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5-2023

Legitimate and Deceptive Media: An Analysis of Sources used in Conjunction with #DefundingthePolice using Twitter API

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Legitimate and Deceptive Media: An Analysis of Sources used in Conjunction with
#DefundingthePolice using Twitter API

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

The idea of defunding the police has been circulating on social media for the past few years. This thesis seeks to analyze what types of sources people use in conjunction with the #DefundthePolice hashtag to define their understanding of defunding the police. Using Twitter API to search for #DefundthePolice, Tweets were analyzed and rated based on the credibility of links embedded within each post. Each link was assigned a credibility rating of one through three, one meaning not credible, two meaning somewhat credible, and three meaning credible. Each link was classified into one of eight categories: news, statements, advertisements, advertisements/propaganda, U.S. Government Official, pictures, videos, and YouTube. Of the Tweets that were able to be given a credibility score, eight to ten percent of links included in the Tweets included credible sources.

Keywords: #DefundthePolice, Social Media, Criminal Justice, Credibility

DEDICATION

To my family and friends.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to my advisor Dr. Hill for leading me through this process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA   American Psychological Association

API   Application Programming Interface

BLM   Black Lives Matter

USM   The University of Southern Mississippi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN May 25, 2020 at the hands of a police officer, was an impactful event that led many large groups and leaders to call for change in policing. Protests were organized across the country and consumed cities and communities. Some of the main organizers of these protests were part of a group named Black Lives Matter (BLM). BLM represents young men and women who are a part of a social movement to combat racial problems within the country (Washington & Henfield, 2019). A slogan, "Defund the Police," evolved from the urge to combat police brutality by involving those both in the protests and within the media in the fight for racial justice, as the protesters understood it. The George Floyd incident caused society to voice demands to defund the police, which in turn caused the public to challenge the authority of police (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). These demands were taking place despite the COVID-19 pandemic, both through social media platforms and in-person through protests, and in some cases, riots (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). When someone needed help even during the protests, police were still called, raising an interesting contradiction (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022).

Social media, including Twitter, was the prevalent communications strategy employed by the protesters. The related #DefundthePolice hashtag was, and still is, a way protesters attempted to gain support for their social movement. In the past, protests have influenced the attitudes of society and how they view information and form an opinion for themselves, and social media has a very similar influence (Wouters, 2018). When it comes to protests and the media, protesters have historically tried to portray five elements: unity, commitment, numbers, diversity, and worthiness (Wouters, 2018). The

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goal of all the elements combined is to make one cohesive group of the same beliefs that can be easily identified. The use of hashtags, such as #DefundthePolice, is a prime example of individuals working together to put forward one message and spread it through Twitter and other social media. An example is when someone uses a hashtag, such as #DefundthePolice, all posts that include that hashtag will appear depending on when they were posted and if they were retweeted.

Combating racial injustice was the main idea of the protests and related social media surrounding #DefundthePolice. BLM, the primary group using the hashtag, includes a diverse group of people who were involved in various protests across the country (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). The group's use of the hashtag led to public questioning of its meaning and a common concern for what could happen if the police were defunded. Slogans such as "Defund the Police" are not merely used to demonstrate goals, but also to directly call for action and policy change. The slogan itself grabs people's attention and bonds people together over the desire for change (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). Understanding how groups are using this hashtag is essential because it can help us understand how other social movements that make use of similar slogans may operate in the future.

The overall goal of this research is to show how social media users understand "Defunding the Police" and where they are receiving their information from. In certain cases, the term "defund" has been misunderstood and/or used in a way to imply a need for more social services or money to be placed in other community needs than law enforcement. Another belief of the term "defund" is to establish a new meaning of police and how they operate based on what society deems as reasonable. The term "defund" has

also been thought to mean abolishing the police entirely. Different understandings of the statement can be problematic when it comes to relaying messages through social media due to the various ways "defunding" is being portrayed.

Social media posts often involve a number of news sources. News sources are a way for those who could not be present at the protest to get information, or a way for those who are using them on social media to provide evidence for their claims (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). Posts on various platforms, such as Twitter, can have a significant impact on people's lives, and the news sources posts included can help provide valuable information about how others have gained their perspectives. To examine how people use sources on Twitter in conjunction with the #DefundthePolice hashtag, the links in Tweets with the hashtag were examined based on the credibility of those sources. Rating the sources' credibility is important, because the credibility can give insight into the public's understanding of defunding the police.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

While the "Defund the Police" slogan has been well known since the start of the George Floyd protests, the relationship between the slogan and the news sources from which it draws support lacks in research. This chapter will examine the literature focused on the different types of defunding efforts put forth by advocates such as reformation, reallocation, disbandment, and abolition, as well as the media and its involvement in protests, law enforcement agencies, and the BLM movement itself. My goal is to establish how the media depicts the defunding advocated by many BLM supporters and how it can influence societal views based on what and how people share information through social media.

Media types, Goals, and History

In its beginnings, the internet allowed users to share messages, software, and data with each other in limited ways. However, by 2008, "75% of internet surfers used "social media" by joining social networks, reading blogs, or contributing reviews to shipping sites" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Not only can large news outlets use the internet to disperse information, but individuals can create their own platforms to share information from large news sources. Of the many types of social media platforms, blogs, content communities, and social networking sites are the most relevant for identifying credible sources shared within (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Blogs:

Personal views of history, events, and issues are often discussed in what is known as a "blog" (Gunter et al., 2009). In the past, blogs were used as forums or to express personal thoughts. They were used primarily for diaries and summaries (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). One of the goals of advancing social media has been to involve more people in political and personal affairs. The number of news blogs has increased over the years. Reddit, a website somewhat akin to a blog, is a place where people can share thoughts, photos, and other things such as links. Users can interact with posts by giving links a thumbs up or down. Reddit is an example of a blog that has seen an increase of news-related blog posts in recent years increasing 7% (Brooke Auxier & Anderson, 2021).

Content Communities:

Content communities are groups of people that share information between one another. The content being shared may include photos, PowerPoints, textbooks, and videos. Individuals do not need to have their own pages to be a part of the content community. Content Community platforms are one of the most popular forms of media today. Perhaps the best example of one of these types of communities is YouTube. Within the last three years, YouTube and other content community sites have seen an increase of use by Americans from 73% to 81% (Brooke Auxier & Anderson, 2021). With a growing number of more information was shared, which often involved sources linked or referenced. BLM has made an extensive use of this type of platform, specifically to share videos of protests and those involved and their actions. An example

of this is when content creators conduct their own interviews with people at a protest and their opinion and feelings are expressed.

Social Networking Sites:

Today, social networking sites are among the most popular media platforms. These sites give users the ability to talk to other users and share information or other users' posts with a group of people who "follow" them, or to a specific group who share similar interests with the user. Examples of social networking sites include Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram. People ages 18 to 29, roughly 84% use some form of social media sites, in comparison to around 81% of adults, ages 30 to 49 who use social media (Brooke Auxier & Anderson, 2021). As people get older however, the percentage of users decreases to around 45% for people over the age of 65 (Brooke Auxier & Anderson, 2021). The age usage in each platform may vary, but at least 72% of all Americans have used some type of social media in the last three years (Brooke Auxier & Anderson, 2021). An example of this type of media usage is when BLM used Twitter to share photos after a shooting to express concern and engage communities to demand action (Edrington & Lee, 2018).

Determining the Credibility of Sources

Information shared on the internet and in person can be misleading and is sometimes spread by those who have negative intentions (Nagura et al., 2006). Individuals must filter out misleading information to decide what is considered a credible source (Nagura et al., 2006). To help decipher what is/is not considered a credible source,

Nagura, Seki, Kando and Aono defined metrics to help code the credibility of a news article (2006). There were three metrics defined: commonality, objectivity, and numerical agreement. A more complete definition of each of these metrics is given below.

