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#OccupyWallSt - A Study of Rhetoric and Technology

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#OccupyWallSt - A Study of Rhetoric and Technology

Abstract

Is Twitter a modern tool for mobilizing a social movement and inciting calls to action that are comparable to those of the past?

In many cases, the root cause of past social movements has involved some type of economic downturn, and groups of disgruntled people came together to form an opposition. Rhetorical language was ultimately used to steer the mobilization and calls to action. **Similarly, social movements have predominantly been based on the idea of utilizing a single orator** – one identifiable individual to help mobilize the collective ideologies and beliefs of a social group. In general, this formula has created mostly negative interactions and eventual outcomes.

Today, modern technology conflicts with this traditional value of rhetoric, as internet-based social media platforms, such as Twitter, have become the contemporary tool for not only the creation of, but eventual expansion of a social movement. In 2011, on the heels of the 2008 recession, people began to grow tired of the unequal distribution of wealth in America. In the case of the **#OccupyWallSt movement of 2011 and 2012, Twitter was essentially the only tool utilized by the group to both mobilize and call to action.**

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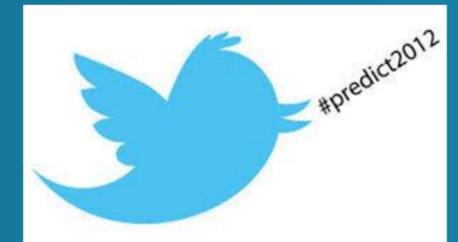
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#OccupyWallSt – A Study of Rhetoric and Technology

Adam Hoffman

St. John Fisher College, 2019



Introduction

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Today, modern technology conflicts with this traditional value of rhetoric, as internet-based social media platforms, such as Twitter, have become the contemporary tool for not only the creation of, but eventual expansion of a social movement. In 2011, on the heels of the 2008 recession, people began to grow tired of the unequal distribution of wealth in America. In the case of the **#OccupyWallSt movement of 2011 and 2012, Twitter was essentially the only tool utilized by the group to both mobilize and call to action.**



Methodology

To determine Twitter's presence as a mobilization tool for the #OccupyWallSt movement, **120 tweets from followers and supporters were individually analyzed using content analysis procedures.** Each Tweet was coded (numerically) into seven specifically designed categories, with each category featuring up to six options for selection. It was assumed that the majority of the calls to action would be presented in the form of written text, but with the possibility of an accompanying image or video. Thus, the collective identity of the group was anticipated to be formed primarily via textual elements. Also, the potential for external links that included similar media elements were factored into the analysis.



Notable social movements of the past, such as that of the Nazi regime, monasticism during the Roman Empire, and even as recent as the civil rights movement, featured rhetorical elements of both positivity and negativity. Each movement essentially utilized a single orator as a representative. Yet, the relevancy and reputations of the aforementioned movements have stood the test of time.

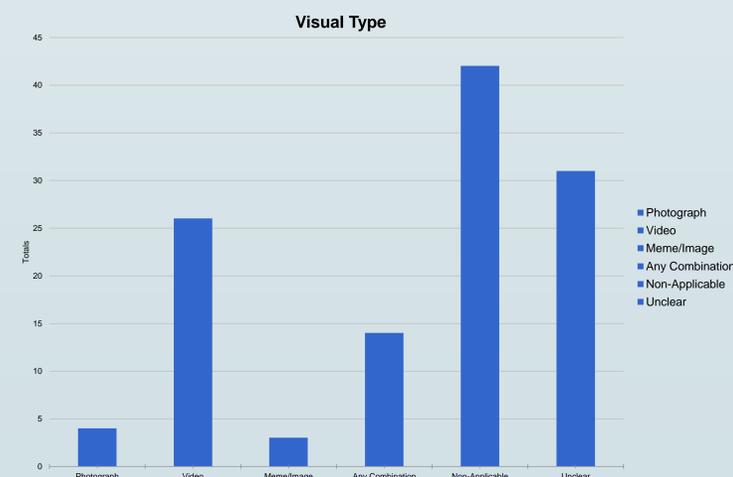
To discover the presence of such elements in the #OccupyWallSt movement, tweets were analyzed from each end of its lifespan, which is widely believed to have lasted from September 16, 2011 to the end of the following year. Due to the high volume of tweets, the range for this study featured individual month groupings: **September 16, 2011 – September 30, 2011 and the following year, October 1, 2012 – October 5, 2012.** The month of October was a significantly shorter data set, simply because the movement appeared to have run its course by that time.

Results

The results indicate that the movements' calls to action were generally "unclear." This option was selected when an individual tweet didn't necessarily have a clear or identifiable characteristic of any type of action. However, as the graph below shows, those tweets that were categorized as either online or offline were nearly split down the middle with a fair level of frequency.

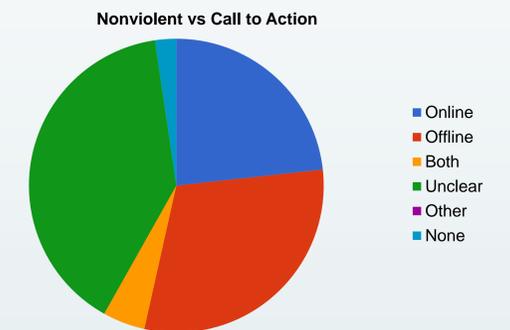


As the chart below indicates, a majority of the tweets did not feature any variations of media, and the "unclear" option was simply chosen when the post included an external link, but didn't directly or obviously indicate its contents.



Conclusion

Even as the #OccupyWallSt movement was relatively unclear in its presence of mobilization or calls to action, further comparative analysis shows encouraging results. The group appeared to be indicating much more about who they were, rather than what they did, but the rhetorical language featured generally non-violent, positive ideologies.



The days of one individual acting as the spokesperson for an entire group, may be a fleeting element of the past. Followers of the #OccupyWallSt movement included people from all walks of life and from all around the country, yet their ideas were able to be shared with literally anyone who was willing to read them.

This movement, in comparison to those throughout history, could be argued to be much less impactful in terms of an undeniable change following its life. However, that could be due to the relative infancy of the technological medium. The concepts and ideologies behind the occupy movement have since spanned across the globe. Technologies and the desires for rhetorical expansion will likely only continue to evolve and intersect.

Acknowledgements

Chew, Sing C. "Historical Social Movements, Ecological Crisis and 'Other' World Views." *Journal of Developing Societies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2008, p. 31.

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