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Alex Rister

University of Central Florida, alexrister1@gmail.com

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Cover Page Footnote

The author is an Assistant Professor of the Practice, Communication, with the Department of Humanities and Communication at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Worldwide Campus as well as a Ph.D. candidate in Texts and Technology at the University of Central Florida. This paper was previously presented the National Communication Association's annual convention.

#ListenToSurvivors: A Case Study of Three Human Trafficking Awareness Campaigns on Twitter

Alex Rister

University of Central Florida

This study uses a case study approach to analyze tweets from 3 American non-governmental organizations to better understand how human trafficking awareness are communicated. Berger's (2013) STEPPS framework includes six principles which seek to explain how content goes viral. This study also seeks to understand if elements of the STEPPS framework resonates with audiences when communicating those human trafficking awareness messages. A thematic analysis of 100 tweets from Polaris Project, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), and End Slavery Now resulted in three primary themes: realistic information of practical value, feminist voices and stories, and engagement with other users. In drawing on literature on digital activism for feminist causes and online human trafficking awareness campaigns, the results of this study provide theoretical and practical information for digital activism in human trafficking awareness.

Keywords: human trafficking awareness, digital activism, Twitter, social media, STEPPS

The U.S. Department of State (2018) defines human trafficking as “activities involved when someone obtains or holds a person in compelled service” (para 1). Approximately 14,500 to 17,500 people are subjected to human trafficking in the United States each year. Girls and women are the groups most commonly trafficked, comprising an estimated 79% of human trafficking victims (Jones and Kingshott, 2016; Turner, 2016; UNODC, 2009). Unfortunately, anti-trafficking campaigns and media portrayals often misrepresent the problem of human trafficking. Media outlets can distort the reality of human trafficking by sensationalizing stories or conflating international and domestic instances of trafficking (Houston-Kolnik, Soibatian, & Shattell, 2017, p. 1). Therefore, anti-trafficking efforts must address underlying issues, including violence against women, instead of reinforcing stereotypes about trafficked people. Images that depict young white girls in chains reinforce incorrect stereotypes, as human trafficking

Alex Rister is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Central Florida and a member of the teaching faculty at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Worldwide campus. She is a prior UCF Francis Bok Human Trafficking Awareness Fellow. Alex's research interests include the communicative elements of advocacy, awareness, and leadership for social change at the individual and organizational levels, especially on issues important to girls and women such as human trafficking.

disproportionately impacts girls and women of color (Steele and Shores, 2015). Digital activism that accurately communicates the problem of human trafficking is critical, especially on Twitter, which has become an important platform for raising awareness about human trafficking (Technology & Human Trafficking, 2012). The current study employs a case study methodology to examine tweets by Polaris Project, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), and End Slavery Now – three non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the United States – as well as responses to those tweets. A thematic analysis of 100 tweets from each organization analyzes how those organizations communicate human trafficking awareness messages and how Berger’s (2013) STEPPS framework was applied in those messages. Identified themes include communicating information of practical value, feminist voices and stories, and engagement with other users. To better understand the case study of tweets by Polaris Project, GEMS Girls, and End Slavery Now, I begin by reviewing the literature on digital activism for feminist causes and online human trafficking awareness campaigns. This body of work highlights the importance of human trafficking as a criminal justice issue with racialized and gendered aspects that significantly impact girls and women of color.

Literature Review: Digital Activism for Feminist Causes

Namy et al (2017) write “For decades, women’s rights activists, researchers, and programmers have emphasized how patriarchal systems shape social expectations in both functional and ideological terms to maintain male superiority over women” (p. 41). Feminist researchers and activists seek to raise awareness about and change elements of patriarchal society. “For nearly 30 years, feminist researchers have argued that in order to stop men’s use and women’s experiences of violence on the personal level, structures of gender inequality at the societal level must change” (Yodanis, 2004, p. 655). According to Howson (2006), “The development of research that offers a progressive critique of the operations of masculinity, grounded in social justice, began with the second-wave women’s movement, and continues to be driven by the profound and systematic work of academic feminism” (p. 2). While feminist research and activism long pre-date the Internet, the digital age has changed the way feminists approach social justice. Baer (2016) argues, “Digital activism constitutes a paradigm shift within feminist protest culture” (p. 18). Continued research can ensure feminist digital activism practices adapt as new technologies emerge.

Digital activism for causes related to gender equity continues to gain popular participation and more widespread media coverage. According to Miller (2014), online feminism includes research that can be accessed through online journals, scholarly feminist networks, websites featuring feminist news and commentary, blogs, and social media promoting feminist causes, including hashtag activism. Incidences of hashtag activism involving gender

equality “are known as ‘hashtag feminism,’ a practice within the burgeoning sphere of online feminism” (Clark, 2016, p. 788). For Miller (2014), online feminism serves as a space where research can be more easily transmitted to mass audiences; additionally, marginalized voices can be more readily heard and more easily shared in online spaces. “Hashtags represent evidence of women and people of color resisting authority, opting out of conforming to the status quo, and seeking liberation, all by way of documentation in digital spaces” (Conley, 2014, p. 1111). Online feminism provides space for a polyphony of voices to discuss feminist causes using a variety of mediums. Schulte (2011) brings up “the deeply interrelated nature of gender and technology and the somewhat paradoxical hope that the internet is the key to the future of feminism” (p. 728).

