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**Cultural Identity and Digital Citizenship:
How Do Social Media Consumers and
Creators Reconcile their Identities in the Digital World**

Hypothesis:

Ethnicity and/or race does alter our experience in social media. Additionally, it obligates us to alter how we interact with others on social media as opposed as to how we interact with those who are within the same ethno-racial group.

Research Experience

During this summer, I was given the amazing opportunity to do research in a field that I find interesting. My interest in the specific study was sparked upon reading “Digital citizenship among ethnic minority youths in the Netherlands and Flanders.” In this article, Leen D’Haenens, Joyce Koeman, and Frieda Saeys focused on information and communication technology access among minorities, as well as how this may facilitate or hinder digital citizenship. Nonetheless, this article failed to examine how these groups interacted with each other. As a result, my project mentors and I decided to design a study that covered both technology access and group interaction. To accomplish this, it was determined that the best way to get input from the Lamar student population was through a survey. Thereafter, we would interpret the results to draw general conclusions.

For the most part, there were no major challenges in accomplishing this. However, one minor bump was dealing with IRB. With a project mentor having to be replaced, the new co-principal investigator had to get his CITI training done to move forward with the IRB submission and approval. This would put us behind our projected timeline, but we would still end up back on track in time for the symposium. Additionally, we would have to redesign our survey to have a qualitative aspect to it because interviews were no longer within the timeframe. Nonetheless, everything worked out for us, and we were able to have data to draw conclusions from!

Throughout my fellowship, I acquired new skills and perspectives. To begin with, it was the first time I went through the IRB process. That by itself was a learning experience! Additionally, it was also the first time I used Qualtrics for research and could confidently say that that is another hard skill I picked up. Other skills I picked up were soft skills such as: communication, analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving and public speaking. Along with the research experience, these skills helped me see that my long-term interests are in continuing to do research with minority students in a collegiate setting. Moreover, it motivated me to keep an academic career in mind!

Overall, the research experience was profound as an investigator and student! Although I have not been able to present my research, I look forward to presenting it at HASBSEB. Before then, I intend to meet up with my project mentors to see what, if any, modifications would have to be made to provide a second round of responses to corroborate the first set of results.

Study

This study received 35 total responses. To consider a response as valid, we filtered out submissions in which there were answers missing and/or fields were left blank. Of these 35 responses, 19 respondents identified as Non-Hispanic (or Latine/x) White while the other 16 were in a minority group. The results were as follow:

Technological Access

Of the 35 respondents, 33 were able to count on a secondary device regardless of ethnicity or race. Furthermore, access to technology throughout these

students' academic careers was not a concern for most. Interestingly, the median age (13) when a minority student gets their first technological device was lower compared to their non-minority peers (16).

Digital Citizenship

94% of surveyed students do not participate heavily in social or political discussion on social media. However, those that do are either minorities or non-minorities that acknowledge that their peers go through “hardships and issues.” This neutral sentiment bled into follow/friend behavior. For the most part, people did not follow/friend others along ethnic or racial lines.

The respondents who did follow along these lines were mostly minority students who “felt like they could relate to them more” or “want[ed] their feed to feel more inviting.” In other words, they felt more comfortable following/friending people in their same ethnic and/or racial group.

46% of respondents agreed that the topics of discussion drastically differ between ethnic and/or racial groups. Specifically, when it comes to current movements that deal with discrimination such as BLM or Stop AAPI. On this same issue, there were minority respondents that stated that when these types of conversations are had, they can count on an “accepting [...] respectable and understanding” friends/followers who do not belong to their groups.

89% of those who experienced some type of racial or ethnic discrimination were minorities or non-minorities that support their peers. Additionally, some of these respondents have experienced discrimination outside of social media. One respondent was harassed on social media because of going to a political event that was anti-racist.

Many respondents did not feel the need to put their social media on Private due to having already done this early on in their academic/professional careers. However, those that have had to do this are ethnic minorities. In one case a Hispanic respondent stated: “I’ve always been private because ally [sic] of people I went to school with bullied me.”

Conclusion

The findings of this study are a good baseline on understanding how our minority and non-minority experience social media. Although the results showed that the “digital gap” no longer affects our minority students, discrimination still does. While minority students do not have to alter their interactions with those outside their ethnic or racial groups—because they count on understanding peers—they are still more prone to dealing with racism than their non-minority counterparts. In summary, the data partially confirms the hypothesis proposed in the beginning of the research.

Appendix: Themes on Experiencing Racism and/or Discrimination on Social Media

Question: Have you ever been personally antagonized on social media based on ethnicity and/or race? If so, explain.

Participant Responses	Theme
“yes because I am Arab, people usually think negative”	Negative comments
“Yes. I am hispanic. In recent years, especially when trump the president. I felt personally attacked because of some of the comments people would share.”	Racism during Trump administration
“Yes. During Trump's first campaign, I spoke about his racism and we called the N word and told to go back to Africa. “	Racism during Trump administration
“yes, I have been bullied for my hair and skin”	Comments about appearance

Question: How did the situation previously mentioned make you feel?

Participant Responses	Theme
“Personally attacked. I felt as if the progress we had made as a country to end racial tensions were disseminating.”	Feeling attacked
“I was shocked. I did not even know how to react. I could not even be upset because it is so ridiculous on how people act.”	Taken aback by comments
“It made me feel angered because I feel like once you have been pushed aside and spat on by people that don’t even know you, you learn to be more accepting to people. Unfortunately the people who are making these comments have no empathy for the people they are hurting and they get away with it.”	Feeling angry
“I don't let it bother me, I'm not even African and people like that are ignorant.”	Unbothered by racist/discriminatory comments
“I feel privileged” <i>Note: This was a response from a non-minority student who has not experienced racism on social media</i>	Feelings of privilege when not confronted by racism or discrimination
“belittled”	Feeling lesser
“Pretty angry and annoyed. I think it is ridiculous to socially bully people with differing views especially knowing they would never speak that way to someone face to face.”	Feeling angry
“it makes me feel disappointed”	Disillusionment after experiencing racism and/or discrimination on social media