

Abstract

This study examined trends in social media content related to police violence and the response of Black Americans to such violence via social media. More specifically, the current study observed and analyzed the different attitudes and experiences of Black social media users in response to viewing police violence on Twitter.

Research Goals

1. Observe the experiences of Black Americans who are exposed to police violence on social media
2. Examine the effectiveness of the vicarious traumatization framework in capturing the experiences of Black Americans who are exposed to police violence on social media

Background

- Racial disparities in police killings; videos shared on social media platforms
- *Vicarious traumatization*: Shift in worldview that may occur in professionals when exposed to traumatic material (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)
- Direct exposure to racism contributes to mental health
- Vicarious exposure to traumatic events contributes to mental health
- Vicarious traumatization can be applied to racial trauma
- Thus, vicarious exposure to racism contributes to mental health



Indirect Exposure to Police Violence in Black Americans on Social Media

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Preliminary Analysis

Category	Definition	Example
Fear	General sense of anxiety over one's safety; feeling anxious over the probability of one's mortality due to police violence	"Living in America as a black person is terrifying."
Anger	Feelings of frustration or displeasure over situation	"As a black woman I am seething in anger over the lives lost but even more so at the excuses and platitudes made to defend these deaths. You're angry about riots? Try being angry about the murders!"
Exhaustion	Feeling emotionally, mentally, or physically tired by the situation	"As a black man in the "United" States of America, these past few weeks have been really tiresome."
Feeling ignored	Feeling unheard; feeling as though one does not have a voice; disregarded	"As a black American, sometimes my voice is lost in the shuffle until it becomes politicized on the nightly news due to something horrific (as is happening right now). My voice shouldn't only be used in pain but in progress."
Grief	Response to loss (death) of victims of police violence	"#GeorgeFloyd you mattered. The pain of Black Death is heavy on my heart today. It always weighs me down."
Gratitude	Feeling grateful due to support from others over situation; having hope due to external support	"I just want you all to know, I see you. As a black woman, times like these are hard. It's hard when I see my brothers and sisters getting killed because of their skin color. It really means a lot when I see people who are fighting for us when they don't have to. #BlackLivesMatter"
Distrust of law enforcement	Questioning the reliability/morals of police officers	"It is very sad, but the reality is that as a black man I have no way of knowing a good cop from from a cop bad until it's too late."
Lack of articulation	Feelings of disbelief over situation; inability to communicate or describe the gravity of the situation	"Lost for words and still trying to process through the feelings of seeing another hashtag as a black woman."
Confirmation of worldview	Confirmation of worldview as a Black American; anecdotal evidence describing the realities of their existence due to systemic racism	"As a black man living in America, when I leave my home, I'm not sure if I should say "see you later" or "goodbye"."

This table provides some examples of the themes that emerged from the dataset. Other themes include depression, stress, numbness, avoidance, and desperation.

Methods

- Qualitative content analysis with purposive sampling method
- Collected tweets from Black Americans from May 25, 2020, to June 5, 2020
- Used guidepost statements like "as a Black American" to search for tweets and verify race/location
- Exported all tweets into spreadsheet for further analysis

Analysis

Qualitative content analysis involves the following steps:

1. Deciding on a research question
2. Selecting material
3. Building a coding frame
4. Segmentation
5. Pilot phase
6. Main analysis

Implications

- Serves as evidence of structural racism playing a part in population health disparities
- In an ideal world, policy changes would prevent and/or reduce the occurrences of race-related injustices
- On a smaller scale, it is important to consider the ramifications of repeatedly viewing violent and triggering content during the modern age of technology
- Future research should also consider causal applications of this concept to discern whether repeated exposure to violent content online leads to negative mental health outcomes

