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## **#BG4Unity: Testing the Effectiveness of a Social Media Activism Workshop**

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#BG4Unity: Testing the effectiveness of a social media activism workshop

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HONORS PROJECT

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media activism, the use of online media to advocate for a political or social issue, is a growing phenomenon. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube can create new opportunities for traditional and digital activists alike to advance their message (Obar, 2014). A prime example of how social media has created new opportunities for activism groups is the Kony 2012 Campaign by the Invisible Children's Organization. They uploaded a video to YouTube on Monday, March 5<sup>th</sup>. By Wednesday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, the group had raised over five million dollars, and the video had received over 70 million views (Obar, 2014). Social media has created a new platform for activists to share their message to make an impact, and activists are not the only people building social networks.

Botterill, Bredin, and Dun (2015) found that in the United States, 72% of young people are using social media, and that in 2007 only 30% of social media users accessed social networking sites once a day. By 2010, this statistic had grown to 67%. Young people, specifically ages 17-24, are the most engaged group of users on social media, and they are also one of the easiest demographics of people to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Terracina-Hartman, Bienkowski, Myers, & Kanthawala, 2013). Social media usage is rising, especially among 17-24 year old college students; therefore, it has become a huge platform to share messages and mobilize a large number of people. While people can use social media to catalyze positive change, there are also risks involved.

Researchers estimate that 97% of non-profit organizations are using social media; however, many of these organizations are lacking a sound strategy for their internet-based communication (Briones, Madden, & Janoske, 2013). This research shows that while being active and having a presence online is important, advocates and organizations need to utilize

effective communication strategies to reach people and change their attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. Another issue that faces those who participate in online activism is that those who consume social media often believe that online activism is only about raising awareness. Myer and Bray (2013) found that American culture is grounded upon the notion of “give” and “get.” Therefore, most people will not give money unless they receive something tangible in return. Due to this notion, it is important to make sure a call to action is included when posting messages surrounding activism to encourage those reading to make a difference (Terracina-Hartman, Bienkowski, Myers, and Kanthawala, 2013). Finally, when discussing diversity, which is often social, cultural and political, there are some issues to consider. Social media enables interactive feedback loops, and allows for fast communication (Obar, 2014). These feedback loops allow for others to respond to messages that are posted, and when messages about diversity are sent via social media, a variety of responses are received and many can be perceived as microaggressions that marginalize, trivialize, and/or deny others experiences. Therefore, it is important to educate people not only about social media, but also diversity and inclusion.

To create a more positive atmosphere online, it is important for social media users to be empowered on how to advocate for the causes they care about, the importance of diversity and inclusion, and how to create a positive atmosphere to allow others to share their opinions and learn from one another. These things can be taught in many different formats, and one that could be very successful is a social media workshop that focuses on sharing messages about diversity and inclusion, where the workshop is aimed at 17-24 year old college students as they are not only the most engaged user group on social media, but also a demographic that is one of the easiest to change attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Terracina-Hartman, Bienkowski, Myers, and Kanthawala, 2013). To discover if this method of educating social media users is effective, I will

design a workshop that focuses on developing social media activism skills and aims to increase participants' communication skills, social media efficiency, and knowledge about diversity.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Diversity**

Diversity is defined as the variability of ideas, values, beliefs, structures, and people (Ghosh, 2012). While the United States has benefitted hugely from diversity, with immigrants coming from all parts of the world; acts of discrimination persist (Ghosh, 2012). For example, Embrick, Walther, and Wickens (2007) documented a case where 90% of management at a company said they would not hire someone who they thought identified as homosexual. Therefore, to create a more inclusive society, people need to be educated about the positive impact diversity has on their communities, but also stereotypes, prejudice, biases, discrimination, and internalized oppression that reinforce the cycle of oppression. Diversity education is particularly important for college students. Throughout their college experience, students develop their own worldview (Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, & Maxwell, 2009) and often interact with people from more diverse backgrounds; therefore, it is an appropriate time to expose and educate students about diversity and how to foster inclusive environments. By educating college students about diversity, they will be (a) better prepared for their professional careers, (b) stronger global citizens, and (c) more likely to stay at their institution and graduate (Sorensen, Nagda, Gurin, & Maxwell, 2009).

Clark (2011) argued that it is critical to the United States' continued competitiveness in the world economy to have a workforce that is not only diverse in composition but is also highly culturally competent. Students need to be educated about and exposed to diversity to become culturally competent, and the college classroom is the central location for this learning to occur

(Patton, Shahjahan, & Osei-Kofi, 2010). Umbach and Kuh (2006) reported that “diversity enhances the educational experience of all students” (p. 169). By learning about diversity and the issues surrounding it, students gained increased cognitive growth that benefits them beyond the classroom and into their professional roles in their careers. It was also noted that experience interacting with others who are different from themselves made students more comfortable working with diverse individuals (Miles, Hu, & Dotson, 2013). This is extremely important for students as they move into the professional world, because it is highly likely that they will work with or for people who are different from them, and they must be comfortable communicating with people from diverse backgrounds. Students who were exposed to more diversity experiences reported greater relative gains in both critical and active thinking (Umbach, & Kuh, 2006).

