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**OK, LADIES, NOW LET'S GET INFORMATION: RECOGNIZING MOMENTS OF RHETORICAL
IDENTIFICATION IN BEYONCÉ'S DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

by

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B.A. University of North Florida, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to understand how activists are encouraging audiences to identify with their work in digital spaces through a case study of Beyoncé’s activism. The current scholarship surrounding digital activism is extensive and has offered a detailed look at individual tools used in activist movements, but there is a lack of research that recognizes the complex network of tools that are often used by an activist or activist group. To address this gap in the research, this thesis offers an analysis of three specific activist tools used by Beyoncé to encourage her fans and other audiences to identify with and participate in her activism. This study investigates the methods Beyoncé employs to get her multiple audiences informed and engaged through an analysis of her activist blog, the “Formation” music video, and her live performance during the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to assess, from a rhetorical standpoint, how Beyoncé is inviting her audiences to respond and become engaged.

The analysis of these three activist tools utilizes qualitative data analysis, focusing on Burke’s (1969) concept of rhetorical identification to understand how her activist messages are presented across mediums. To expand on the findings of this analysis, a reception study on Beyoncé’s “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance was conducted to gauge the success of her rhetorical methods. The findings of this study recognize the need to continue looking at the multiple tools used by activists to understand the complexity of their rhetorical work online. This study also provides methods for analyzing the intertextual nature of digital activism so that further research can be done. While this study begins to address the gap in the

current scholarship, more research needs to be done to study the current rhetorical practices of digital activists.

To Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, for providing the motivation for this thesis, and for her dedication to promoting equality.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“Activist rhetors need to make kairotic decisions about modes, media, and the technologies of production, reproduction, and distribution associated with them.” - Sheridan, Michel, & Ridolfo
(2002)*

In the United States, there is a current push for the media to recognize police brutality in response to the shootings of numerous black youths across the nation, including Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Walter Scott. As a response to these shootings and the lack of repercussions for their shooters, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was started in 2013 and has become the title of a national movement (Stephen, 2015). The Black Lives Matter movement has gained significant traction over the last three years through the use of popular social media websites, such as Twitter, and its work has proven significant in making changes in the United States. According to Stephen (2015), the movement “helped secure the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina capitol. It helped pressure the federal government to investigate police practices in Ferguson and Baltimore” (para. 16). Because the movement started at such a kairotic moment with the publicized acquittal of George Zimmerman, Trayvon Martin’s shooter, it has been able to keep its momentum, transition off Twitter, and successfully maintain its representation in the popular media.

Movements such as this have become common over recent decades with advances in technology allowing for a new digital realm of activism. These tools allow for mass mobilization and organization in a way that was not possible before the use of social media platforms and internet blogs for activist purposes. From the Occupy Wall Street movement, which heavily relied on Twitter (Penney & Dadas, 2013) much like Black Lives Matter, to the Human Rights

Campaign's efforts to support marriage equality (Vie, 2014), digital tools have become prominent in activist work. A review of the literature regarding digital activism reveals that current scholarship has had a narrow focus that prioritized only one of the activist tools used in a movement, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest (DeLuca, 2015; Harlow & Guo, 2014; Ouellette, 2014; Penney & Dadas, 2013; Vetter, 2014). However, most of the work that activists do is more complicated than this singular mode of communication. As Treré (2012) argued, this one-medium bias limits our understanding of the complexity of digital activist work. Because online activism is still a new field that is facing criticism for its effectiveness (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2013), it is essential that the scholarship continues to represent current digital activist work while describing the complex and intricate work that these movements require (McCorkle & Palmeri, 2014).

This research study seeks to respond to McCorkle and Palmeri's (2014) call for timely publications on digital activist work while moving away from Treré's (2012) one-medium bias. This study was conducted during the 2016 presidential election in the United States, and is focused on the activist work that celebrities have done to bring attention to issues that were prominently discussed within the presidential debates and within the larger conversations across the country. Noticeably, celebrities and politicians during this time used their platforms to call further attention to issues regarding racism and the Black Lives Matter movement, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights, among others. While the work these celebrities did was unique given their platform and popularity, they managed to use their voices and public attention to add to the current conversations surrounding issues like racial injustice in the United States.

