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Making a Video and Making a Difference Using Social Media: A “Call to Action” Approach

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Making a Video and Making a Difference Using Social Media: A “Call to Action” Approach

Overview

Today, communication is more visual than ever before and many young people are consuming media primarily online. Further, social media are the communication channels of choice for many young African Americans, especially Twitter and Instagram. Both platforms provide opportunities for pictures, words, and short video to be consumed. In addition, YouTube and Facebook provide users the ability to consume longer videos. Regardless of the platform, rich media – video and audio – are powerful tools for presenting information online. The goal of this assignment is for students to use readily available technology – computers, tablets, and smartphones – to produce a video with a distinct “call to action” to encourage others to support the Black Lives Matter movement. More importantly, this assignment can open a dialogue about race, gender, culture, cultural sensitivity, media representations, and social movements.

According to its website, Black Lives Matter is an “ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (Guiding Principles, n.d.). The #Blacklivesmatter movement has generated a considerable amount of its momentum through social media channels, especially Twitter. Skeptics question whether “clicktivism,” which is online activism, counts as “real” activism, but #Blacklivesmatter has shown that online mobilization for a cause can truly be effective and bring about results offline. From local protests and simultaneous national protests to political pressures and actual social change, Black Lives Matter has had significant success over the last few years.

The central questions of this lesson plan are: How can students use video to push the Black Lives Matter guiding principles, which are diversity, restorative justice, unapologetically Black, globalism, collective value, Black women, transgender affirming, empathy, Black villages, queer affirming, loving engagement, Black families, and intergenerational? How can they use a video to purposefully to organize others via social media to support the Black Lives Matter movement?

Public relations is a field of study designed to build mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics. Professors not only teach students how to structurally develop certain public relations tactics, but they also must teach them how to develop the proper content and key messages to persuade, build consensus or increase awareness. In most cases, this occurs through the use of a “call to action,” which is an imperative statement designed to move a public to act in some way (e.g., vote, call, buy, support, join). While this is an essential skill taught to public relations students, learning to create content to drive a specific message or persuade others to act in a certain way is a valuable skill worthy of learning by any student and easily transferable to the workforce. A relevant way for students to exercise this process is through the creation of a video with a clear purpose, and a significant call to action. It can be, as noted on the Black Lives Matter website, a way to “get involved in the fight for Black lives” (Get Involved, n.d.). The main way for this to occur is through contacting a local chapter of the organization to provide support, making a donation, making a purchase, finding resources, and actions.

Rationale

Today, wrapping an understanding of persuasive and purposeful content creation into the framework of race and diversity is a beneficial approach. Professors can work to see the benefit of engaging students around topics of race and diversity during a time in which all of these issues are taking center stage in U.S. society. The ultimate reason to bring diverse issues to the classroom should be to create what are known as culturally competent students (Howard-Hamilton, Richardson & Shuford, 1998). As paraphrased by Howard-Hamilton and Hinton (2004), these students:

- Appreciate the inclusion of diversity in programming and curriculum;
- Understand the complex nature of multiple identities and the intersections of religion, gender, race, socioeconomics and lifestyles;
- Comfortably discuss diversity-related topics without concern of alienation by their cohorts;
- Respond to injustices when they occur and believe it is improper to discriminate based on primary diversity characteristics or cultural nuisances;
- Appreciate who they are racially and ethnically as well as those who are similar to or different from them;
- Understand that being different is acceptable;
- Desire learning about issues of oppression that affect both society and themselves; and
- Bond with individuals who have different perspectives.

There are several teaching techniques used to develop culturally competent students. First, instructors can incorporate various readings from traditional books, articles and trade magazines, especially those with special diversity columns or sections. Second, instructors can bring in guest speakers to discuss diversity-related issues not only in society, but also in relation to their fields. Third, instructors can introduce class exercises that encourage student interactions, force students out of their comfort zones, and facilitate classmates learning about each other. Fourth, students can complete home assignments that ask them to investigate current trends in diversity and how they relate to their fields. Fifth, instructors can lecture on the topic of diversity, instead of shying away from it or skipping over the topic in textbooks. Sixth, instructors can screen movies, television shows, or even short video clips from the Internet to facilitate dialogue about primary and secondary diversity characteristics and what they mean to students.

This assignment works to embrace the fourth, fifth and sixth principles. Students have very powerful production tools in their hands each day – smartphones. While many are used for calling and texting, entertainment industry professionals have shot movies on iPhones, such as *Tangerine*, and music videos, such as Kanye West's *Only One*. This assignment's central objective is to ensure that students can capitalize on the technology at their fingertips to produce communication that has purpose and a real impact. Today, students are bombarded with concepts like cause-related marketing, brand-cause fit, and corporate social responsibility, but do they really understand what they mean? Can they produce a communication (i.e., video) that is meaningful for a real-life cause? Can they take a #Blacklivesmatter principle, create a visual tactic, and guide viewers through a call to action to support the (re)building of the Black liberation movement?

Timeline

Students are provided a description of the video assignment in the syllabus on the first day of class. It is also discussed with them during one full class period. Students are provided three weeks to complete the group assignment. Students should be required to provide updates on their work during the three weeks. Depending on the instructor, students could be required to provide a script, shooting schedule, or rough cut for grading or review. Finally, another class period should be set aside for viewing the videos and offering students a chance to not only comment, but also engage in another dialogue about race and diversity in U.S. Society.

Detailed Lesson Plan and Assignment Instructions

A class session (90 minutes) should be set aside to officially introduce the assignment. The introduction should cover the production of the video as well as the assignment’s goal, the history of #BlackLivesMatter, the context of social movements, and the state of race in the United States.