In addition, diversity education develops students into global citizens. When colleges and universities have diverse student populations, students will be more likely to interact with someone from a different background. These diverse learning environments give students the opportunity to improve their intergroup communication and gain an understanding about the realities of the multicultural world in which they live and work (Umbach, & Kuh, 2006). However, students will not always come across these interactions alone, and diverse communities will not always create a welcoming and affirming climate. To better prepare students for involvement in a global society, active and intentional supports for students to develop understanding and knowledge of diverse populations is needed to allow meaningful interactions outside of the conventional classroom setting (Sorensen et al., 2009). Diversity programming (i.e., events that are hosted with the goal to help increase attendees’ understanding of diversity and open them to new ideas and cultures), such as diversity workshops and cultural

events, can leave a lasting impact on students. By gaining the experiences offered by these programs, students were reported to continue to embody an awareness of diversity long after they graduated (Miles et al., 2013). Overall, it was said that “as a result of experiencing diversity in college, students learn how to work effectively with others and how to participate actively and contribute to a democratic society” (Umbach, & Kuh, 2006, p. 170).

Diversity education and exposure to diversity play a major role in helping students become global citizens. It also impacts a student’s likelihood to stay at their institution and graduate. Umbach and Kuh (2006) expressed that students’ experiences with diversity positively affected retention rates and degree aspirations. Bowman (2014) stated that openness to diversity is directly related to first-to-second year retention. It was reported that students who experienced diversity were more likely to stay at their institution. While the retention of students is important, diversity experiences and education also play a role in graduation rates. Hicklin and Meier (2008) found that increased minority representation in policy making was positively associated with graduation rates in the K-12 public education system. They concluded that because of the similarities between higher education and K-12 public education policy, by increasing the representation of minorities in the policy making, college and university graduation rates would increase. Exposing students to diversity is incredibly important because it not only helps them gain the skills needed to be successful in our multicultural society, but they are also more likely to be retained by their institution and go on to graduate and obtain a degree. Knowledge about diversity is not only important in face-to-face communication, but it is also a factor in online communication, specifically playing a large role in cyberbullying.

### **Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is the use of online communication media, such as text messages, instant messaging, social media, and personal websites or blogs, to promote repeated, hurtful behaviors by a group or individuals with intent to harm others (Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011). While bullying is traditionally thought of as something that takes place on an elementary school playground, it continues into higher education. There are many examples of cyberbullying that have occurred on college campuses throughout the United States. One example involved a first year student at Rutgers University. In late 2011, he asked his roommate if he could use their room for a visit with a male guest. The roommate granted permission, but before leaving set up his computer's webcam so he could view what was going on in the room via the internet from across the hall. The student's roommate then shared what he saw via the webcam, an intimate encounter with another man, over Twitter and made the video viewable by others. After finding out he had been watched, the student committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge in New York City (Washington, 2015).

Cyberbullies use social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter, and texting on cell phones to intentionally hurt others. It was reported that many victims of cyberbullying in a higher education setting have been targeted based on their race or sexual orientation, and victims reported that being cyberbullied made them feel angry, made it harder for them to concentrate, and made them consider dropping out of college (Washington, 2015). Binder and Mansfield (2013) noted that many companies in the United States will terminate employees due to misconduct on social media. However, it was also expressed that many employees of American companies are not aware that they could lose their job or be disciplined because of how they portray themselves on social media. Therefore, education and awareness of the issue of cyberbullying is needed in higher education environments (Washington, 2015). Due to these

findings, it can be concluded that students need to be educated on using social media responsibly to decrease the likelihood that they unintentionally bully or offend someone while using social media. Not only is it important to understand how diversity and diversity education impacts and benefits students, we must also understand how students receive the messages being communicated to them. The elaboration likelihood model, which is discussed in the theoretical framework section, explains what people need to process persuasive messages.

### **BG4Unity**

BG4Unity is a social media campaign that was launched in early 2015. The goal of the campaign is to promote unity and to use social media take a stand against stereotypes, prejudices, biases, discrimination, and hate. Members of the campaign also work to provide support to those who have been impacted by microaggressions, microassaults, prejudices, and discrimination. BG4Unity encourages people, not only members of the community in Bowling Green, OH, to share positive messages and shatter stereotypes in order to make online communities, like Facebook and Twitter, safe spaces for everyone. The campaign calls for people to post messages to social media platforms and asks them to include #BG4Unity and post social media activism snapshots. A snapshot is when someone shares a picture of themselves, or another, holding a piece of paper with a written message on it. BG4Unity has taken the fight against discrimination onto social media. Instead of attacking others for spreading hate, the goals are to increase the number of positive messages shared online, let others know they are not alone, challenge stereotypes, and to educate the community about diversity and the importance of everyone being unique. Two theories, the elaboration likelihood model and the dual process model of message production have been used to help members of the campaign to create persuasive messages.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Elaboration Likelihood Model**