Given the visibility of this form of celebrity activism, this research project presents a case study of the work of Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, a prominent singer, songwriter, actor, and activist. Along with her career as a performer, she has recently become a visible advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement and a supporter of women's and LGBTQ+ rights. During the time of this study, Beyoncé used her website, music, and live performances to voice her opinion on the mistreatment of black citizens, the issues that women and LGBTQ+ citizens face, and the importance of the 2016 presidential election. This case study will compare the rhetorical work that Beyoncé does across her modes of communication—including online work through her blog, music, and music videos, as well as offline work through her live performances—to better understand the strategies that digital activists employ to increase representation for their movement while encouraging participation. Specifically, this case study will allow scholars to better understand how the process of rhetorical identification is facilitated through activist work, and how digital activists use multiple modes of communication to address and interact with various audiences. Burke's (1969) discussion of rhetoric and identification will be the basis of much of my analysis, as I will be using his explanation of this process to better understand how Beyoncé is engaging her fans. While I am unable to fully understand how intentional her use of rhetoric and identification is without speaking with her regarding her intentions, I plan on analyzing her blog, "Formation" music video, and live performance at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show to assess, from a rhetorical standpoint, how she is inviting her audience to respond. Burke defines identification as the process by which a rhetor creates a sense of belonging within an audience, motivating them to align with the rhetor and their presented

beliefs. This process is complicated, as Burke explains, but it is a necessary focus to consider when studying digital activism and the reliance on the continued involvement of participants.

To conduct this case study on Beyoncé's activism and present a deeper understanding of the complexity of digital activist work, I have created a few research questions that seek to focus on the network of tools that activists use when creating online social and political movements.

This study sought to develop answers to the following questions:

1. What rhetorical strategies does Beyoncé use to facilitate the process of identification within her various audiences, and how does she reinforce this process over time?
2. How does Beyoncé convey her goals and activist work across her various platforms, and what does this network look like?
 1. What are the constraints and affordances of using one-way lines of communication, such as blog posts and music, for activism?
 2. How does this network of digital tools help promote and engage various audiences?

By finding answers to the above questions regarding Beyoncé's, we may be able to begin understanding the complex nature of digital activism work in general because of the focus on her network of tools. While Beyoncé is a unique activist because of her popularity and platform, she allows for a more visible research site that can provide a richer analysis. Her modes of communication are diverse and visible, and the conversation surrounding her current music and performances allow for a reception study to understand the effectiveness of her rhetorical work. Because the current research surrounding digital activism has limited itself to a focused analysis

of one tool used by a given activist, I aim to use this study to promote more critical analysis of digital activism.

This chapter has presented an introduction to my research study by explaining how research on the multiple tools used by a digital activist can allow for a richer understanding of the complex nature of online social and political activism. The next chapter will present a review of the current literature on digital activism and the criticism surrounding this online work. Chapter Three will detail the methodology that was developed for this research. Chapters Four, Five, and Six will present my analysis of Beyoncé’s activist blog, “Formation” music video, and 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance. Finally, Chapter Seven will present my discussion of the rhetorical work Beyoncé does across her platforms, the answers to my research questions, as well as the implications of this research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In Chapter One, I explained that the exigence for this research study came from the lack of current digital activism scholarship that illustrates the full array of tools that activists use when promoting their work and engaging audiences. While there is extensive research surrounding digital activism that has created the basis for this study, the current scholarship on digital activism has predominantly favored a focus on two-way sites of communication such as Facebook and Twitter (Harlow & Guo, 2014; Mitu & Vega, 2014; Penney & Dadas, 2013). Mitu and Vega's (2014) review of current digital activism research focused predominantly on research done regarding social media usage for digital activism, looking at how those tools influence communication and engagement. They limited their overview to this type of digital activism research and explain that these social media platforms have historically been seen as the most important tools available for online activism. Popular social media sites that allow for open discussions are often used by digital activists to engage their audiences and gain momentum by getting their ideas trending, using tools like group chats and hashtags. Harlow and Guo's (2014) research exemplifies this, as they focused their research on immigrant activism in Austin, Texas, looking at the use of Twitter and Facebook for activist purposes. Given the influence of the digital divide, which prohibits many immigrants within Texas and other locations from accessing digital technologies, Harlow and Guo limited their study to focus groups with immigrant activists rather than immigrants themselves. By doing so, they sought to understand how these activists were using digital media platforms to conduct their work and what influence the digital divide had on their activism. They focused on how these activists used social media sites to engage with

other activists, along with Skype and e-mail for communication with immigrants, authorities in the area, and other officials.