Digital activism works well as a term to classify the work of feminists online. According to Joyce (2010), “‘Digital activism’ is the best term to discuss all instances of social and political campaigning practice that use digital network infrastructure” (p. ix). These instances include campaigns on the Internet found on websites or blogs; social media campaigns with text, images, and hashtags; email, text, instant messages; and other forms of advocacy work using digital technology. For Tufekci (2017), benefits of online movements and digital activism include the ability of a campaign to germinate, the lack of censorship in online spaces in many countries, and the inclusion of diverse voices. However, Tufekci (2017) also notes drawbacks to digital activism in a lack of formal leadership, stymied capacity-building, and tactical freeze within a movement. Schradie (2017) points out the inequalities of participating in digital activism, including unequal access to resources such as technology, skills, and time. Despite these drawbacks, digital activism continues to be a medium for protesting oppressive governments, raising awareness of human rights issues, and promoting feminist causes. “Utilizing the digital to make visible the global scale of gender oppression and to link feminist protest movements across national borders, these actions exemplify central aspects of digital feminist activism today” (Baer, 2016, p. 18).

Berger’s STEPPS Framework

Digital activists utilize a variety of appeals to galvanize audiences, and Berger’s (2013) STEPPS framework provides one way to examine online content seeking to promote activism. This framework includes six principles, known as STEPPS, to explain how content goes viral. Previous research has used STEPPS to explore why content goes viral on Twitter (Pressgrove, McKeever, & Jang, 2017). Berger (2013) defines the first “S” in STEPPS as social currency—people’s motivation to appear competent and share content that maintains this appearance of competency with one’s following. Triggers, the “T” in the STEPPS framework, may be defined as a triggering event that motivates a person to act (Berger, 2013). Next, “E” refers to the emotional content of a shared message. Indeed, research on activism

indicates emotion works well to engage audiences. “Activists intending to recruit or mobilize for their cause intentionally engage in tactics aimed at eliciting emotions that lead to collective action, that is, emotion work” (Gong, 2015, p. 89). The first “P” in STEPPS stands for public, defined by Berger (2013) as content that is clear and evident to audiences; imitation is key to the public element of the framework. For example, in the viral ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) ice bucket challenge, audiences could easily imitate the act of dumping a bucket of ice over their heads. The second “P” stands for practical value--useful information that helps others. Finally, the “S” refers to stories. Previous research by Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose (2016) indicates sharing stories online creates a community experience. “Becoming contributors to the hashtag allowed [rape survivors] to more deeply access the affective connectivities produced and circulated, and made participants experience them in different ways. Participants were affected by speaking together, and about their experiences” (Keller et al, 2016, p. 28). “Other contributors reflected on these ‘overwhelming’ feelings of solidarity with hashtag contributors as leaking into their daily lives away from the computer screen” (p. 28). The present study analyzes whether STEPPS translates to communication about human trafficking.

Online Human Trafficking Awareness Campaigns

Social media platforms are important sites for feminist activism in causes such as violence against women and human trafficking awareness. According to Keller et al (2016), “Where websites provide platforms for visibility, social media applications like Twitter have provided opportunities for girls and women to connect, share, and find solidarity through tweeting experiences of rape culture” (p. 33). Despite research on human trafficking using new media, “more research is needed to measure both the positive and negative implications of digital activism in anti-trafficking efforts” (Technology & Human Trafficking, 2012, para. 14). The present study analyzes human trafficking awareness campaigns from three Twitter accounts.

Because girls and women are frequently among the most trafficked populations, a feminist lens for research on human trafficking advances our understanding of the issue. Research indicates a variety of factors account for the prevalence of trafficked women and girls, “structural inequities - including poverty, gender-based violence, racism, class and caste-based discrimination, and other forms of oppression and marginalization” (Hume & Sidun, 2017, p. 8). Jones and Kingshott (2016) argue “the one factor suggested to condition” these contributing factors “is the system of patriarchy” (p. 274). However, Turner (2016) emphasizes the importance of seeing women and girls as separate categories since “combining the two [groups] risks infantilizing women and failing to afford children the recognition they need, both as children and as gendered beings” (p. 195). Being reflexive during the research process is one way to address Turner’s

(2016) concerns. Jones and Kingshott (2016) also promote feminist research in this area, suggesting “Examining the topic of human trafficking through a feminist lens is necessary to understand how the issue of patriarchy impacts criminal justice system approaches to the crime as well as the outcomes of such anti-human trafficking efforts” (p. 272-273). Keeping the experiences of survivors at the center of the research allows for an application of feminist research practices.