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is a dual-process model that explains how recipients process persuasive messages (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). ELM argues that the degree to which a person elaborates (i.e., systematically and critically thinks about) a message will affect subsequent attitudinal change (Lane, Miller, Brown, & Vilar, 2013). In this model, there are two routes through which a message can be processed: a central and a peripheral route. ELM says that when someone has sufficient levels of motivation and ability, they will process a message using the central route. If they are not motivated or able, they will process the message via the peripheral route (Lowry et al., 2011). The use of the term elaboration comes from the amount of relative thinking that a receiver gives to a persuasive message. High relative thinking, or elaboration, leads to the central route. Low relative thinking, or elaboration, leads to the peripheral route (Lane et al., 2013).

**Central processing.** For someone to process a message using the central route, they must be both highly motivated and able. When using the central processing route, the message receiver will process information deeply using careful thought and logic. They will examine the quality of the presenter's argument. If the argument is of high quality, then it is more likely that the message will alter the receiver's attitudes and beliefs (Lowry et al., 2011). When the receiver is motivated and the content of the message is important to them the message will be processed centrally (Heppner et al., 1995). For example, when someone is advocating for the benefits of diversity, the receiver could be motivated because they have a diverse group of friends who they value and have active listening and cognitive thinking skills making them able to process the message. Therefore, this receiver will process the message centrally, and it is more likely they will not only agree with the message producer, but they will be more likely to retain the information long term and possibly change their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs.

**Peripheral processing.** Receivers who are not able or motivated will process messages via the peripheral route. When processing messages peripherally, the presenter's characteristics are more important in altering the receiver's attitudes and beliefs than the content of the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). Some characteristics that are taken into consideration when processing messages peripherally are a presenter's credibility, attractiveness, and trustworthiness (Heppner et al., 1995). Lowry and colleagues (2011) reported that when processing messages peripherally, shortcuts and emotions are used for decision-making. For example, someone may be listening to a diversity advocate; however, they are not motivated because they are from a small town of all white people and do not value diversity, but they find the message producer very attractive so they listen anyway. The receiver processes the message peripherally, because they are not motivated and they do not retain the information long term. These shortcuts move the focus away from the content of the message and move it toward superficial attributes, such as the source of the message.

**Outcomes.** The route that a message is processed also has an effect on persuasive outcomes. When receivers are motivated and able, they will process messages via the central route. Persuasion from the central route is more deeply rooted, resistant to counterarguments, longer lasting, and a better predictor of behavior (Lowry et al., 2011). While the central route results in longer lasting attitudinal change, the peripheral route yields the opposite results. Receivers who are unmotivated or unable to process messages via this route, the results are not as positive as the results of the central route. When persuasion is processed by the peripheral route it is done much faster; however, changes in attitudes and beliefs are not as long lasting; receivers are more susceptible to counter-arguments, and behavior cannot be predicted (Lowry et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be concluded that when producing persuasive messages, more

positive results are gained when receivers process messages via the central route, allowing for longer lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes compared to the peripheral route. Not only is it important to understand how messages are received, but also what those producing messages need to be able to do to create a persuasive message that can create attitudinal and behavioral change.

### **Dual-Process Theory of Message Production**

The dual-process theory of message production posits that persuaders need to be both motivated and able to produce effective messages (Hanasono et al., 2016). When educating social media users how to create effective anti-hate messages on social media, advocates will need to have the ability to do so, including sufficient knowledge of diversity, diversity-related language, and access to social media. First, social media users need to understand what diversity is and the benefits that it has on oneself, institutions, societies, and our globally connector world. Social media message creators also need to have an understanding of diversity-related language. They must understand how to use language to positively discuss diversity using a mediated communication platform. For example, using inclusive language, such as y'all when addressing a group of more than one gender or partner when referring to a significant other, creates a safe space for everyone because it does not automatically set an expectation on how someone must identify. Having an understanding about the #BG4Unity campaign will give our social media users added ability to participate in the diversity conversation and allow them to be a part of an online community all working to share positive messages about diversity and reduce hateful messages on social media. The last factor to having the ability to produce messages is social media access and efficacy; advocates must know how to use social media to advocate against discrimination.

Persuaders need to have the ability to produce effective messages; however, they also need to be motivated. Social media users are motivated to create diversity messages when the content is relevant to them (Hanasono et al., 2016). When message producers identify with the issue, they are more likely to be motivated to contribute to the conversation. Also, when social media users identify as allies to those affected by the issue, they will also be motivated to produce effective messages. Therefore, to motivate message creators, they need to be educated on why diversity is relevant to everyone, including themselves.