Commonality:

Sentences and contents of multiple articles that were based on the same topic and had similar structure and organization were closely examined. The publishing date was also a deciding creditability factor. Articles with more sentence similarity were found to include reliable information (Nagura et al., 2006).

Objectivity:

A "speculative clue score" is given to phrases within the article, that use certain words to describe the article's information and where the author may have received the information. Some objective phrases include "guarantee-with" and "expressing-policy." Examples of somewhat speculative phrases are tell, seem, highly possible, convincing, policy, and attitude. The objectivity score would be increased or decreased based on source types and how often key words are used to show credibility of article (Nagura et al., 2006).

Numerical Agreement:

Numbers involved in scenarios, such as the number of involved individuals, that help examine how accurate publishers were based on if the included numbers were in agreeance with various articles (Nagura et al., 2006).

Social Media Platform: Twitter

In this thesis project, the main goal is to examine what sources people use in conjunction with the phrase "Defund the Police" through Twitter posts. The analysis evaluates different news sources that were linked and/or referenced within the Tweets and attempts to understand why people use the sources they did and what message those sources were relaying. When it comes to research, Twitter is a popular tool for collecting data by monitoring and understanding what is happening around the world through its users.

Mislove, Lehmann, Ahn, Onnela and Rosenquist (2021) conducted a geographical, race, and gender study on Twitter users. Twitter offers great opportunities for research on society based on its popularity and availability of disclosed information; 91% of its users have their profile information public (Mislove et al., 2021). The available information may be limited to the individual's location, name, and their Tweets. Understanding the geographical, race/ethnicity, and gender on Twitter will help break down the Tweets and understand the characteristics of the users. It can be noted that when it comes to geographical data, Twitter can overlook in that aspect and overrepresent populations (Mislove et al., 2021). When it comes to gender and Twitter usage, males have a higher percentage of use than females. Ethnicity data was challenging for Mislove, Lehmann, Ahn, Onnela, and Rosenquist to analyze because of the lack of disclosed information on race (2021). This suggests that while Twitter is a good source of information, it is not truly representative of the general population. On the other hand, since many social movements make use of Twitter to reach a wider audience, it may in

fact be a good representation of those groups who engage in activism through the platform.

Social Media Biases

Impartiality is an important topic when it comes to media sources. Certain models and criteria can help determine if a source is impartial or not, which in turn may affect a source's credibility. Professional criteria, external criterial, output criteria, and audience criteria were certain media aspects that have previously been evaluated to determine bias within a source (Gunter et al., 2009). Professional criteria are the stories that were selected based on what will attract the most viewers. Cognitive biases play a role in this criterion in that innate psychological beliefs will strongly influence individual's opinions when viewing information from social media (Aaroe & Petersen, 2018). External criteria that include truthfulness and accuracy were the main components of this criteria. Facts were checked by directly observing and being present at an event or through experts. Using multiple sources that reported the same event, comparisons were made to see where they differ or if they were similar in facts. In reading the articles, experts were looking for "short-cuts" that were possibly being taken by the publishers. Output criteria includes pictures, phrases, styles, and other content that is used. This criterion includes content and discourse analysis. The quality of what is being put out into society was evaluated. The last criteria are audience criteria which focuses on consumers of news; people's understanding of the news and how they are influenced by the way articles are written. With the #DefundthePolice hashtag, individual influence could be observed by their responses and what they decided to share next.

Media and its Impact on Social Views of Defunding the Police

Mass media helps form the meaning of "Defund the Police" (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). The media can control what people see, how they view information and, in a way, alter their actions (Craig & Reid, 2022). The way someone responds, which can include actions and words, depends on their own understanding of "defunding" based on what they have seen in the media. According to Cobbina-Dungy et al., there were four central ideas of the phrase "Defund the Police" (2022). The ideas were reformation, reallocation, disbandment, or abolition. While each of these four ideas were different, most protesters' beliefs fall into one of them (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). We can see this demonstrated through various social media platforms. A more complete definition of each of these themes is given below.

Reformation:

To reform means to better something, that changes need to be made (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). An example of a reform act is the *George Floyd Justice in Policing Act* passed in 2020 by the United States House of Representatives. This act involves new policies and regulations such requiring body cameras and mandatory data collection of traffic stops.

Reallocation:

Reallocation refers to the transfer of funds from law enforcement to social services. In context, this is meant to provide services to a community, such as one-on-one help, mental and physical, and not just to police departments who may or may not be able

to help depending on resources available. The idea of reallocation helps to review how increased police funding has or has not reduced crime rates and the common practice of proactive policing and maintaining order. An example of common service mentioned all over social media is community policing (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022).

Disbandment:

Disbandment means to cut back on police departments, eventually eliminating whole departments and starting from newly developed systems with new polices enforced (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). By "cut back," more than half of funds, if not all, would be revoked with other agencies taking over areas currently covered by the police. Disbandment is the process of elimination of police units. A common thought that stems from "disbandment" is the ability to recreate a new department that society deems reasonable. This would include new policy and a whole new mission and meaning to policing in general.

Abolition:

Abolition refers to the complete and total end of policing; police would no longer be a part of society and policy. Individuals known as "abolitionists" have advocated for this change due to their belief in policing having its direct linage in slavery. The end goal for abolitionists is to create a society that solves issues on their own without the help of authoritative figures (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). In the media, people said, "abolish the police," or something similar without really knowing the consequences and/or benefits of doing so.

While there were many forms of defunding, individuals' beliefs in how far "defunding" should go plays a major role in the 'defunding the police' interpretations. These interpretations stem from the sources people use to help define their understanding of defunding, which is the significance of this thesis. Sources tend to lean in a certain direction depending on political status and the audience they are trying to reach. This affects credibility and overall societal understanding of what BLM is trying to implement. Understanding the different forms of defunding can help researchers gather information and relate to the data collected in order to understand why individuals may be using certain sources to relay information to others.

Race and Media Depictions of Law Enforcement

Throughout history in policing, we have seen various challenges specifically between ethnic and race, including mainly African Americans (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). When police organizations first formed, they were known as "slave patrols," eventually forming into organized police forces. This is one of several reasons African Americans have a hard time forming relationships with officers. According to Cobbina-Dungy, African Americans are less likely to have faith, respectfulness, and appropriateness in police then those of other ethnicities (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022).

Policing is a very complex and demanding job that includes many different roles and is still evolving differently in various areas around the United States (Brown, 2019).With policing evolving over time, technological advancement and changes of laws and standards have improved societal morals. (Brown, 2019). Within the past few years, more research between race and policing has been conducted due to the focus of policing

being shifted to race, particularly interactions with minority groups, mainly African Americans (Brown, 2019). The attitudes of people in communities of color show that race is a factor within the police-citizen relationship. Some factors that have been identified as relevant were use of force and arrests rates among minority communities. The belief that police mistreatment is racially biased can be seen more in the Latino and African American communities than the White communities; however, they are viewed differently between Latino and African Americans based on cultural hierarchy (Weitzer, 2010).

Researchers have been attempting to figure out how someone's race could potentially affect arrest rates within the United States. This research resulted in an insufficient amount of evidence to support the claim that African Americans have a higher chance of being arrested due to their race, which has been a topic in the media (Brown, 2019). In addition, it has been inferred by Brown (2019) that arrests mainly occur when the safety of others is at risk, when there is no compliance, and a serious violation of the law occurs (Brown, 2019).