According to Limoncelli (2017), “The emergence and spread of contemporary anti-trafficking advocacy is an understudied phenomenon” (p. 816). In addition to being understudied, many people do not have a baseline awareness of human trafficking. McDonald (2014) addresses survey results indicating an overall confusion about what “human trafficking” means and a lack of understanding about the issue. Government task forces, agencies, and organizations promote advocacy and anti-trafficking campaigns; however, many NGOs (non-governmental organizations) also do this work. Approaches of these NGOs vary; for example, in a study of women’s rights organizations, Bell and Banks (2018) found that the presence of these groups “has an effect on laws to provide greater protection of those vulnerable to trafficking and to laws to prevent trafficking” (p. 374). Women’s rights organizations seek to change patriarchal systems and the laws that govern those systems, especially in cases where women and girls are negatively impacted. The primary focus of women’s rights organizations on changing laws is critical to effective anti-human trafficking work since the American criminal justice system is not currently set up to support survivors of trafficking. Jones and Kingshott (2016) argue that this system “is highly gendered and heavily male-dominated with maleness constructed into the system and infused throughout the organizational process” (p. 275). McDonald (2014) puts forth that in this system, “victims are often viewed by police, prosecutors, judges, and juries not as legitimate victims but rather as criminals, engaged in prostitution and of being illegally in the country” (p. 129). According to McDonald (2014), we must reconceptualize the primary role of the criminal justice system not as finding and prosecuting traffickers, but to “discover victims and connect them to the resources” that will help them “reclaim their lives” (p. 136). Reflexivity can ensure all are attentive to personal biases and their impact on trafficking survivors. Hume and Sidun (2017) urge those who work with survivors to “scrutinize the portrayal of trafficking victims in the media and in awareness campaigns” as well as to explore our personal stereotypes (p 9). Anti-human trafficking campaigns must carefully consider this advice.

After conducting 37 interviews with anti-trafficking activists to “analyze how emotion work is done online,” Gong identifies three overarching themes: “injustice frames that include personalized responsibility, inspirational stories, and affirming interactions” (p. 92). These findings align with Berger’s (2013) STEPPS framework, especially emotion and story. McDonald’s

(2014) recommendations on best practices for these campaigns include a victim-centered philosophy focused on the “number of victims freed from oppressive, degrading circumstances” (p. 136). A victim-centered philosophy focused on helping others ties to Berger’s (2013) conception of practical value.

In a study of the ‘Real Men Don’t Buy Girls’ campaign featuring celebrities hoping to raise awareness of human trafficking, Steele and Shores (2015) found that the campaign messages reinforced gender stereotypes by reproducing “gender structures and power relations underpinning trafficking and child exploitation” by chiding men to conform to a ‘real man’ gender role in rejecting human trafficking, and by reducing women and girls to commodities (p. 419). Additionally, the campaign “render[ed] the public a spectator, rather than being educated and empowered to become a participant in prevention efforts, and critical agents in challenging gender orders driving trafficking” (Steele and Shores, 2015, p. 431). Steele and Shores’ (2015) results encourage a reflexive, feminist lens when creating anti-trafficking campaigns. Furthermore, these findings support multiple elements of Berger’s (2013) framework, including social currency and public. Since Twitter is an important site for anti-trafficking advocacy, the present study explores the STEPPS framework by analyzing three Twitter profiles.

Polaris Project, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, and End Slavery Now

Polaris Project, GEMS, and End Slavery Now raise awareness of human trafficking in different ways. Polaris Project focuses on human trafficking prevention and awareness. Polaris has overseen the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline for over ten years and has developed an extensive data set as a result. @Polaris_Project has over 47,000 Twitter followers at the time of the present study. Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) is “the nation’s largest organization offering direct services to girls and young women who have experienced domestic trafficking and CSE” (commercial sexual exploitation) (<https://twitter.com/gemsgirls>). A critical piece of the GEMS mission involves “ending commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking of children by changing individual lives, transforming public perception, and revolutionizing the systems and politics that impact sexually exploited youth” (para 2). @GEMSGirls has a Twitter following of over 27,000 users at the time of the present study. End Slavery Now partners with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center to “illustrate the many different ways normal, everyday individuals can get involved in the fight” to end modern-day slavery (para 1). @EndSlaveryNow has over 27,000 Twitter followers at the time of the present study.

The present study employs a case study methodology to analyze 100 tweets by Polaris Project, 100 tweets by GEMS, and 100 tweets by End Slavery Now to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Polaris Project, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, and End Slavery Now communicate human trafficking awareness messages?

RQ2: Do elements of Berger's (2013) STEPPS framework resonate with audiences when communicating human trafficking awareness messages?

Methodology

A case study methodology was employed to answer the study's research questions. I use a case study method as "an attempt to systematically investigate an event or a set of related events with the specific aim of describing and explaining these phenomena" that "permits the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 325). In this instance, the primary benefit of a case study is to "provide a deep understanding of phenomenon, events, people, or organizations" (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 328). In analyzing anti-human trafficking messages on Twitter, a case study format allows for a deep understanding of how three specific organizations craft those messages and how other people engage with those messages on Twitter. This understanding may be helpful for others wishing to communicate anti-human trafficking content.