### **Diversity and Social Media Activism Training**

There are three perspectives to diversity training as outlined by Alhejji, Garavan, Carbery, O'Brien, and McGuire (2015): the business case, social justice, and learning. The business case perspective argues that employers do not want to invest in diversity training, because they lack an understanding of its benefits. The social justice perspective emphasizes the impact of equity, equal opportunity, and fair treatment. This approach challenges organizations to address racism, gender exclusions, and religious and sexual orientation and identity intolerance. The learning perspective reiterates that learning outcomes are important. Positive and negative learning outcomes were identified. Positive outcomes included increased self-knowledge, skills to work with different groups, and the ability to work with different cultures. Negative outcomes include increased interpersonal conflict, and negative interpersonal conflicts (Alhejji et al., 2015).

Through their meta-analysis, Alhejji and colleagues (2015) found that learning outcomes including greater knowledge and awareness of diversity issues, changed attitude towards diversity, and increased diversity behaviors and skills to handle diversity issues. Creating training that focuses on and achieves these learning outcomes is important in diversity education.

Achieving these outcomes will allow participants to have a greater impact on creating a society that understands diversity and has an awareness, has positive attitude towards diversity and understand its benefits, and when people have increased diversity behaviors and skills they will not only be able to better handle diversity issues in person, but also on online platforms like social media.

Colquitt, LePine, and Noe (2000) reported that there were many factors that related to outcomes of training. Personality variables had a moderate to strong relationship with the motivation to learn and learning outcomes. There was also a strong relationship between the locus of control and motivation, indicating that those with an internal locus of control display higher motivation levels, and individuals with an external locus of control had higher transfer levels and learned more (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000). Achievement motivation and the motivation to learn had a moderate relationship. Achievement motivation also had weak to moderate relationships with post-training self-efficacy, an individual's belief that they are capable of organizing and executing the actions needed to produce given results (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000), and reactions. Pre-training self efficacy was reported to have a moderate to strong relationship with training outcomes and motivation to learn (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000).

Results of their meta-analysis showed that many of the variables correlated with the important variables in a training context, like declarative knowledge, skills acquisition, post-training self-efficacy, motivation to learn, and transfer among others. Age was also a factor in motivation to learn and learning. Older trainees demonstrated lower motivation, learning, and post-training self-efficacy than younger participants (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000). These are important factors to understand when working in a college setting. Understanding that our

younger participants might have higher motivation levels to learn and increased post-training self-efficacy is important when creating a workshop which will be implemented in a college setting.

There are many barriers to effective communication and activism on social media. First, those producing messages do not always understand social media (Obar, 2014). It was also reported that a lack of strategy, not having specific measurable goals for the use of social media, also caused ineffective activism online (Briones, Madden & Janoske, 2013). It is important to address the speed that social media moves and that messages that are produced can get lost (Briones et al., 2013). These barriers all affect how they need to be trained to produce messages that are effective in creating change. When training individuals how to produce effective social media messages, it is first important to help them understand what social media is and how it works. Second, a strategy needs to be implemented to outline the types of messages that are going to be produced, what platforms to use, and when to post, and finally it is important to address the speed that social media moved because it is so fast that movements online can disappear much faster than traditional activism movements.

Overall, when creating a workshop to train attendees on diversity and social media, learning outcomes need to be created and focused on to produce better training outcomes as a whole. Understanding what affects individuals' motivation and how to motivate them is important as well, because for training to be successful, the attendees need to be motivated to learn to achieve the learning outcomes. Finally, understanding the barriers that social media creates for activists will help those developing training workshops understand what points are important to convey to those they are training so they continue to be motivated to make a difference.

In this study, I hypothesize that:

H1: After completing a workshop on social media advocacy and diversity, participants will have an increased appreciation for diversity.

H2: After completing a workshop on social media advocacy and diversity, participants will have increased their social media activism skills.

H3: Individuals who complete a workshop on social media advocacy and diversity will (a) be more appreciative of diversity and (b) have stronger social media activism skills than individuals who do not complete the workshop.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study is to test if a theoretically grounded workshop on social media advocacy and diversity will increase participants' social media effectiveness and appreciation of diversity. Featuring two conditions, an experimental and control group; participants in the experimental condition completed the social media activism and diversity workshop, while participants in the control condition were not exposed to any treatment. Due to logistical limitations, participants will not be randomly assigned to each group.

### **Participants**

Participants ( $N = 198$ ) were college students at a medium-sized Midwestern university. Participants in the experimental group ( $n = 59$ ) were either enrolled in COMM 3030 or a member of a student organization. COMM 3030 is an upper level communication course that focuses on teaching students about persuasion and the theories that surround it. Members of student organizations, like We Are 1 Team, World Student Association, Black Student Union, and Latino Student Union, were also recruited to participate in the experimental group. Participants

in the control group ( $n= 139$ ) were enrolled in COMM 2010 or recruited through campus emails and announcements. COMM 2010 is an introductory communication course that aims to introduce students to the theories used by communication scholars. Participants for the control group will also be recruited by campus emails and announcements where information about the study will be sent out to all member of the campus community.

