Instagram Power Users and their Effect on Social Movements

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Social movements, complex systems of informal but organized relationships that pursue a shared goal of social change, have existed for decades. Since the advent of the Internet, technology and social media have increasingly played a role in social movement development. Recent research indicates that "power users" - influential users with higher audience engagement - are an important faction of users on social media. Power users have been identified on Facebook and Twitter, but not on Instagram. Instagram is a particularly interesting platform to study as it differs from Facebook and Twitter in that it's image-based, can be anonymous, and likely appeals to a different demographic of users than those who primarily use Facebook or Twitter. We hypothesize that power users will be an identifiable segment on Instagram and that they can and do play a vital role in the success of social movement mobilization.

This research seeks to build on real-life social movements, social movement theory, and social media research to gain a deeper understanding of online activism and the role of the power user. Due to the prominence of images on this social network, examining the role of Instagram in social movements will likely speak to the role of emotion in social movements. This lack of such discussion is a major critique of social movement theory.

This study aims to first identify and define the "power users" on Instagram posting about social movements, then to understand the attitude and behaviors of these "power users" and how it differs from average users. We will do this by identifying patterns in Instagram content about social movements, "power" and "average" user survey results. We will also examine the posts through the analysis of images, captions, number of likes and other metrics. The results will inform subsequent research about Instagram that has been scarce.