On April 10, 2018, I collected the last 100 tweets from Polaris Project, the last 100 tweets from GEMS, and the last 100 tweets from End Slavery Now. To ensure data could be collected from multiple months on each organization's Twitter platform, and especially capturing data from January as National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, 100 tweets from each organization allowed for a sizeable but manageable sample. Tweets were sorted in an Excel spreadsheet to include the date; the text posted; the content posted with that text, such as images, videos, links, or documents, and the engagement with the content posted in the form of likes, comments, and re-tweets. After collecting all the data, I conducted a thematic analysis of the content. Initially, I sorted the content into themes corresponding to Berger's (2013) STEPPS framework components. Some content overlapped across two or more parts of the framework, and content not fitting into the framework was grouped together to form new themes. Each of these themes are outlined below.

Case: Anti-Human Trafficking Advocacy on Three Twitter Accounts

One hundred tweets from @Polaris_Project included 53 original tweets and 47 retweets. Of tweets, 22 included photos, seven had video, and 46 included links to websites or documents. Thirty-seven tweets engaged in live-tweeting on February 27, 2018, around the topic of massage parlor human trafficking using the hashtag #MassageParlorTrafficking. Only six

out of 100 tweets received no re-tweets. The most commonly re-tweeted post came on March 14: “BREAKING: We have released 2017 statistics from the National Human Trafficking Hotline – the number of human trafficking cases reported jumped by 13% with a 29% increase in individual survivors that were identified through reports and tips. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/2pboABv>” (twitter.com/Polaris_Project). The text was accompanied by a picture of the United States with “hot spots” indicating cities reporting human trafficking via the hotline. This tweet was re-tweeted 182 times and received 139 likes. The following three most popular tweets included Polaris Project’s re-tweets on the anti-human trafficking efforts of Delta Airlines (65 re-tweets and 287 likes), the #CanYouSeeMe campaign focused on awareness in transportation hubs in the US (110 re-tweets and 166 likes), and the winners of the 2018 Skoll Awards for Social Entrepreneurship (135 re-tweets and 285 likes).

Most Polaris tweets and re-tweets received no comments (72 out of 100), and 20 tweets received only one comment. Engagement with Twitter content in the form of comments was uncommon. The tweet with the most comments – a total of 38 – was a re-tweet from Sen. Rob Portman on March 19, stating, “Justice cannot be seen but its absence can be felt. And that’s what’s happening now, an absence of justice. #SESTA is the online sex trafficking solution victims and their families need and courts have called for <http://bit.ly/2G7uOMd>” (twitter.com/Polaris_Project). To compare, the tweet with the second-highest number of comments had only 16 comments. Comments on the March 19 tweet focused on partisan politics and criticisms of the senator. While mainstream media may have covered the story or included a mention of Sen. Portman, social media allowed constituents to speak to him directly. This is one key feature of online feminist activism. By using social media to raise awareness of gender issues, activists can directly incorporate the voices and stories of those impacted.

Although uncommon, seven tweets featured video components. These tweets were usually re-tweets from other sources, such as a link to a news feature on the film *I Am Jane Doe* or a commercial debuting the #CanYouSeeMe campaign.

Considering STEPPS, the most common technique was to share information of practical value; 67 out of 100 Tweets used the “practical value” element in STEPPS. Public, defined in this capacity as Polaris encouraging the audience to take practical, public action, was utilized in 12 tweets. Emotion specifically employed to thank sponsors, partners, and audiences was seen in 10 tweets, and stories (which are also emotional) were utilized in 11 tweets. In applying the STEPPS framework, tweets could use more than one appeal. The most recent tweet from @Polaris_Project was on April 6, 2018, with the 100th tweet dated February 27, 2018.

One hundred tweets from @GEMS_Girls included 63 original tweets and 37 re-tweets from other Twitter users. Seventy-seven tweets included

multimedia – 45 with photos, four with video, and 28 with links to websites or documents. Out of 100 Tweets, 18 received no Re-Tweets. The largest segment of tweets at 39 received one or two re-tweets. Of the 17 tweets receiving double or triple-digit re-tweets, only two were originally posted by @GEMS_Girls, whereas the 15 others were re-tweeted. The first of the two most popularly re-tweeted @GEMS_Girls tweets were made on February 11, 2018, with 10 Re-Tweets, “If you didn’t know, please share and help us continue to provide comprehensive services to girls and young women who have survived sexual exploitation and #trafficking here in the USA by donating. Donate Today: <http://www.gems-girls.org> #Sexualabuse #MeToo” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). The second most popularly re-tweeted original tweets created by @GEMS_Girls was posted on March 22, 2018, with 13 re-tweets: “Prior childhood abuse and neglect make girls and young women vulnerable to recruitment into the commercial sex industry, lack of options, education and employment keep them there.-Rachel Lloyd, GEMS Founder & CEO #girlsarenotforsale #trafficking” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). As one strategy for feminist digital activism, hashtags such as #MeToo not only allow movement participants to organize around a particular issue, but also allow discussion, debate, and community building around that issue (Fotopoulou, 2016; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Kaun, 2015; Tufekci, 2017). Only nine of 100 Tweets received no Likes. Eight of the 28 total tweets receiving double and triple-digit likes were original posts by @GEMS_Girls, whereas others were re-tweeted from various accounts, such as *Essence* magazine, #MeToo movement founder Tarana Burke, and Barack Obama. Seventy-two tweets received no comments; all tweets with double or triple-digit comments were re-tweets from more popular accounts.