Participants included 71 men, 121 women, and 1 trans\*person; five individuals elected not to report their gender. Seventeen participants self identified as African American or Black, 4 Asian, 2 Latino/a, 5 multiracial, 153 White, and 17 who did not report their race. 165 participants' self identified as straight/heterosexual, 4 gay/lesbian, 5 bisexual, 4 asexual, 1 pansexual, and 19 elected to not report their sexual orientation. Participants also self reported their religions affiliation: 136 Christian, 3 Jewish, 7 Atheist, 6 Agnostic, 1 Muslim, 1 Hindu, and 45 who chose not to report.

### **Procedure**

All procedures and measures affiliated with this research project were first approved by Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). Participants in the experimental group completed a 75 minute, face-to-face, workshop led by Drew Ashby-King and/or Dr. Lisa Hanasono. The workshop began with informed consent and all participants signed that they understood that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Those who gave consent then completed a pre-test measure. After completing the pre-test measure, participants completed the workshop where they discussed diversity and social media activism and participated in activities that aided in increasing their knowledge, appreciation and understanding on both topics. Participants then indicated their

responses on the study's post-test measures, and their participation was complete after they finish the debriefing form.

Control group participants completed an online survey. They began by providing their informed consent. They then answered questions and completed the outcome measures. Participants in the control group did not take part in the diversity and social media activism workshop or any other kind of intervention.

### **Measures**

I used an adapted version of Chen and Starosta's (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. Intercultural sensitivity is defined as someone's motivation to appreciate, understand, and accept difference among cultures (Chen & Starista, 2000). Chen and Starosta (2000) created and tested a 24 item scale to test intercultural sensitivity. A five point Likert scale was used, where five indicated that the participant strongly agreed with the statement and one meant the participant strongly disagreed with the statement. To measure social media activism skills, I used a social media activism questionnaire that consisted of 11 items. A five point Likert scale was also used for this scale, where five indicated the participant strongly agreed with the statement and one meant the participant strongly disagreed with the statement. The reliability of each scale was acceptable ( $\alpha > .70$ ). The variables' descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. To view each measure, please see Appendix A

### **RESULTS**

A series of paired and independent samples t-tests were run to compare the the results of both groups. Confirming this study's first hypothesis, participants who completed the workshop reported an increased appreciation of diversity,  $t(177) = 2.91, p = .004$ . The results of H1 are presented in Figure 1. Confirming the study's second hypothesis, a paired sample t-test indicated

that participants who completed the workshop had increased social media activism skills,  $t(58) = 7.16, p < .001$ . The significant increase in means between the pre- and post-test of the experimental group as seen in Figure 2.

Finally, the results from an independent samples t-test confirmed H3. Individuals who completed the workshop had (a) more knowledge about diversity and (b) stronger social media activism skills than participants in the control group,  $t_{\text{diversity appreciation}}(177) = 2.91, p = .004$ , and  $t_{\text{social media activism skills}}(189) = 6.07, p < .001$ . Figure 3 shows that the experimental group's scores were higher than the control groups' scores. Thus, all three hypotheses were supported showing that attending and participating in a social media activism and diversity workshop helped increase students social media activism skills and their appreciation of diversity in their community.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Implications**

The results of this study show that giving students a space to learn and discuss social media activism and diversity is critical in enhancing online advocacy and its effectiveness. Interventions like this project's workshop can increase college students' appreciation of diversity and social media activism skills. This study connects to many past studies and extends on their findings. Openness to diversity is connected to the first-to-second year retention of college and university students (Bowman, 2014; Umbach and Kuh, 2006) and the outcome of this study show that workshops about social media activism and diversity can help improve students' diversity appreciation helping create a better campus climate for all. The workshop developed for this study increased participants' appreciation of diversity. The outcome of this study shows that

implementing a workshop like the one developed for this study could have a direct positive impact on the retention rate of students in a college or university setting.

Cyberbullying is present in higher education and increasing the awareness of its present is important (Washington, 2015). The results of this study show that a workshop focusing on diversity and social media activism could counter cyberbullying and decrease the amount that occurs, and increase the support of those who are bullied online. Participants showed an increased awareness of diversity. This result shows that by implementing workshops about diversity and social media activism students will have the resources to better understand that the differences they have compared to their peers are valuable. This would then lead to a decrease in the amount of cyberbullying that occurs because students would hold more value for those who are different from them and the amount of support they give those who are different from them would be increased. The study also showed this type of workshop increases participants' social media activism skills. Increasing students' social media activism skills can help increase the online support that those who are publically cyberbullied receive. This would occur because their peers would have the skills to advocate for them and to change others attitudes and beliefs to not only support those who are cyberbullied, but also stop the cyberbullying for the future.

### **Limitations**

While this study's results were significant and have many positive implications, there are also some limitations with its design and method. The study used a quasi-experimental design, where participants were not randomly assigned into the control and experimental groups. Therefore, it is possible that the results for the third hypothesis could have been due to something other than the intervention (workshop). In relation to this limitation, it is important to note that participants recruited through COMM 3030 participated in the intervention at the beginning of

the semester (i.e., prior to starting any coursework relating to activism and persuading others with social media).