Through the group discussions and follow-up questions in these focus groups, Harlow and Guo (2014) found that the activists used a combination of social media tools, e-mails, Skype calls, and face-to-face communication based on their intended audiences. While the participants believed that these digital tools were useful for raising awareness, they acknowledged that while they often had a lot of engagement online, most of that engagement did not transfer over into offline marches and protest events. Harlow and Guo noticed that the activists working to help these Texas immigrants were faced with a number of issues, including the potential misrepresentation of immigrant needs and the distancing between themselves and the group they were trying to advocate for. Because the digital divide prohibited the immigrants from having their own voice online, Harlow and Guo emphasize the need for a mixture of online and offline tools to keep all parties involved and aware of the work being done.

Penney and Dadas' (2013) research on the use of Twitter within the Occupy Wall Street movement further represents Mitu and Vega's (2014) argument. Like Harlow and Guo (2014), Penney and Dadas limited their focus to the social media tools used in this activist movement to better understand how information was circulated for protest purposes. They interviewed 17 active members of the Occupy movement who were engaging in the large Twitter presence that the movement had created to understand what this networked digital space offered to the social movement. From their interviews, they learned that Twitter served seven main purposes: facilitating protests; live-sharing events; sharing news; expressing opinions; engaging in open conversations; connecting with others; and facilitating online actions for the movement. Penney

and Dadas highlighted the successful use of tweeting for circulating information within the Occupy movement, and they argued that the 140-character limit of the tweets “was generally seen as advantageous rather than constraining, since it forced them to condense their communications into short bursts of texts with the capacity for velocity” (2013, p. 86). This argument combated the “slacktivist” understanding of using Twitter for protest purposes, which claims that tweets are often decontextualized and insufficient for large-scale communication. However, Penney and Dadas concluded their article with a discussion about the ease with which movements can be tracked when the majority of their communication exists on a public platform such as Twitter. Because there is not much control regarding the velocity with which these tweets circulate, or the audiences that they reach, there are still risks to using a popular digital network for protest organization.

While scholars like Penney and Dadas (2013) view social media tools as useful, other scholars have debated the effectiveness of these popular sites at encouraging offline activism, calling this work slacktivism because of its low-risk and low-cost affiliation. These scholars dispute the definition and purpose of digital activism, and argue against (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2013), or for (Christensen, 2011; Vie, 2014) the benefits of digital activism. While Christensen (2011) and Vie (2014) advocate for the successful use of online activism, scholars like Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2013) stand by the argument that digital activism is incapable of matching or encouraging offline activism. Gladwell’s *New Yorker* article argued that low-risk and low-cost activism is nothing more than superficial participation. He claimed that past activists were recognized by the causes they represented, highlighting the work they accomplished rather than simply the tools they used to achieve that work. Because current

activist work relies heavily on digital tools rather than offline protesting, Gladwell worked to persuade readers that this engagement is distanced and separated from the work needing to be done. He used this article to argue that this low-risk slacktivism is incapable of creating real change, and that “Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice” (Gladwell, 2010, para. 19). His argument is backed by Harlow and Guo’s (2014) findings, in which they learned from their focus groups that the work the activists were doing for the immigrants was hindered by the distance present between them and the immigrants they were attempting to support.

In Morozov’s (2013) article, he discussed his distrust of “Internet-centrists,” who believe that “decentralization beats centralization, networks are superior to hierarchies, crowds outperform experts. To fully absorb the lessons of the Internet, urge the Internet-centrists, we need to reshape our political and social institutions in its image” (para. 2). To further his discussion, Morozov heavily relied on a critique of a book by Steven Johnson titled *Future Perfect*, in which Johnson backed the beliefs of Internet-centrists by arguing that there is a “coherent logic to the Internet” (2013, para. 9) that needs to be mimicked in society. For Morozov, these arguments are incapable of justifying a reliance on the Internet for successful activism and digital engagement. His main argument was that Johnson’s outlook on the power of the Internet is too optimistic, claiming that the decentralized and horizontally-structured nature of the Internet, that Internet-centrists praise, is incapable of making politics more participatory. Unlike Penney and Dadas (2013), Morozov argued that the Occupy Wall Street movement failed to garner full participation because of its decentralization. Like Gladwell (2010), Morozov

criticized the use of digital tools for political activism, arguing that the decentralized network of online tools cannot replace the hierarchical, centralized nature of a political system. This scholarship reveals that the main criticisms against digital activism is the expectation that online tools are decentralized and disconnected, which would in effect make the work of the movement less impactful.

Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2013) agree that online engagement is incapable of matching the work done by offline activists hoping to make lasting political or social changes, but Christensen (2011) and Vie (2014) provide a counter-argument. Their research suggested that social media sites can be successful when attempting to encourage offline work. Christensen used his research to discuss the controversy surrounding digital activism, with many claiming that online forms of political participation is nothing more than “slacktivism,” or low-risk, low-cost activism. He surveyed current literature on the topic to decipher whether this kind of participation is actually slacktivism or rather a form of virtual activism. Christensen explained that the main argument against online political participation is that it is insufficient to create true political change, or make strides toward the political goals intended by these activists. He claimed that “many of the campaigns accused of being *slacktivist* are almost certainly never able to fulfill their stated goals, nor were they necessarily meant to” (Christensen, 2011, Conclusion section, para. 6), but he continued to state that this is not enough to dismiss the potential that virtual activism has on increasing offline participation. Despite the research that Christensen cited arguing against “*slacktivist*” movements, he explained that there is still enough research to suggest that online engagement does not replace offline political participation, but rather reinforces it.

Vie (2014), like Christensen (2011), made the argument that digital activism is more than slacktivism because of the potential it has for influencing offline engagement. Her research focused on the transmission, replication, and mutation of memes within the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), looking at Facebook profile pictures and the remixing of memes in the media. The HRC logo, which features a red square with an equal sign inside of it, became the profile picture of thousands of Facebook users to represent their support of marriage equality. Vie argued that this “spread of memes is an opportunity for digital activism, or instances of social and political change made possible through digital networks” (2014, Introduction section, para. 5), and that the use of these memes could unite the participants of a movement. After the logo became popular during March 2013, it began to be remixed with famous characters being superimposed over the equal sign, furthering the transmission of the HRC logo and equality message. This became a popular method of advertisement for various companies, which transferred the meme off social media. Vie (2014) explained that “memes are not simply minor moments of slacktivism, but are parts of a complex web of digital activism that involves creating content, transmitting memes, and remixing messages that can have significant impacts on offline behaviors” (Conclusion section, para. 6). Because of their ability to have widespread transmission and remixing, memes could exist in ways that traditional text-based posts cannot. The transmission and remixing of memes could be seen as a way for participants to identify with a social movement, by allowing them to alter the image in a way that better represents themselves while still aligning with the overall movement. By providing people with the means to identify with a cause, social movements can encourage continued membership and support from their participants. Like Christensen, Vie cites the potential that online engagement has for

encouraging offline activism, as well as the numerous affordances provided by these online tools.

While the debate over the success of digital activism is still ongoing, another issue is present in this research. All the scholars mentioned thus far have predominantly limited their focus to sites like Twitter and Facebook, neglecting other available digital tools. The limited scope of past digital activism scholarship has created space for scholars like Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2013) to argue that online political and social participation is nothing more than slacktivism. As previously mentioned, their argument came from the belief that digital tools are decentralized and therefore incapable of replicating offline activist work. Because the current scholarship surrounding successful digital activism has presented a limited glimpse into the complicated network of tools that are being used, more research needs to be done. To fully understand how these tools are being used, McCorkle and Palmeri (2014) called for a more “capacious vision of digital activism” (Thread 3 section, para. 2). For this to happen, they argued that we need more timely publications of activist work that spread beyond the focus of traditionally popular social media sites. As McCorkle and Palmeri pointed out, there is a trend in current digital activism scholarship to focus on not just popular social media sites, but these tools alone without any recognition of the other tools being used. Treré (2012) named this trend a “one-medium bias” (p. 2362), emphasizing the issue with such a limited focus. According to Treré, “The main consequence of the one-medium bias for the study of online activism is that it can reduce the complexity of the Internet to just one of its comprising technologies, or to certain particular ‘portions’ of this complex environment” (2012, p. 2362). To combat this one-medium bias, scholars need to expand on McCorkle and Palmeri’s call by acknowledging and studying

the numerous tools used in social movements to see the complex networks at work. These scholars argue that by looking at these tools, we can gain a better understanding of the complexity of social movements while also learning how activists are gaining new members and helping them identify with their causes.