Use of Force in Policing

The use of force regarding race has been a popular topic of coverage of policing in the media and has been the primary focus of the BLM movement and #DefundthePolice. Law enforcement's use of deadly force is seen in less than 2% of police encounters involving the force used to restrain someone during an arrest, physical or verbal force as well (Brown, 2019). When it comes to the implementation of standards and policies, law agencies have higher standards than other agencies due to the authority

bestowed on them from the government (Rockwell et al., 2020). Police training, including hands-on training, is an important aspect of law enforcement to ensure policy is being followed, especially when it comes to use-of-force and citizens behaviors (Rockwell et al., 2020). The types of common training by most, if not all departments in the United States include de-escalation practices and use of less lethal force. Some less lethal force examples include tasers and OC spray. In most use of force cases, researchers and individuals present have seen a less physical approach and more verbal commands and presence. Psychological and physiological responses focused on in officer training has shown the enhancement in use of discretion, performance, and awareness of officers during use of force and decision-making examples in Rockwell et al., 2020. The policies and training that police are given has been widely examined and some aspects have changed since the George Floyd incident, though it remains to be seen how effective these changes have been relative to policing or those promoting the "defunding" approach.

Nationwide Involvement and various Media Groups Views

'Black Lives Matter' was a phrase used by those who advocate for racial equality and show aversion to police brutality (Loader, 2021). In 2020, the phrase came back to life since the early 2000's and grew in popularity as a response to the George Floyd incident. Currently, there are about thirty chapters of the official BLM organization around the world (Loader, 2021). There is no established hierarchy in the group. The three core values of BLM are networking, horizontal organizing, and local autonomy, strategies, and tactics (Loader, 2021).

BLM is vocal about police brutality, but it has three overall demands: a recognizably liberal sensibility, democratic self-determination, and defunding the police (Loader, 2021). BLM's idea of defunding is commonly correlated with another common phrase from their movement called "Disempower, Divest, Disband" (Loader, 2021). This slogan can also be seen in social media used by protesters and those who are part of the movement.

Cobbina- Dungy, Chaudhuri, Lacourse and DeJong evaluated the protestors and broke them down into three separate categories: revolutionary protesters, intermittent protesters, and tourist protesters (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). Revolutionary protesters were defined as those who reported on social media when and where the protests were taking place, showing a commitment to the movement. Intermittent protesters were defined as those who participated in protests four or more times to show commitment. Lastly, the tourist protesters include those who have attended three or fewer protests and show a further interest in learning more about the events (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022).

These categories are important because they can help society and researchers to gather data on social media. Understanding the different roles of those involved in the defund the police movement can help viewers and researchers achieve a better understanding of purposes and influences on and to those who are apart of the movement. A big part of research on this topic is the effect on society. Trends and perceptions can easily be obtained on social media. The goal for both researchers and viewers are to understand what is happening, whether that be a protest or new media release, and possibly confirm information to be reliable and accurate.

There have been multiple ways those who use social media have viewed "Defunding the Police." Most ways include limiting law enforcement agencies' budgets and moving towards other services (Craig & Reid, 2022). These services, such as helping the homeless and those with addictions, would potentially provide homes for the homeless and mental health services to those who may not have proper resources. Opponents of the "Defund the Police" movement argue that taking away resources and money would cause damage or weaken society – in other words, that these changes would be anti-police rather than achieve the goals they set out (Craig & Reid, 2022). The limited resources available to law enforcement agencies, which can vary depending on their size, can potentially compromise public safety. This is especially concerning when considering the possible consequences of reducing these resources. Defunding the police would make the role of police much harder, due to some officers leaving the job due to consequential circumstances. These circumstances include lack of support, both physically and financially. A major issue that was predicted by researchers as a result of defunding in multiple areas of the media included 911 calls experiencing longer wait times and crime rates increasing due to the lack of police patrolling the area (Craig & Reid, 2022). When viewing both sides of the movement, the sources people use to find information and how they use the information for themselves or to influence others should be evaluated to make sure accurate information is being portrayed about the possible effects of defunding.

The BLM movement in the media reflects many different understandings of the overall goal and attitudes of citizens. However, using the slogan "Defund the Police" as a framing statement for BLM helps narrow down the overall goal of the group. This

statement is controversial but communicates the main goal of the group to gain support (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022).

Gaps of Police and Persons in the Media

Following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky in 2020, defunding the police continues to be a major topic not only in the United States, but all over the world (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). Protests, some peaceful and some violent, have taken place against the police and their policy. Studies have shown that those involved online and in person with the protests do not have one unified understanding of the slogan (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). Individual background, race, beliefs, and political views can play a role in someone's understanding.

The United States was also in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which had brought forward multiple challenges for not only police, but also those involved in the "Defund the Police" movement. Ralph et al. focused on officer relations in England during the pandemic, but much research was found to be similar to those actions in the United States and can be seen through the media. While some people wanted to defund the police, at the same time, many wanted police to enforce COVID-19 restrictions (Ralph et al., 2022). Police were faced with the challenge of new and ever-changing circumstances and asked to gauge priorities in another direction where society was lacking in enforcement (Ralph et al., 2022).

COVID-19 also presented a challenge for citizen-police relations. In early history, police officers could be see trying to mend and/or create relationships with citizens to maintain confidence (Ralph et al., 2022). Social media allows police to create

relationships, share positive updates and important information directly with the public

(Ralph et al., 2022). Having the strict rules during COVID-19 made it difficult for the

media to capture what was truly happening between police and citizens. Limited face-to-

face reaction and lockdowns not only restricted human interaction, but also what the

media captured. The media was a major outlet for people to receive information, not only

on this topic but general world events as well.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Twitter API

The Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) is a tool provided by Twitter to help researchers programmatically pull data from the platform, drawing from Tweets from around the world. In general, the API allows a limited number of Tweets to be pulled from the platform for free a day, but if additional access is desired, an application requesting access is required. Due to recent changes in rules and regulations regarding the Twitter API, this larger access was unavailable over the course of the study. However, with limited access, a sample of Tweets was able to be obtained, though it was limited in each search to the previous 7 days. Thus, a sample ranging in dates from March 2, 2023 to March 28, 2023 was gathered. Additionally, searches were able to be limited to those containing specific information, including hashtags. The sampling process is described in more detail below.

Subject: Tweets that include the #DefundthePolice and Links to Various Sources

Tweets that include #DefundthePolice between March 2, 2023 and March 28, 2023 were evaluated in the context of this study. Common hashtags that are also used were #abolishthepolice, #ACAB and #policebrutality. During the period of data collection, there were various numbers of Tweets in other languages which also used the #DefundthePolice hashtag. Although the same hashtag was used in the United States, these Tweets were possibly from events involving the police that were happening elsewhere in the world, so the Tweets in other languages were not included in this study.

Sample and Data Collection

The initial goal of this study was to follow the hashtag #DefundthePolice through 2020-2021; however, changes to Twitter API access limited the study range to March 2, 2023 to March 28, 2023. The hashtag was still prevalently used during this time, so this study accomplishes the same initial research goals along a different study timeline. While data was limited to a sample of Tweets each drawn from the 7 days prior to when the script was run, the data gathered still represents people from various backgrounds and numerous sources which include news, blogs, and other sharing platforms. The original sample of Twitters API's data that was pulled included Tweets and Re-Tweets containing the hashtag #DefundthePolice (the search ignores capitalization), as well as those with and without linked sources. Re-Tweets were eliminated for analysis, as they do not contain new information, and given this study's interest in the sources used within the Tweets, those containing no URLs were also discarded. The number of Tweets collected before the "no URLs" were discarded are shown in Table 1.