Second, the survey design used did not allow for a pre- and post-test comparison of diversity appreciation. Therefore, the studies found that there was a statistically significant difference between the diversity awareness for the control group, and the post-test of the experimental group. However, due to the survey design there is some possibility that this difference is because of something other than the intervention (workshop). To improve this for future research, a pre-test for diversity appreciation should be administered to those in the experimental group that can then be compared to their post-test results for the same scales to improve the results and allow for a more accurate comparison.

### **Future Research Direction**

Future research will be required to further learn of the impact of a social media activism and diversity workshop beyond increasing participants' social media activism skills and diversity appreciation. Future studies should extend on this research by using an experimental design and randomly assigning participants to control and experimental conditions. Looking forward, researchers should implement a workshop like the one created for this study and then not only test the effectiveness of the study, but seek to see if the workshop effects the retention rate of students who attend the workshop compared to students who do not complete it. This would allow researchers to discover if a workshop similar to the one created for this study would truly impact student retention rates.

Furthermore, to extend the research on social media activism, future studies should look at individuals' engagement with activism online beyond their participation in the intervention. Discovering the level of participants' participation in social media activism after completing the

skills training workshop would not only increase the understanding of the effectiveness of the intervention. It could also be identified if the messages shared throughout the workshop were considered persuasive, which would impact the higher likelihood that it helps create positive attitudes, beliefs, and behavior toward diversity issue. Overall, future studies should strive to extend this research beyond the workshop itself and test the outcomes of the workshop on the impact it has on students' retention at their institution and persistence to graduation, and if the workshop instilled long-term change in participants, changed their behaviors, and increased their participation in social media activism.

### **CONCLUSION**

Online communication, such as social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), texting, instant messaging, and e-mailing, have become a common part of 21<sup>st</sup> century everyday life and is no longer just an accepted form of communication, but a necessary one (Caron & Light, 2015). Cyberbullying is occurring on college campuses because of differences between students like race and sexual orientation (Washington, 2015); therefore, students on these campuses need to be educated on the value of their differences and how to effectively communicate online especially when they disagree with their peers. Implementing a social media activism and diversity workshop will help students become more aware of the diversity in their community and on their campus, increase their social media activism skills, and in turn hopefully have a positive impact on campus climate. This plays a vital role in enhancing not only retention of those students who participate in the workshop, but also gives them the skills to communicate in a positive manner online on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook and other members of the community at large.

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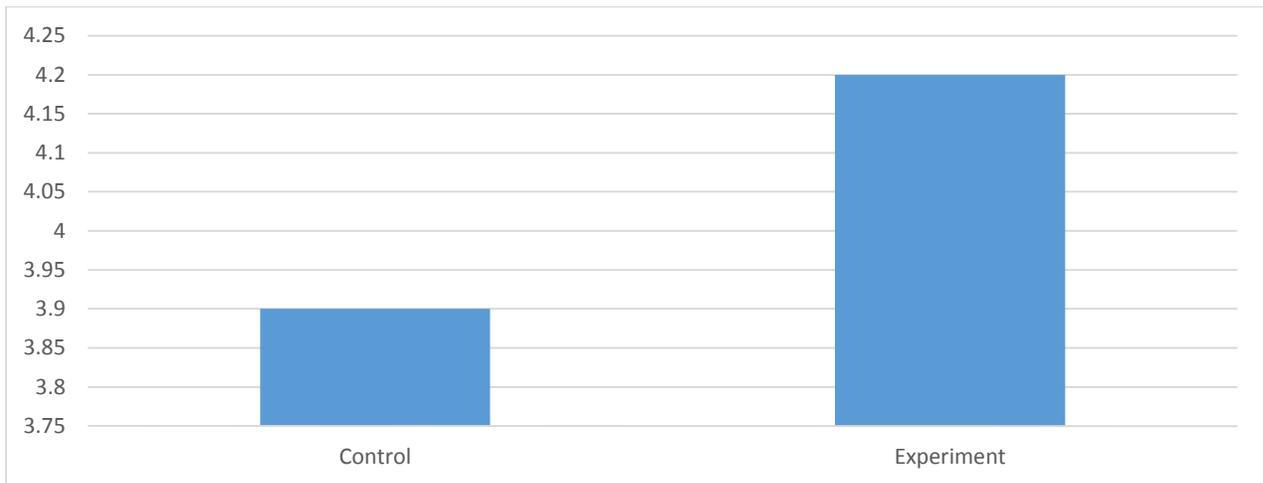
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**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