Considering STEPPS, the most common techniques utilized were sharing information of practical value (33 of 100 Tweets), emotional tweets such as words of encouragement and inspiring quotes (29 of 100 Tweets), and stories – which are also inherently emotional (20 of 100 Tweets). Nine tweets embodied Berger’s (2013)’s “public” concept, as they sought to encourage and inspire audiences to take action. The most recent tweet from @GEMSGirls was on April 10, 2018, with the 100th tweet dated February 2, 2018. The 100 most recent Tweets from the End Slavery Now Twitter handle @EndSlaveryNow included 99 original Tweets and one re-tweet. Of tweets, those containing multimedia included 66 with photos and 41 with links to websites or documents. None of the @GEMS_Girls tweets included video. Out of 100 tweets, three received no re-tweets. Seventy tweets received between one and ten re-tweets, 17 received between 11 and 20 re-tweets, and 10 received 21 or more re-tweets. The most popularly re-tweeted post with 89 re-tweets was from January 7, 2018, and read, “‘Human trafficking is a global problem that requires people in every nation to take action to end it. I’m especially appalled at the number of children being trafficked and sold for sex. Hopefulness must triumph over hopelessness.’-John Clark,

CEO, NCMEC @NYAbolitionists” (twitter.com/EndSlaveryNow/). The tweet was accompanied by a photo of John Clark and was one of 32 tweets in a more extensive campaign. Each tweet from January 2018 featured a quote from an abolitionist raising awareness of human trafficking along with a photo of that activist. These tweets appeared in succession during January with no additional tweets, re-tweets, or replies to users. As discussed above, the community-building emphasis of online feminist activism can be seen in the campaign’s development and execution. The use of photos depicting real-life activists along with a streamlined look and feel of the campaign shows a community of human trafficking activists inviting and encouraging further community building through the interactive features of Twitter such as liking, sharing, and commenting.

When considering all 100 tweets, only one received no Likes. Fifty-eight tweets received between one and ten likes, 23 tweets received between 11 and 20 likes, and 16 tweets received more than 21 likes. The most-liked tweet, with 255 likes, was posted on January 18, 2018, and read, “‘Human beings are not for sale — at any age, for any purpose, under any circumstances, by anyone... Let’s listen to survivors and use our voices to end sexual exploitation and abolish demand.’ - @AshleyJudd, Actor, Activist, and Humanitarian @NYAbolitionists” (twitter.com/EndSlaveryNow/). A photo of Ashley Judd accompanied the tweet. Thirty tweets received at least one comment, with the largest number of comments--nine--on the aforementioned Ashley Judd tweet. End Slavery Now utilized three primary techniques aligned with Berger’s (2013) STEPPS framework. Fifty tweets used emotion; 32 tweets displayed practical value or the sharing of helpful information; and 12 tweets utilized stories, including emotional appeals. The most recent tweet from @EndSlaveryNow was on January 31, 2018, with the 100th tweet dated July 21, 2016.

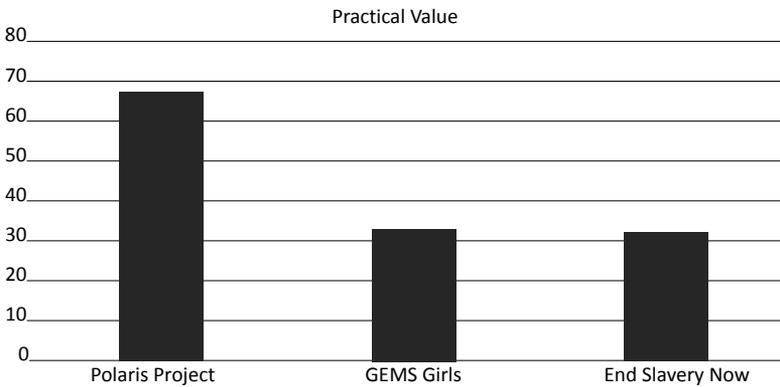
Discussion

Through the thematic analysis, three primary themes emerged: realistic information of practical value, feminist voices and stories, and engagement with other users.

Realistic Information of Practical Value

Polaris Project, GEMS, and End Slavery Now shared information of practical value about human trafficking with facts and statistics; images of charts, graphs, and statistics; and links to external articles, videos, and websites. This information aligns with one aim of online feminism—to provide information in spaces where marginalized voices can be heard and shared. Polaris relied most heavily on this technique, with 67 out of 100 tweets giving information of this kind, while GEMS and End Slavery Now relied on this approach in 33 and 32 Tweets, respectively.