March 2, 2023 – March 9, 2023	39
March 8, 2023-March 15, 2023	274
March 13, 2023 – March 20, 2023	233
March 21, 2023 – March 28, 2023	336

Table 1: Number of Tweets Sent by Twitter on Four Collection Days

Using the methods defined by Nagura, Seki, Kando and Aono (2006), each source linked within a Tweet was rated for credibility based on its commonality, objectivity, and numerical agreement by using a scale, almost identical to the one used by Nagura, Seki,

Kando and Aono (2006). The following was how each aspect of credibility was scaled. This scale can also be viewed in Appendix B. The scale differs from the two, three and four scale used in the previous study, but the method of determining the score is mostly similar.

Commonality:

Based on sentence similarity and contents, each Twitter link received a score of one through three: one had no similar content of other sources, two included some similar content, and three was accredited to the links that could be found on other publishing sites, had similar if not the same content, and could be backed up by others.

Objectivity:

Twitter links were analyzed for objectivity using the exact words of Nagura et al.'s 2006 study but scaled differently. A one was given to the sources that were very uncertain by using the words "hope," "maybe," "possibly," "unclarity," etc. A two was given to the source that is somewhat uncertain by using the words "tell," "say," "seem," "plan," "motivation," "assume," etc. A three was given to a source that had mainly objective information stating policy and proven fact.

Numerical Agreement:

The numerical agreement aspect of credibility was rated one through three like commonality and objectivity. However, there is a difference in the score of one. A score of one could mean no numerical agreement was present or no other sources agreed. They

were both placed in separate categories in the data collection to ensure accuracy. A two

signified that two or more sources agreed numerically. A three meant three or more

sources agreed numerically.

Along with rating each source, each was placed in a category: news, blogs,

advertisements, pictures, videos, other commentary, YouTube, and advertisement sites

and propaganda combined. Commonly repeated, not relevant, and other countries' links

were also noted. Each category is defined below based on Oxford Languages and Google.

News:

The definition of news is, "newly received or noteworthy information, especially

about recent or important events, a broadcast or published report of news" (Oxford

Languages, n.d.).

Blogs:

The definition of a blog is, "a regularly updated website or web page, typically

one run by an individual or small group, that is written in an informal or conversational

style" (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

Advertisements:

The definition of an advertisement as it relates to this research is "a person or

thing regarded as a means of recommending something" (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

Pictures:

The definition of a picture is a visual that "represents (someone or something) in a photograph or picture" (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

Videos:

The definition of a video is, "the recording, reproducing, or broadcasting of moving visual images; a recording of moving visual images made digitally or on videotape" (*Oxford Languages*, n.d.).

Commentary:

The definition of commentary is, "an expression of opinions or offering of explanations about an event or situation" (Oxford Languages, n.d.). The definition may also include "a descriptive spoken account (especially on a broadcast) of an event or performance as it happens; a set of explanatory or critical notes on a text" (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

YouTube:

The definition of YouTube is, "upload a video of (someone or something) to the video-sharing website YouTube" (Oxford Languages, n.d.).

Advertisement sites and Propaganda:

Placing these two categories together is important due to the fact that they were often seen together and not used by themselves while analyzing the Tweets. The definitions include, "a notice or announcement in a public medium promoting a product, service, or event or publicizing a job vacancy; information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view" (*Oxford Languages*, n.d.).

Determining the Final Credibility Score

Similarly scored as the other parts of this data, the credibility score is rated one through three. A one means not credible and/or cannot determine credibility due to lack of evidence. A two means the source is somewhat credible, missing some support and information which may also include more opinion than fact (policy and research). A three is the highest score and means credible; the source may include policy and can be found elsewhere to support the information presented in the source.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Out of the original spreadsheet sent by Twitter, only 630 Tweets with links. Of the 630 Tweets, only 323 Tweets were able to be rated for credibility due to the others lacking relevance, availability, and language/other country barriers. The 323 Tweets do not reflect the number of repeated links used. The common number of repeated links was two time, with thirteen times repeated for one link being the highest.

Each of the links were classified into one of eight categories. As seen in Table 2, pictures had the highest occurrence, whereas U.S. Government Official links had the lowest occurrence. Video and advertisements/propaganda are seen to represent the same proportion as each other at 0.170 of the data.

CATEGORY	n	Proportion
U.S. Gov Official	2	0.006
Adver/Prop	55	0.170
Advertisement	15	0.046
News	77	0.238
Picture	95	0.294
Statement	16	0.049
Video	55	0.170
YouTube	8	0.025

Table 2: Category Proportions of 323 Analyzed Tweets Containing a URL Link and the Hashtag #DefundthePolice

Table 3 shows the proportion of the three hundred and twenty-three Tweets that were rated a final score of one, two, or three. The majority of the Tweets (proportion = 0.796) were given a commonality score of one. The majority of the links were found to not be credible.

FINAL SCORE	n	Proportion
1	257	0.796
2	40	0.124
3	26	0.080

Table 3: Credibility Proportions of the 323 Links Able to be Analyzed

Table 4 represents not United States and/or English links. This shows the proportion of Tweets unable to be used because of being in a different language or from a different country. The total number of links that was unable to be used to determine credibility was 250. Out of the 250 of those Tweets, 99 fall into the non-English and/or another country category. N = 476 No's include those links that were examined for credibility and those that were not.

NOT USA/ENG	n	Proportion
No	476	0.828
Yes	99	0.172

Table 4: Proportions of Unanalyzed Tweets due to Language and Geographical Location

Table 5 displays all eight categories and their final credibility mean score averages. The highest final score of 3.72 (mean) was news. U.S. Government Official (3.00) was second with Statements (2.13) in third. The reason for the Final Score (sd) being 0.00 for adver/prop, picture and YouTube is due to the inability to determine credibility of most links in those categories due to lack of supporting details and facts over opinions.

Category	Final Score (mean)	Final Score (sd)
News	3.72	1.34
Statement	2.13	0.35
U.S. GOV OFFICIAL	3.00	
Adver/prop	1.00	0.00
Advertisement	1.07	0.26
Picture	1.00	0.00
Video	1.15	0.52
YouTube	1.00	0.00

Table 5: Credibility Final Score Determined Based on Commonality, Objectivity and Numerical Agreement for each Category.