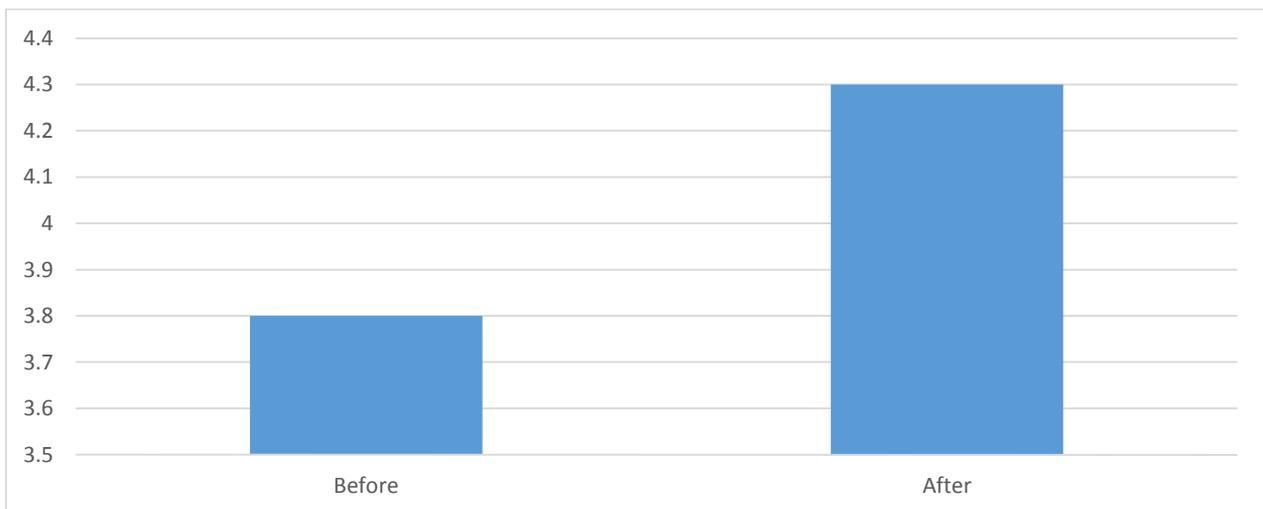
Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Intercultural Sensitivity	16.03	2.40	.711
Social Media Activism Skills	14.81	2.98	.832

**Figure 1. H1 Results: Diversity Appreciation**



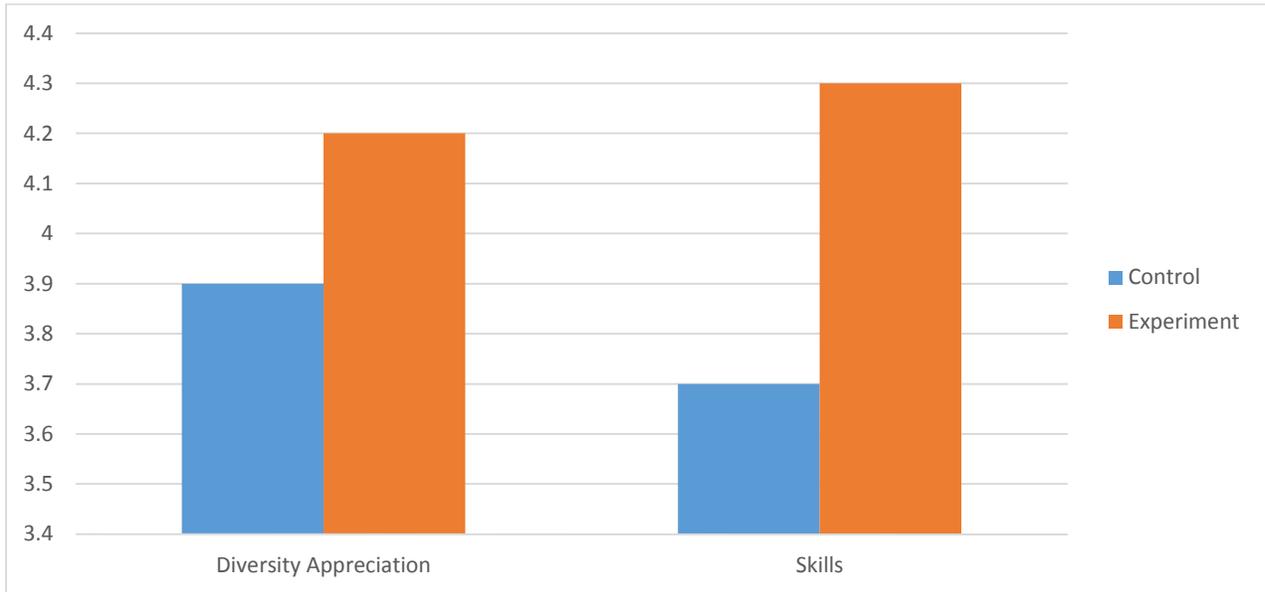
Mean of Diversity Appreciation scale on a 5 point Likert Scale.

**Figure 2. H2 Results: Social Media Activism Skills**



Mean of Social Media Activism Skills scale on a 5 point Likert Scale.

**Figure 3. H3 Results: Comparison of Control and Experiment Group**



Means of Diversity Appreciation and Social Media Activism Skills on a 5 point Likert Scale.

