, can have on an audience. On social media especially, tone-deaf words can sometimes cause greater waves than positive messages can ever create for good. There are a lot of things that divide Americans, especially politically, but there is also something to staying grounded in the fact, and basing all interactions with others, off of the truth that we all have a shared human experience. Everyone's life looks different one way or another, but for some reason, everyone believes what they believe, and they are normally passionate about that. Not many people seek to be wrong. So, there may be something to fully hearing out the other side's argument of an issue. Even if I do not end up agreeing with them, understanding their reasoning and lived experiences can make their current point of view make more sense. I was also reminded through my work of the lasting effect of social media. A digital footprint is real. What these individuals tweeted ten months ago in response to a never-before-seen attack on the Capitol is being analyzed and reported on by a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate student at a private school in Arkansas. Not that my tweets are worth researching, but I normally do not consider that as a possibility when I tweet day to day.

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