Before introducing the video assignment, the instructor should have a robust conversation about race, culture, and social movements in the African-American culture. Further, as society has changed, social movements and activism have moved online. Therefore, it is critical to introduce the concepts of clicktivism, slacktivism, armchair activism and keyboard activism, which all call into question the worth of digital activism, suggesting that it is inferior to offline, in-person activism. Critical race theory (CRT), or another theory of choice, should be used to ground the discussion. CRT was developed in the post-Civil Rights era as a form of concern and resistance against the civil rights laws and lack of progress toward racial equality in U.S. Society. The theory rests on the tenets that racism is normal in U.S. Society, that progress for Blacks is only encouraged and tolerated when elite Whites see it as a way to promote themselves, and that storytelling plays a significant role not only in developing community knowledge but also in sharing narratives that are different from those of the dominant culture. (A great resource to review for how videos can be used to produce counter-narratives can be found in the Kathy Mills and Berly Exel article listed in the bibliography.)

Students should be taught about the importance of ensuring that there is a purpose to the video, that its messaging is specifically tailored to a key audience, and how necessary it is to have a call to action for video viewers. Further, students should be shown videos of the instructor’s choice that allow them to understand how videos can be used to elicit emotional and physical responses by individuals for specific purposes. They should also be introduced to a special section on the course’s learning management system with helpful tips and instruction on how to produce a video. Finally, students should be provided time during class to select partners. Once done, they should be asked to exchange contact information to ensure they are able to connect outside of the classroom.

Students are provided exactly three weeks to produce the video. This allows time for not only creating the idea, but also shooting and editing it. The instructor should provide at least one opportunity per week to collect evidence of progress toward completion of the video, including a treatment, script, and shooting schedule. On the selected due date, students share videos via

social media, and time is allotted in class to show the videos and have a robust discussion. Depending on the number of students, this could take a complete class.

Assignment Details

Students should select a group of two to three students to produce a video to galvanize support for Black Lives Matter. The video is a chance to showcase students' creativity and strategic thinking skills. Further, it is an opportunity for students to learn how to utilize the technologies on computers, tablets, and smartphones to develop a purposive and persuasive communications video.

The assignment is to create a two- to three-minute video that highlights at least one of the guiding principles of Black Lives Matter. The video should put the principal in proper perspectives and locate it within not only the Black Lives Matter movement, but also the current climate of U.S. society. As with any properly produced public relations tactic, there should be a proper call to action, and those specifically stated on the #BlackLivesMatter website should be utilized in the video. It is also necessary for students to create a video that is both aesthetically pleasing and technologically sound.

Each group of students must upload video to at least one social media outlet. A link to the post, tweet, or video page should be emailed to the instructor on the day the assignment is due. Students should not simply provide a link. Special care and attention should be made to the actual introduction of the video on social media. It should also be tagged with the hashtag #Blacklivesmatter. Finally, in instances where students choose to upload to Twitter or Instagram, which only allow short videos, the full video should be linked to a YouTube page.

Teaching Materials

Supplemental Materials

A special section was created within the course's site on university's Learning Management System (LMS), which was Blackboard. This section allowed students to obtain tips on how to create videos via smartphones. Resources ranged from how-to videos to blog posts and tips. If a faculty member does not have access to a LMS, students can be shown the videos in class, the videos could be shared via Google Docs, or the instructor can create a special YouTube channel. A few of the online resources are below:

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Sawers, P. (2014). How to shoot, edit and publish videos from your Android smartphone. <http://thenextweb.com/creativity/2014/07/27/shoot-edit-upload-movie-android-smartphone/>. Retrieved on January 2, 2016.

Web Video Chefs. (2013). How to shoot mobile Android video for beginners <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ml8ZHqsbeq8>. Retrieved on January 2, 2016.

Rubric

The rubric below contains the elements needed within each video, each associated with a point-value for calculating the assignment’s final grade. Unless alerted to a student’s failure to fully engage in the video’s production, all students will receive the same grade.

Section: _____

Students: _____

Grade: _____

-
- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. Be sure to clearly identify the cause. | 5 pt. _____ |
| 2. Be sure to clearly identify and describe the #Blacklivesmatter principle. | 15 pt. _____ |
| 3. Be sure to clearly state at least one call to action. | 15 pt. _____ |
| 4. Be sure to clearly state benefits for involvement. | 10 pt. _____ |
| 5. Be sure your public is clearly identifiable. | 15 pt. _____ |
| 6. Quality of sound, picture, graphics and other visuals. | 15 pt. _____ |
| 7. Overall, concept of idea and its tie to the visual representations present in the video. | 15 pt. _____ |
| 8. Uploaded to social media with a proper introduction.
(If uploaded to Twitter or Instagram, teaser post and full upload done.) | 10 pt. _____ |

Total (_____) of 100

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Lindgren, S. (2015). The Work of Audiences in the Age of Clicktivism: On the Ins and Outs of Distributed Participation. *Media Fields Journal*, 10, 1-6.

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Biography

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Dr. Tia C. M. Tyree is a Professor at Howard University within the Department of Strategic, Legal and Management Communications. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses. Her research interests include hip hop, rap, reality television, film, social media, and African-American and female representations in the mass media. She published articles in several journals, including *Women and Language*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, and the *Journal of Black Studies*. She is the author of [The Interesting and Incredibly Long History of American Public Relations](#) and co-editor of [HBCU Experience – The Book](#) and [Social Media: Pedagogy and Practice](#). She is also the co-founder of the [Social Media Technology Conference & Workshop](#).