Table 1
Information of Practical Value (STEPPS)



Since Polaris oversees the National Human Trafficking Hotline, hotline data drives their Twitter presence. Most Polaris tweets shared data from hotline calls, such as number and kinds of calls, and information of practical value in “live tweet” format under a hashtag. For example, one tweet on April 5, 2018, read, “Isolation was the most common method of force, fraud, or coercion used by traffickers to control their victims reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2017. Learn more here” (twitter.com/Polaris_Project). A link to the most recently published data from the hotline was included below the tweet. Polaris’ focus on tweeting information of practical value for an audience distinguishes them as the NGO at the forefront of sharing quantitative data on human trafficking, allowing their Twitter account to serve as a unique information hub. Anti-trafficking campaigns may seek to re-tweet the information of practical value from @Polaris_Project, may incorporate the data collected from the National Human Trafficking Hotline into their campaigns while citing Polaris, or may focus on generating new information of practical value in a way that stands apart from Polaris.

One way to generate new information of practical value is to live tweet from a conference, meeting, training, or press conference about human trafficking. Thirty-six total tweets from Polaris Project on February 27, 2018, focused on live-tweeting about the issue of massage parlor trafficking, using the hashtag #MassageParlorTrafficking. Tweets included quotes from trafficking experts and re-tweeted those participating in the “live tweet” conversation.

GEMS and End Slavery Now also shared information of practical value, focusing primarily on sharing links to external sources of information about human trafficking. @GEMSGIRLS linked to external articles such as a New York Times article on Backpage and a BuzzFeed article on the recent law passed prohibiting New York law enforcement from having sexual relations with people in custody. @EndSlaveryNow linked to articles such as the 2016 Fair Trade Holiday Gift Guide providing ideas for fair trade gifts

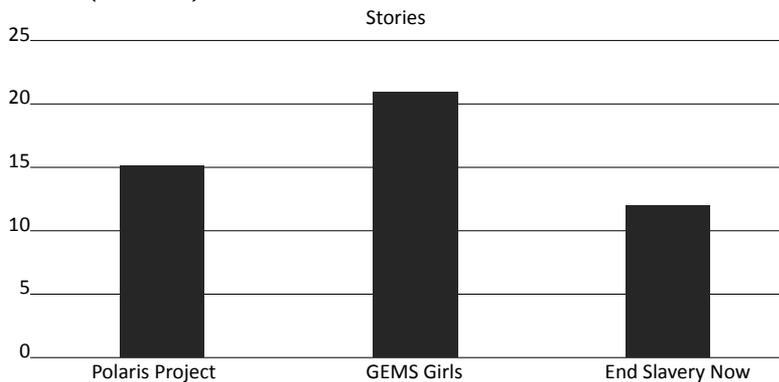
for the holiday season and an article questioning whether “John shaming” works. Raising awareness of human trafficking by sharing “bite-sized” information was often used. Polaris tweets with information of practical value totaled 1,310 re-tweets, 1,877 likes, and 102 comments; GEMS tweets with information of practical value totaled 391 re-tweets, 186 likes, and 129 comments; and End Slavery Now counted 315 re-tweets, 324 likes, and 12 comments. Shared articles can come from sources outside of the organization, as a majority of @GEMSGIRLS tweets did, or from blog posts written by the organization itself, as a majority of @EndSlaveryNow tweets did.

Tweets sharing information of practical value prove vital for human trafficking awareness, although this strategy may be used more or less than other strategies based on various factors. Two factors mentioned in the present study include the organization’s mission and the Twitter campaign itself. For example, live-tweeting a human trafficking training on a particular day. Information of practical value that is easy to read, easy to understand, and easy to share allows audiences to raise awareness of human trafficking in small ways and enables organizations to gain audience credibility. The importance of the information of practical value reflecting accurate human trafficking data, as opposed to media representations that may be false, is also an important consideration.

Feminist Voices and Stories

Polaris Project, GEMS, and End Slavery Now sought to highlight the authentic voices and lived experiences of girls and women through the “emotion” and “story” elements of Berger’s (2013) STEPPS framework.

Table 2
Stories (STEPPS)



Twitter accounts showed the reality of human trafficking as a local issue impacting any citizen instead of “sensationalizing stories” that depict an international problem in oppressed countries (Houston-Kolnik et al.,

2017, p. 1). End Slavery Now featured a campaign of photos of New York abolitionists during January 2017; one such abolitionist, Yasmin Vafa, was featured in a picture with the following quote as the tweet: “‘Not only are women and girls of color overrepresented in the sex trade, they’re also more likely to be criminalized for their exploitation. Sex trafficking must therefore be recognized as a racial, gender, & criminal justice issue.’ -Yasmin Vafa, Co-Founder & ED, @rights4girls” (twitter.com/EndSlaveryNow/). This strategic campaign spanned 32 total tweets. Since @EndSlaveryNow’s most recent tweet was posted on January 31, 2018, featuring the final quote and photo from the campaign, the entire Twitter account had a deliberately feminist look feel. The campaign communicates the message that human trafficking disproportionately impacts girls and women of color and as a criminal justice issue for those survivors, calling attention to the elements of patriarchal systems perpetuating the problem through the images and content communicated by the campaign.