Figure 1 displays the data from Table 3 to more evidently illustrate the significant differences in credibility score. The score of one accounted for more than half of the data, while two includes a few more links than three, but not by many. Figure one indicates that there are significantly more non-credible sources than credible sources.
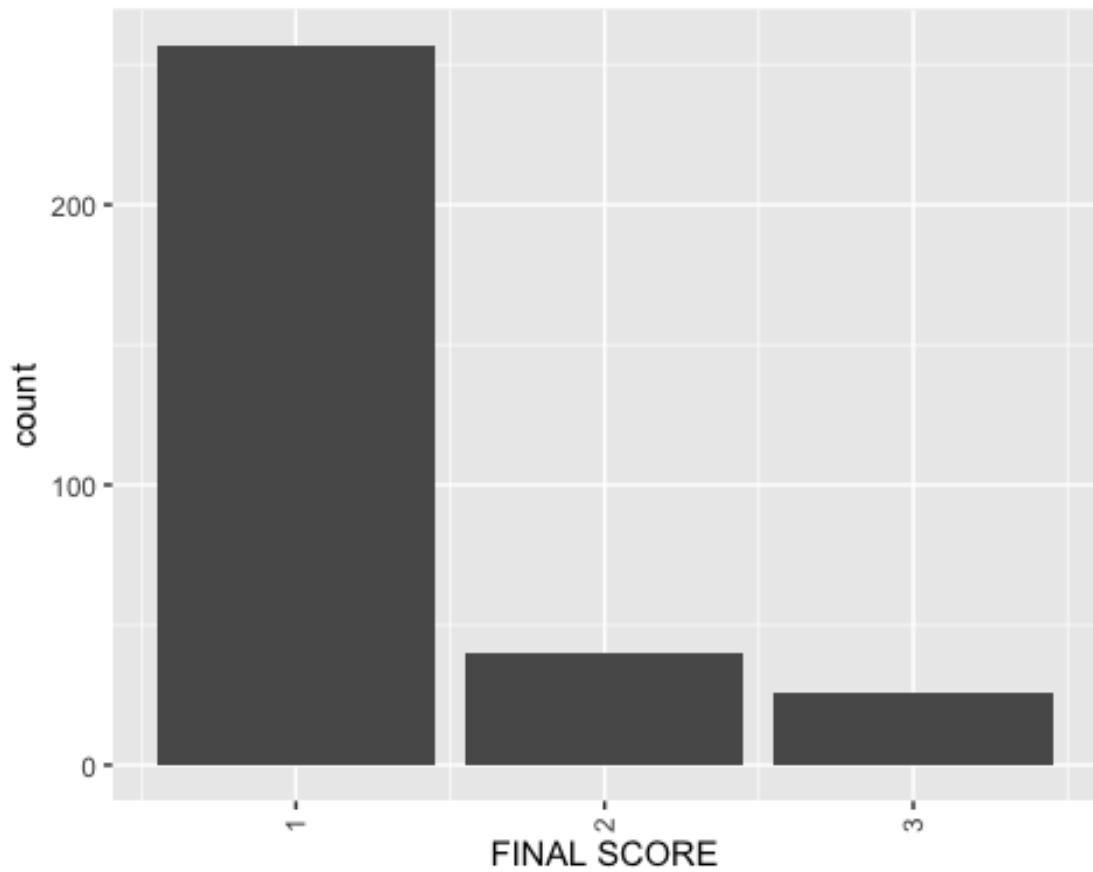

Figure 1: Final Score Distribution of Tweets

Figure 2 demonstrates all eight categories and their count similarly to Table 1. Figure 2 indicates that the Picture and News categories are the top two types of sources, adver/prop and video coming in second and third.

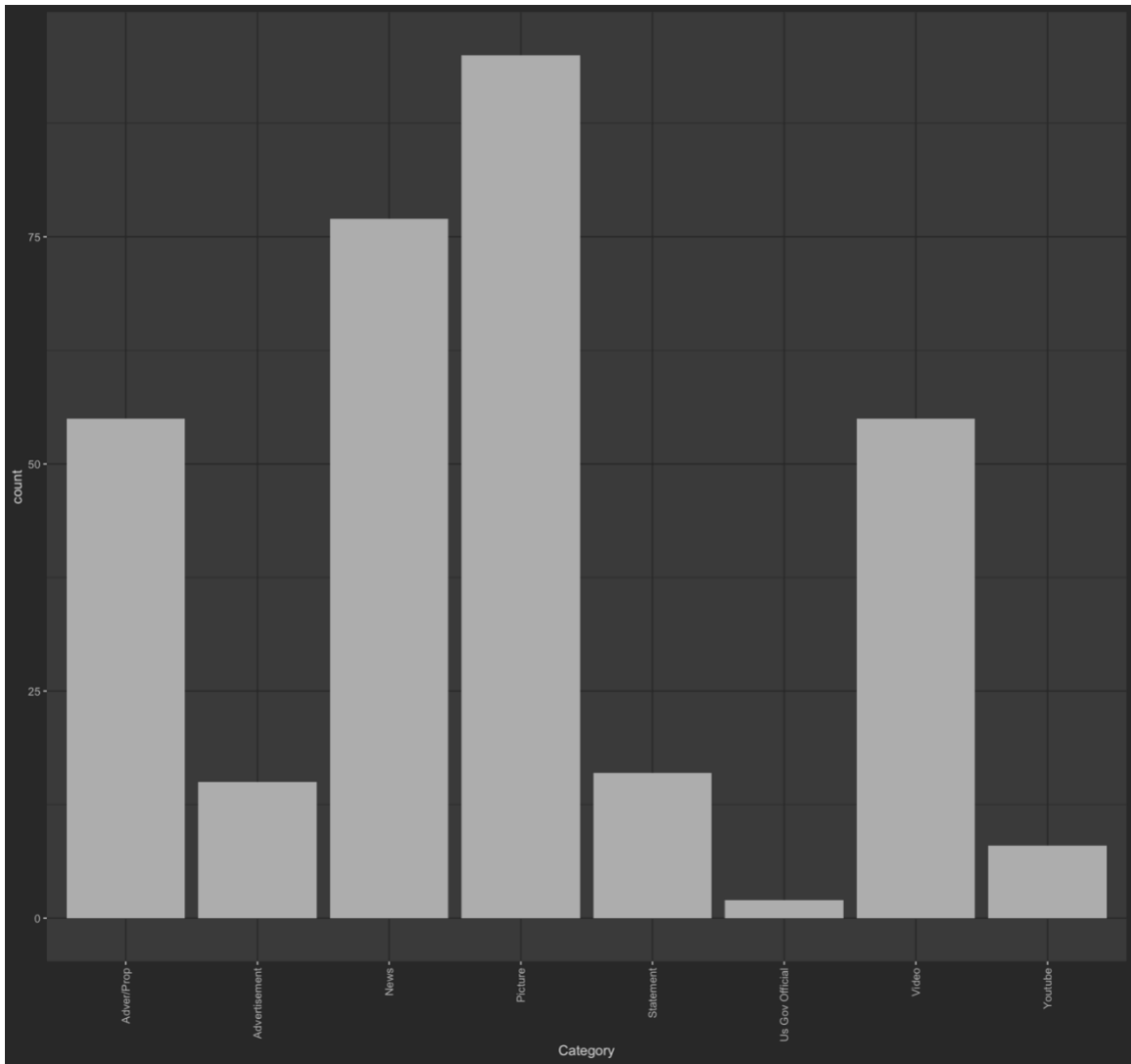*Figure 2: Types of Sources and Their Usage*

Figure 3 demonstrates the final credibility scores of each category alongside its significance in the data. This table provides a wide range of data points and the ability to clearly identify the proportions of each. Figure 3 indicates that news is one of the more used categories, and credibility can be seen more in this type of source than any other.