**APPENDIX A****Intercultural Sensitivity Scale**

1. Knowing about the experiences of people different races makes me more aware of myself.
2. Knowing someone from a different ethnic group broadens my understanding of myself.
3. I can best understand someone after I get to know how s/he is both similar and different from me.
4. It's often hard to find things in common with people from another generation.
5. I am interested in knowing people who speak more than 1 language.
6. I attend events where I might get to know people from different racial backgrounds. I would be interested in participating in activities involving people with disabilities.
7. I don't know many people from other countries.
8. I often feel a sense of kinship with persons from different ethnic groups.
9. I am comfortable getting to know people from different countries.
10. When I listen to people of different races describe their experiences in this country, I am moved.
11. It's really hard for me to feel close to a person from another race.

**Social Media Activism Questionnaire**

1. Social media activism is an effective way to raise others' awareness.
2. Social media activism is an effective way to advocate for social/political issues.
3. Social media activism is an effective way to change people's behaviors
4. I enjoy participating in social media activism.
5. My friends approve of social media activism.
6. My family supports my participation in social media activism.
7. People in my social network think that it is okay to engage in social media activism.
8. I know how to support an issue through social media activism.
9. I am capable of using social media to advance a specific social or political cause.
10. I know how to use social media to engage in social media activism.
11. I can use social media to persuade people to support a particular political or social issue.

**APPENDIX B****INFORMED CONSENT SHEET****Study Title: Social Media Activism**

Principal Investigator: Lisa K. Hanasono, Assistant Professor

Student Researcher: Drew Ashby-King

Department of Communication, School of Media and Communication

Bowling Green State University

**Informed Consent Form for all individuals who wish to complete this study's online survey.**

**Introduction:** As researchers in the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), we are interested learning about how people engage in social media activism. You must be at least 18 years to participate in this study.

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this research project is to examine how people use social media to promote diversity and inclusion. Consisting of 1 online survey, participation should take approximately 10-15 minutes. We ask our participants to please complete the survey in one session, as the online survey software does not allow individuals to save their answers and restart the survey at a later time. In this study, you will be asked to complete some questionnaires about yourself and your experiences with social media activism.

All participants who complete this study can enter a drawing to win one of five \$20 Amazon gift cards. In addition, BGSU students who are enrolled in participating Media and Communication courses may be eligible to earn 1% extra credit for completing both surveys. Students enrolled in COMM 2010 can earn 10 points for their Communication Application Assignment or 1% extra credit by completing this survey.

**Voluntary nature:** Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions (or not do a particular task) or discontinue participation at any time. Deciding to participate or not will not affect you (grades/class standing/employment) or your relationship with BGSU.

**Risks:** Participation in this study involves minimal risk. As mentioned above, we will take every possible precaution to safeguard your confidentiality and ensure your privacy. In addition to separating your name and contact information from your answers, all self-identifying information provided through your questionnaire answers will be removed or replaced with alternative pseudonyms. For example, if you specify the name of another person or a specific organization, we will replace those names with pseudonyms to protect all parties' identities. If you do experience any distress from your participation, we recommend contacting the Crisis Intervention Center, a 24-hour hotline at (419) 352-1545. BGSU students who wish to seek help may visit the BGSU Counseling Center; they are located on campus in room 104 of the College Park Office Building. You can reach them by phone at (419) 372-2081.



**Confidentiality Protection:** All of your responses will be kept confidential on a secure online survey site; only the Principal Investigator will have access to your specific responses. At the beginning of the survey, you will be prompted to enter some basic information that will be used to construct a pseudonym. To protect your privacy, all of your answers will be connected to your pseudonym. At the end of the survey, you will be prompted to enter your name, email address, and COMM course number in case you want to be entered for the Amazon gift card drawing or earn credit in a COMM course. After all data has been collected, the Principal Investigator will download the master data spreadsheet from the secure survey site. She will then remove all identifying information (e.g., names, contact information) from the data spreadsheet, so your specific answers will not be linked to your personal identity; it will only be linked to your pseudonym. The list of participants' names, email addresses, and course information will be kept on a separate document entitled "Confidential List of Participants." This document will be kept on a secure, password-protected computer; only the Principal Investigator will have access to this document. The Confidential List of Participants will be destroyed within one month after data is completely collected and the drawing of Amazon gift cards is conducted.

The cleaned data spreadsheet (i.e., that lacks any identifiable information) will be kept securely on password protected computers by the Principal Investigator. As with all online surveys, we encourage participants to complete this study using a personal computer, as some employers may use tracking software; also, please avoid leaving a survey open if using a public computer or a computer that others may have access to. Finally, please make sure to clear your browser cache and page history after completing this survey.

**Contact information:** If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Dr. Lisa K. Hanasono, Principal Investigator, at [LisaKH@bgsu.edu](mailto:LisaKH@bgsu.edu) or by phone at (419) 372-3512. You may also contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or [hsrb@bgsu.edu](mailto:hsrb@bgsu.edu), if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research. Thank you for your time.

**Indication of Consent:**

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. By clicking "NEXT", I agree to participate in this research.

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