Polaris and GEMS also utilized a feminist approach to tweets. For example, one Polaris tweet reads, “Finding help for survivors is hard when they speak different languages and are from places where law enforcement is often corrupt” (twitter.com/Polaris_Project). This tweet demonstrates an issue with systems themselves—systems of language and law enforcement—that serve as barriers for assisting survivors. As another example, GEMS tweeted, “‘The most overt form of this is the portrayal of this issue as ‘white slavery,’ the overwhelmingly depiction of little white girls in awareness campaign materials and an adherence to an idea of what a ‘real’ victim looks like; white.’ -Rachel Lloyd #HerToo #trafficking” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). This highlights the media outlets that perpetuate false ideas about the issue of human trafficking and its survivors. Another example from March 27, 2018, states, “‘They need to see hope after the sex industry’ @GEMSGIRLS founder Rachel Lloyd in working with #LawAndOrder on moving beyond the “dead hooker” stereotype in #media #unlearningintolerance #UN” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). These three examples indicate the value of anti-trafficking Twitter campaigns showing the truth about human trafficking in light of the obstacles presented by language and law enforcement systems, which allows organizations to push against patriarchal norms in their communication efforts.

Conley (2014) said, “The mundane lives of black women and girls are often downplayed, exploited, or all-together ignored in mainstream media and other public discourses” (p. 1112). Instead of downplaying or ignoring information, all three Twitter accounts highlight statistics about girls and women of color as the majority of human trafficking victims and survivors and as important voices to share and listen to in anti-human trafficking efforts. Specifically, GEMS focused on lifting up girls and young women of color through various empowering and inspirational quotes, messages, and stories that aligned with the organization’s mission. In addition to sharing text, the

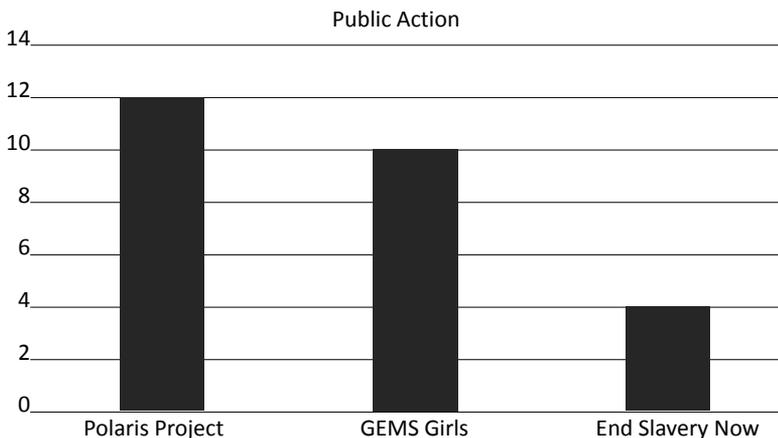
use of photos, videos, and links to articles or other resources allowed these organizations to provide realistic portrayals of girls and women impacted by human trafficking. These communication strategies are critical to overcoming previous notions of human trafficking, which may be incorrect, and the systems that may not allow survivors to find help and thrive.

One important note was the popularity of tweets classified as “emotional” by End Slavery Now: quotes from famous people. These posts were relatively popular, generating between two and twenty re-tweets, but did not offer ways for audiences to get more involved beyond an awareness of the organization itself. One important strategy utilized by Polaris and GEMS, but not by End Slavery Now, was to break up emotional content with practical value information and content encouraging public action. Overall, the feminist lens Polaris, GEMS, and End Slavery Now used prioritizes the reality of girls and women impacted by human trafficking. This feminist lens allows for communication about the issue to highlight systems that may further oppress victims, navigate ways around those systems to assist survivors and ensure audiences see real faces of trafficking survivors versus the faces seen in the media. Additionally, feminist content focused on uplifting spirits and confidence using emotion may be a powerful strategy that may speak to girls and women in general and survivors of human trafficking specifically.

Engagement with Other Users

Engagement with other users is an essential tool used by Polaris, GEMS, and End Slavery Now. I break down engagement into two primary strategies: encouraging public action (one element of STEPPS); and highlighting prominent figures, organizations, and hashtags. Replying directly to other users on Twitter was rarely done.

Table 3
Encouraging Public Action (STEPPS)



Encouraging public action took many forms, including calls to re-tweet something, sign petitions, contact legislators, or donate. Calls for public action were used less frequently than sharing practical information or sharing emotional or story-driven tweets; however, encouraging public action and advocacy was utilized by all three organizations. Polaris encouraged public action in 12 tweets, with GEMS doing so in nine tweets and End Slavery Now in four tweets. On March 18, 2018, GEMS posted: “.@GEMSGIRLS empowers girls & young women who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation & domestic trafficking to exit the commercial sex industry & develop to their full potential. Share their tweet to raise awareness <http://ht.ly/KoNb30iVlgu#womenshistorymonth>” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). This tweet was re-tweeted five times and liked seven times. While sharing a tweet may be seen as “slacktivism,” a variety of other activist opportunities were also provided. For example, one tweet called for donations: “The girls and young women we sever [sic] are in need of basic toiletries like soap, shampoo and conditioner for curly hair, toothpaste, feminine products, lotions, deodorant, hair oil, hair brushes/combs, etc. Please purchase items from our Amazon Wishlist: <http://bit.ly/GEMSWishList>” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). This tweet shared a link to an Amazon wish list, was re-tweeted four times, and gained four likes. Polaris encouraged audiences to take action on legislation, “Add your voice as we move closer to a vote on #SESTA -- urge your senators to support this bill that will allow us to better combat sex trafficking online: <http://bit.ly/2prdHvl>” (twitter.com/Polaris_Project). This tweet received seven re-tweets and four likes. An example of public action posted by End Slavery Now was: “Support a Survivor’s Crowd Funding Campaign, Help them Go Home: <http://www.endslaverynow.org/act/action-library/support-a-survivors-crowdfunding-campaign>” (twitter.com/EndSlaveryNow/). This tweet received two re-tweets, two likes, and one comment. Donations to the organization as a type of public action were rarely promoted. Types of public action varied, from low-stakes and effortless “slacktivism”-type work such as re-tweeting or digitally signing a petition, all the way to more hands-on activities such as direct service, volunteering, and protesting.