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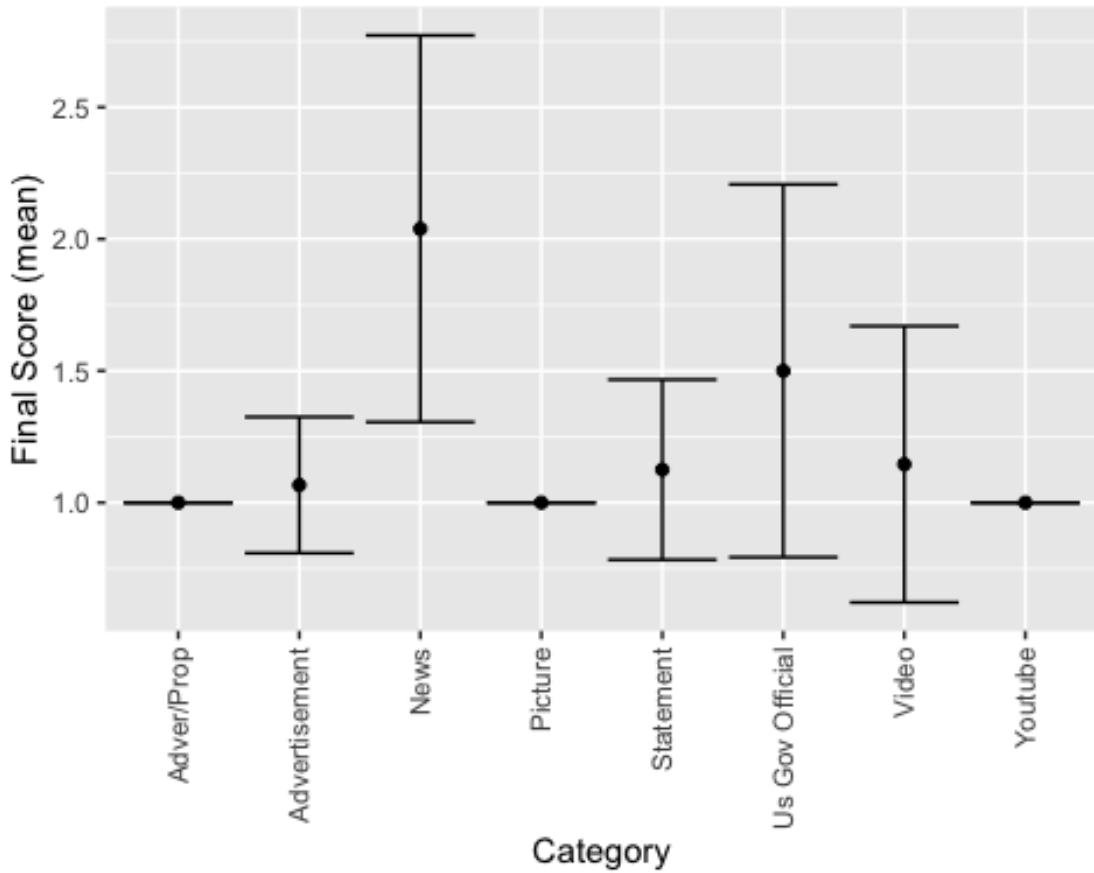*Figure 3: Credibility Scores in Correlation with Categories*

Figure 4 includes the final credibility of the news source used. A credibility score of two classified much of the type of source. The score of three comes in second and a score of one comes in third. The score of two being the most suggests that most news sites are somewhat credible, with some downfalls which can be numerical agreement or objectivity mainly.

News Tweets by Final Score
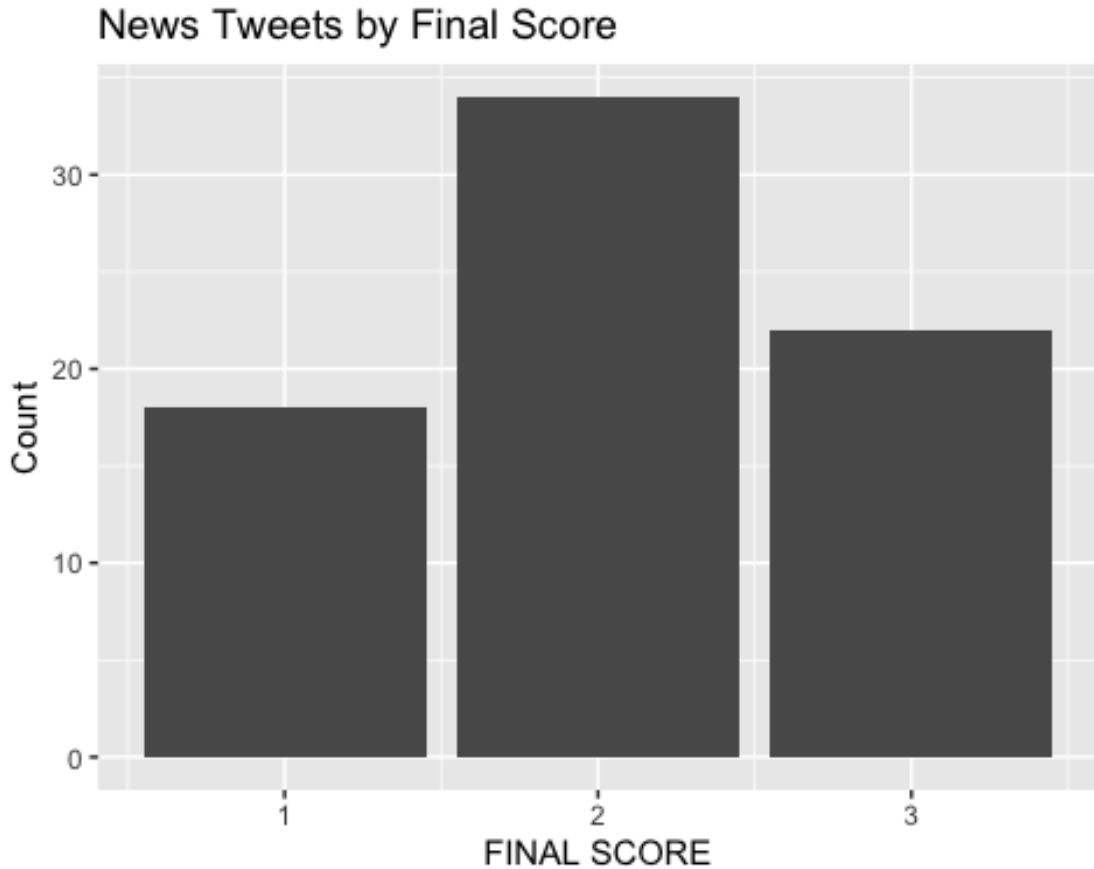
Figure 4: Final Credibility Score of Various News Sources

On two occasions during data collection, statements from government officials such as President Biden were linked. The first government official statement from President Biden includes: "Some MAGA Republicans in Congress have called for defunding the police, abolishing the FBI, and cutting mental health services. Meanwhile, my budget invests in safer communities and access to mental health care. Like I always say: a budget is a statement of values" (Tweet #25). The second government official tweet, also made by President Biden includes: "My budget will fund proven strategies for

accountable and effective policing. So, cops know the communities they serve and the communities know them. Our neighborhoods will be safer for it" (Tweet #42). These two Tweets seemed to be geared towards gaining personal support rather than providing clarity and information on defunding.

Categories such as news, advertisement, and videos consisted of various media types. The news category consisted of news articles and headlines. The advertisement category included online shops and websites about certain groups and ideas. This is different than adver/prop category which includes mainly pictures and words of others that attempt to grab the interest of a larger group of people. The category of videos includes TikTok and videos that are embedded within the Tweet itself; those that can be seen without going to another platform other than Twitter. YouTube is its own separate category and not included in videos due to its significance of usage to share information and opinion about the defunding the police movement.

At times during the data collection, it was difficult to find certain links within the Tweets themselves without being directed to Twitter's site to click the embedded link in another post to be sent to the actual source. This suggests that when it comes to people's expressions of opinions and use of sources, if they see a source or commentary that is appealing to their interests and beliefs, they are more likely to use it and add their own comment to it to make it their own.