Engaging with prominent figures, organizations, and hashtags was another tool utilized by all three organizations. End Slavery Now’s January 2018 campaign featured abolitionists with varying celebrity types, such as actress Ashley Judd, New York NOW President Sonia Ossorio, playwright and poet Sarah Jones, and politician Michael Bloomberg. Each tweet in this campaign received multiple re-tweets and likes. GEMS sought to tag others to thank them for an action, such as sharing an important message or advocating for legislation. These tweets engage audiences through comments, likes, and re-tweets. @GEMSGIRLS also utilized important hashtags to engage with other conversations, including #EqualPayDay in April 2018, #WomensHistoryMonth in March 2018, and #BlackHistoryMonth in February 2018. For example, GEMS re-tweeted a

message from Equality Now: “Our Goodwill Ambassador @EmmaWatson calls for men & women to unite to achieve gender equality. RT if you’re with her! #TimeIsNow” (twitter.com/GEMSGIRLS/). This strategy allows human trafficking awareness to contribute to conversations about other feminist issues organized around a particular hashtag, #TimeIsNow in this case. Polaris reached large audiences through engagement with Delta Air Lines and Mira Sorvino. Polaris tweeted, “Thanks to @MiraSorvino and @Delta employees for your incredible leadership in the fight against human trafficking! #getonboard,” along with a photo (twitter.com/Polaris_Project). Possibly due to the three notable names, audiences heavily engaged with this tweet, which received 16 retweets, 38 likes, and two comments. Importantly, engaging with prominent figures, organizations, and hashtags must be done with great care, as Steele and Shores (2015) point out in their research on the celebrity image in human trafficking campaigns. Engagement with knowledgeable people and organizations who understand how to communicate about the issue using a feminist lens is critical, as opposed to engaging with poorly constructed messages which might include “discordant humour, poorly evidenced statistics, and perilous contradictions [which] unfortunately undermine” any anti-trafficking messages (Steele & Shores, 2015, p. 432). Polaris, GEMS, and End Slavery Now took care with their affiliations to effectively promote anti-trafficking messages and communicate their missions.

Conclusion

A case study of 100 tweets from Polaris, 100 tweets from GEMS, and 100 tweets from End Slavery Now revealed strategies to raise awareness of human trafficking. Using 280 characters of text or less and accompanying that text with photos, charts, and graphs may allow audiences to understand the fundamental issue of human trafficking, where unrealistic media representations may fail. A feminist lens enables campaigns to ensure messages communicate the reality of human trafficking and may allow anti-trafficking advocates to affiliate with public figures and organizations to advance the cause. A mix of fact-based awareness and emotional stories ensures audiences understand the statistics about the issue and the first-hand accounts of survivors—the use of photos, videos, and weblinks each providing significant contributions. While emotional campaigns such as empowering quotes might garner engagement, balancing those more “slacktivist” tweets with messages offering practical value and stories is recommended for a more comprehensive understanding of trafficking. Campaigns such as End Slavery Now’s month-long feature of prominent New York abolitionists can serve as an audience-centered example to engage and spread awareness. However, care must be taken to ensure that a given campaign represents the organization’s brand and the issue at hand.

Directions for future research include examining more than three

Twitter accounts focused on anti-human trafficking advocacy. An analysis of government agencies, faith-based organizations, and women's rights organizations would be beneficial points of comparison. Additionally, Gong's (2015) previous study may be expanded in light of Berger's (2013) STEPPS framework. Interviews with anti-human trafficking activists might be scheduled to analyze not just the emotional work done on Twitter, but all of the elements of STEPPS. Finally, the present study might expand to compare and contrast anti-trafficking content across social media platforms; for example, all three organizations in the present study managed accounts on Facebook and Twitter.

Ultimately, this study extends the practical application of Berger's (2012) STEPPS framework to human trafficking awareness content on Twitter and provides insight into how that content might be framed in future single tweets and larger-scale campaigns to raise awareness of human trafficking without relying on incorrect stereotypes. As the study analyzed 300 total tweets from three American non-governmental organizations, its applications can be especially helpful for nonprofit and non-governmental organizations with limited funding but a critical need for using social media, and especially Twitter, for human trafficking awareness efforts.

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