News sources and pictures were the top two most used categories out of the eight. One example of a news source is a Tweet that was shared an average of twelve times during the data collection. The original link associated with the Tweet led directly to the posts which stated: "My god. The autopsy shows bullet exit wounds through both of

Tort's hands, indicating that their hands were raised when they were murdered. "The autopsy further reveals that Manuel was most probably in a seated position, cross-legged when killed."" (Tweet 51). The link to the actual article: *Family: Activist's hands raised when shot by troopers near training center site* by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution which was rated a two in terms of credibility, is linked under the comment of the Tweet, but not what you see first when opening the link provided by Twitter. Figure 5 is an example of this instance during data collection.
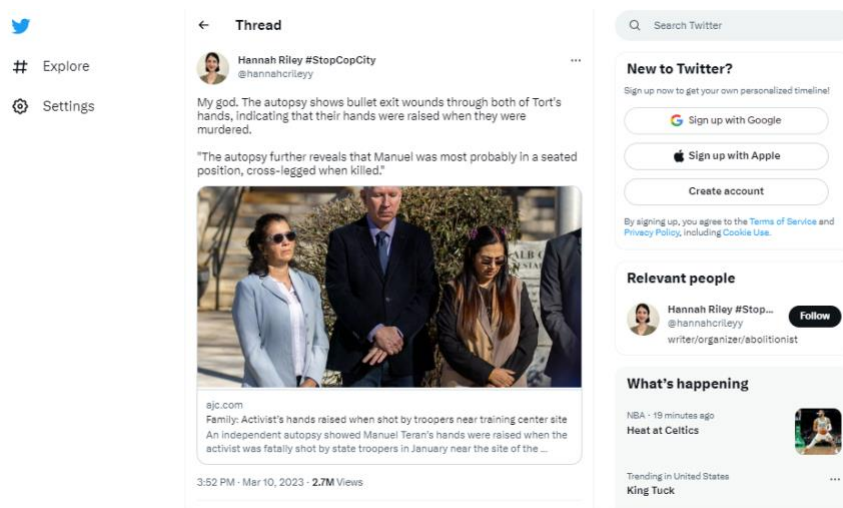
Figure 5: Twitter Page Embedded into Link provided by Twitter API Example (Tweet #51)

This is an important aspect of the link to note due to the reasoning for this thesis. The purpose of this thesis is to assess sources. If links lead to the actual Tweet and not directly to the source, that may be an indication of someone or a group potentially trying to get someone to sway a certain direction or develop an idea that they have yet to research for themselves. The idea stated as a comment above the link may or may not be what the article is even about. There is also the thought of how Twitter pulls the Tweets

with the URLs. It is unknown if Twitter shortens the URLs or simply pulls them from the Tweets or the method they use when adding them to the spreadsheets.

Advertisement/propaganda and video follow behind in third and fourth place when it comes to sharing information about defunding and expressing opinion. The reason advertisement and propaganda are in the same category is because they are often found together in links (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Example of Prop/Adver Category

This Figure 6 attempts to promote the idea that all cops are bad and to grab people's attention to get them to agree. While this picture is colorful and the meaning behind it is somewhat obvious, it has no merit. A common factor between all advertisement/propaganda, and even videos and some pictures was that it was difficult to give them a credibility rating due to the lack of supporting evidence and commonality.

Most if not all these types of categories received a rating of one due to the inability to establish a credible source. Only 8% to 10% were found to be credible sources, illustrating that most people do not look for credibility when sharing their

opinion or general information about a certain topic. Users tend to post what reflects their

own views versus proven and supporting facts.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Main Idea

When establishing what this thesis would be and consist of, a major question that came to mind was what has impacted society and policy most recently. Defunding police is not a new idea, but the idea of defunding has been prominent in the past few years due to certain events and news circling the world (Loader, 2021). The idea of defunding not only affects how society functions, but also present and future policies that involve everyone in society. There are many research articles that include the topic of defunding and other related topics. One other thesis done at San Diego State University entitled: *(sometimes) Speaking out: Temporal Analysis of Interaction with #DefundthePolice on Twitter,* also used Twitter data collection. However, it differs from this thesis in the sense that this study is based on the credibility of sources used in posts with the hashtag versus how Twitter played a role in furthering the idea of defunding the police.

Through social media, individuals who are not involved in the BLM organization in general can also express their opinion and often connect sources that they believe support their opinion. Throughout multiple points during data collection, many sources are used repeatedly. The highest was a news source, rated a credibility score of two and used on average around thirteen times within the data set. The source's credibility to not play a factor in determining what was linked and not linked various times, with a score of one being seen in almost every other Tweet. This suggests that the meaning of low credibility is the possibility that people may not know much about the subject and are still trying to figure out all different aspects of defunding while attempting to share information. In a way, social media can show bias when it comes to what information is

shared and has the potential to control the narrative for their target demographic with little to no challenge. Using Cobbina-Dungy et al. (2022) four components of defunding, it can be seen how different groups on various social media platforms define their understanding of what defunding is and, in some cases, sources may be linked.

There were three distinct limitations while conducting this research. The first was not knowing how the links were pulled by Twitter API. Twitter sent the spreadsheet that included no URLs, but whether the links were shortened or remained full and unmodified is unknown. This idea of the link affecting data collection is due to some links leading straight to Twitter's page and some leading to websites, such as the New York Times' website. Another limitation is the inability to get URLs sent from Twitter without Tweets with no URLs being included in the spreadsheet sent from Twitter. This affected the process of data collection because Twitter only allowed you to collect a certain number of Tweets per day and included Tweets with no URLs allowed for less potential evidence to support the conclusion that more uncredible sources are used than credible ones are. The third limitation, which corresponds to the first two limitations mentioned, is Twitters change in API policy at the time of data collection. The original plan for this research was to collect data from the years 2020 and 2021. Due to the inability to get access to the more advanced Twitter API system, only the past seven days were able to be collected at the time the data was being pulled. Although the data collection method changed, this presented new opportunities to observe the current status of the #DefundthePolice trend on social media, not only in the United States but also globally.

Around two hundred and fifty links that were provided by Twitter were either not relevant to #DefundthePolice, could not be opened due to accounts being deactivated/posts being deleted/subscriptions being required to view links, or were from other countries or not posted in English. Although the non-English Tweets were not used in the analysis, it was interesting to learn that defunding is not only a problem in the U.S.. Sometimes it was difficult to distinguish what was and what was not in the United States due to some of the news sources, pictures, and videos being similar to those used in the United States. This is an interesting trend because researchers can use this data and analyze how other countries are dealing with the idea of defunding and possibly come to a solution that could in turn benefit the world or help other countries develop their own idea on the issue and how it may impact the future.

Impact on Society and the Future

There are two major reasons for activists' calls to defund the police. The first is reason is the idea that police agencies are overinvested in, which in turn allows people to believe that police misconduct and illegal acts are more likely to take place and that fewer resources are available due to funding going to the agencies (Rushin & Michalski, 2020). The main reason why the idea of defunding will impact society is from its potential downfalls, but also because of information from non-credible sources being considered more than credible sources are. This causes the spread of panic and uncertainty.

Researchers Stephen Rushin & Roger Michalski advise governments and society on the consequences and unforeseen effects that may come with defunding because

superior policing requires funding to train and maintain an adequate police unit (Rushin & Michalski, 2020). While there are many factors that go into funding, such as where it comes from and how it is dispersed, society should look at the overall picture of the pros and cons. When it comes to the idea of defunding the police, the cons outweigh the pros. While this paper focuses mainly on the sources people use, it may also be beneficial to understand research that has already been done on the effect of defunding to deeper understand sources and the possible outcomes that some may suggest. Crime rates would most likely be increased due to the lack of resources given to police agencies to ensure their ability to control crime (Rushin & Michalski, 2020). The ability to control crime effectively is taught through training and accountability, which would be limited or none at all if funds are eliminated or cut "While the urge to defund police departments is understandable, these potential drawbacks ought to give policy makers significant reservations before undertaking widespread defunding efforts" (Rushin & Michalski, 2020)

Conclusion

This research is important due to the lack of research in the topic of source credibility in relation to "Defunding the Police" and how even after three years of the idea resurfacing, after many years it is still a popular tag in society today. The ability to still be able to pull recent data that continues to get more popular shows how the topic of defunding is continually growing. This can be problematic if credible information is not being shared, but instead peoples' political beliefs are being taken as fact instead of opinion. The overall goal of this thesis was to analyze what types of sources people use

when using the hashtag #DefundthePolice in order to evaluate what people are actually

saying. Also, if those using the tag understand what is truly being talked about or relayed

by using credible sources, or if people are just conforming to hysteric beliefs of social

media. With the prevalence of social media in modern society, Twitter has become a

major platform for individuals and like-minded groups to share their opinions with the

use of links and personal statements. By using Twitter's API system, only 323 links being

able to be examined for credibility based on commonality, objectivity, and numerical

agreement. This research shows how sources associated with the Tweets tend to lean in a

certain direction depending on political affiliation and the audience users are trying to

reach, reflecting personal opinion rather than fact. This resulted in most sources being

found to be untrustworthy.

The events that lead to the call for defunding has been brought to not only the

attention of the United States, but also the world who has struggled with similar issues. A

fair number of links that included sources collected using Twitter API included those of

other countries. While those Tweets were not examined for this study, it is still important

to recognize them. Twitter and other social media platforms are not only used here in the

U.S., but all over the country. Sources like those linked in Tweets, such as news articles,

pictures, statements, videos, and advertisements/propaganda are used by other areas of

the world as well. This data calls for potential future research on the topic, which could

open more discussion on what people use when defining their understanding of defunding

around the world, not just in the United States.

The perception of the idea of defunding and their actions revolving around

defunding can impact the future of society and policy. If a society is built on deceptive

information, the likelihood of survival is slim. Craig & Reids research supports this conclusion because it provides examples of the possibility of changes that have been advocated for through various sources and societies implementation of the idea and policy (2022). The more authentic and legitimate information that can be proven from past and present research can provide people in the future with the right tools to examine outcomes and possible repercussions such as this research does. Future research using this topic can be beneficial not only due to its impact on societal structure, but also the advancements in technology in the future may be greater than they are now with the potential to provide more data in support to a claim similar to this data's outcome.

APPENDIX A: PYTHON CODE

```python
from TwitterAPI import TwitterAPI, TwitterPager

QUERY = '#abolishthepolice'

consumer_key = 'nLOqkLfj5Ou2PShWe6UJrcMS1'
consumer_secret = 'w20APpcl7PzrLZf7g3BIakibSclrcLRNFGwOZa685KO9ZRBpp7'
access_token_key = '14407759-OJC91GlomxKth7UiZ4Pxng8JZhjB5vqutnmOZ4wPs'
access_token_secret = 'kxvblLmGUmAbaQCsFN9hWXCz9EwZf6RVNmhsjSWG3t5nk'

api = TwitterAPI(consumer_key, consumer_secret, access_token_key,
  ↪access_token_secret, api_version='2')
r = TwitterPager(api, 'tweets/search/recent',{
    'query':'#AbolishThePolice',
    'tweet.fields':'created_at',
    'place.fields':'name',
    'max_results':100})

tweet_list = []
tweet_list_date = []
tweet_list_name = []
#tweet_list_location = []

for item in r.get_iterator():
    if 'text' in item:
        print(item['text'])
        tweet_list.append(item['text'])
        tweet_list_date.append(item['created_at'])
        tweet_list_name.append(item['id'])
        #tweet_list_location.append(item['name'])
    elif 'message' in item and item['code'] == 88:
```

```python
  print('SUSPEND, RATE LIMIT EXCEEDED: %s\n' % item['message'])
  break
```

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APPENDIX B: CODING THEME

Commonality:

1. no similar content of other sources (may include a yes, which means one sources was found to be similar)
2. some similar content
3. sources can be found on other publishing sites; mostly similar content; can be backed up by other sources.

Objectivity (using words):

1. very uncertain = "hope"/"maybe"/"possibly"/"unclarity"
2. somewhat uncertain = "tell"/"say"/"seem"/"plan"/"motivation"/"assume"
3. objective (certain) = expressing policy / guarantee with/ research

Numerical Agreement:

1. none present or none agreed.
2. one - two sources agreed.
3. three or more sources agreed.

FINAL SCORE:

1. unable to establish credibility.
2. somewhat credible/ some supporting information/ more opinion than fact (policy and research)/ some research and policy.
3. credible

APPENDIX C: R CODE FOR ANALYSIS

```r
# Category Proportions
cred %>%
  filter(CATEGORY != 0) %>%
  count(CATEGORY) %>%
  mutate(CATEGORY = str_to_title(CATEGORY)) %>%
  mutate(Proportion = prop.table(n)) %>%
  mutate(Proportion = round(Proportion, 3)) %>%
  flextable()

cred %>%
  filter(CATEGORY != 0) %>%
  ggplot(aes(CATEGORY)) +
  geom_histogram(stat="count") +
  theme(axis.text.x = element_text(angle = 90, vjust = 0.5, hjust=1))

## Credibility
cred %>%
    filter(`FINAL SCORE` != 0) %>%
    count(`FINAL SCORE`) %>%
    mutate(Proportion = prop.table(n)) %>%
    mutate(Proportion = round(Proportion, 3)) %>%
    flextable()

cred %>%
  filter(`FINAL SCORE` != 0) %>%
ggplot(aes(`FINAL SCORE`)) +
  geom_histogram(stat="count") +
  theme(axis.text.x = element_text(angle = 90, vjust = 0.5, hjust=1))

## URL
max(table(cred$URL)) # Max was twice

## [1] 2

## US
cred %>%
    filter(`NOT USA/ENG` != 0) %>%
    count(`NOT USA/ENG`) %>%
    mutate(Proportion = prop.table(n)) %>%
    mutate(Proportion = round(Proportion, 3)) %>%
    flextable()

#### Testing
explanatory <- c("Category", "Commonality", "Objectivity", "Numerical_A
greement")
cred %>%
  rename(Category= CATEGORY,
         Numerical_Agreement = `Numerical Agreement`,
```

```r
        Objectivity = objectivity,
        Final_Score = `FINAL SCORE`) %>%
  select(-URL, -COMMON, -UATV, -`NON-REL`, -`NOT USA/ENG`, -`Numerical
Agreement (yes)`) %>%
  filter(Final_Score != 0) %>%
  group_by(Category) %>%
  summarize(`Final Score (mean)` = mean(Final_Score, na.rm = TRUE),
            `Final Score (sd)` = sd(Final_Score, na.rm = TRUE)) %>%
      flextable()

cred %>%
    rename(Category= CATEGORY,
            Numerical_Agreement = `Numerical Agreement`,
            Objectivity = objectivity,
            Final_Score = `FINAL SCORE`) %>%
    select(-URL, -COMMON, -UATV, -`NON-REL`, -`NOT USA/ENG`, -`Numerica
l Agreement (yes)`) %>%
    filter(Final_Score != 0) %>%
    mutate(Category = str_to_title(Category)) %>%
    mutate(Category = ifelse(Category == "U.s. Gov Official", "Us Gov O
fficial", Category)) %>%
    group_by(Category) %>%
    summarize(`Final Score (mean)` = mean(Final_Score, na.rm = TRUE),
              `Final Score (sd)` = sd(Final_Score, na.rm = TRUE)) %>%
    ggplot(aes(Category, `Final Score (mean)`)) +
    geom_point() +
    geom_errorbar(aes(ymin = `Final Score (mean)` - `Final Score (sd)`,
                      ymax = `Final Score (mean)` + `Final Score (sd)
`)) +
    theme(axis.text.x = element_text(angle = 90, vjust = 0.5, hjust=1))

cred %>%
  filter(CATEGORY == "news") %>%
      ggplot(aes(`FINAL SCORE`)) +
      geom_histogram(stat = "count") +
      ggtitle("News Tweets by Final Score") +
      ylab("Count")

## Warning: Ignoring unknown parameters: binwidth, bins, pad

table(cred$`NON-REL`)

##
##  No Yes
## 471 104

table(cred$`NOT USA/ENG`)
```

```
## 
##  No Yes 
## 476  99 

table(cred$UATV)

## 
##  No yes Yes 
## 528   1  46 
```

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