A number of scholars have started responding to McCorkle and Palmeri's (2014) call, looking at other less popular sites, such as Pinterest and web blogs (DeLuca, 2015; Ouellette, 2014; Vetter, 2014). Ouellette (2014) conducted a genre and discourse analysis of the feminist blog, *Gender Across Borders*, looking at the reasons why the blog failed to generate a truly interactive community as it intended. While the blog featured a mission page claiming to aim their posts at a global feminist community, Ouellette argued that because nineteen of the twenty writers are western academics writing about issues in the Global South, they are publicizing themselves as a non-global group. This coupled with the distant third-person voice used in all of the writer biographies presented them as separate and detached from the "global" issues that they were claiming to be engaging with. Ouellette's analysis of the blog posts provided a similarly detached tone, with an "I vs. them" dichotomy being featured in a number of articles. Based on her analysis, she concluded that the reason for the failure of the *Gender Across Borders* blog came from a lack of genre and discourse awareness given the audiences that they claimed to be reaching out to. From this analysis, Ouellette concluded with the argument that digital activists need to be critical when choosing the genres and platforms they want to use and the discourses they choose, especially when considering their audiences.

Vetter (2014) and DeLuca (2015) both conducted research on digital activism through the Pinterest website. Because Pinterest has a predominantly female demographic with traditional

normative gender applications, such as sharing pins related to crafts and recipes, Vetter created a queered activist pinboard to disrupt the normative gendered use of the site. Through the creation of this board, Vetter demonstrated ways in which activists can appropriate social networks for their own intended purposes. He argued that “the ‘pinning’ of queer and anti-consumer images, links, and videos in the online public sphere disrupts the normative discourse on the network. And furthermore, that this practice of disruption serves to challenge problematic (and hegemonic) gender construction that occur in Pinterest” (Vetter, 2014, Queering Pinterest section, para. 2). One way that Vetter “queered” his pinboard was by including content from outside of the Pinterest website, linking out to new content that was more capable of disrupting the gender identity of the site. Another suggestion he posed is to re-pin anti-consumerism images, which can be found within the Pinterest network to actively disrupt the site from within. By disrupting technology and subverting its intended uses, Vetter suggested that we can better assert silenced voices.

DeLuca’s (2015) research on Pinterest focused only on the subversion of the network’s intended use from within. She looked at the ways in which activists appropriated the space and subverted its intended purpose to charge their posts with political messages, and to share and spread information. She focused on the composing practices of women on the website, looking at two case studies. The first case study focused on Jane Wang’s repinning of an infographic shared via Obama’s campaign pinboard, which depicted the life of a woman named Julia under both Obama’s and Romney’s administration. While the infographic received little response from Obama’s original post, who mainly had followers who already aligned themselves with his views, the post received numerous and vastly different responses from Jane Wang’s repinned

version. While the responses were vocal in response to Obama's depiction of women and women's health, a number of commenters voiced their opposition to seeing political posts on a website meant for recipes and crafts. The second case study came from Jane Wang's pinning of an image of Big Bird shortly after a comment was made by Romney regarding the character, which led to another lengthy discussion regarding the politics behind the post as well as the placement of the post on a site like Pinterest. DeLuca ended her article with a discussion of the two cases, explaining that Pinterest offers a unique social space for activism, with particular opportunities for cyberfeminism and political expression. She argued that even though the discussions around both posts did not result in changed opinions, they do both represent civic engagement. Vetter (2014) and DeLuca both offered examples of the ways in which mainstream social networking sites can be utilized for activist purposes. Both scholars provided examples of digital activism research that differs from research done on Facebook and Twitter, which are more commonly associated with the sharing of ideas and beliefs. These two research studies, along with Ouellette's (2014) research on the feminist blog, all demonstrate responses to McCorkle and Palmeri's (2014) call. These scholars present various findings regarding the use of digital activism that are not afforded by studying mainstream social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Despite McCorkle and Palmeri's (2014) call, and the research done by Ouellette (2014), Vetter (2014), and DeLuca (2015), few scholars have researched ways in which activists use spaces that only offer a one-way line of communication between creator and reader, such as blogs that do not allow for comments or open discussion. Because one of the main benefits of using digital activism is the available means for spreading information, it is interesting to study

how activists use one-way lines of communication to inform their participants before they become engaged. Lawrence (2010) offered three steps for successful online engagement, explaining what businesses can gain from looking into the tactics of popular political advocacy groups: 1) integration of multiple tools; 2) listening before engaging; and 3) turning online work into physical action. By conducting research that eliminates the one-medium bias that Treré (2012) argues against, scholars can better understand how digital activists are effectively using their network to educate and engage their participants, which is especially important in cases of one-way communication. Beyoncé's activism is useful to consider in light of this given her enactment of Lawrence's three suggestions: she relies on multiple tools--blog posts, music videos on YouTube, and live performances--to reach her various audiences; she encourages her fans to listen before engaging by presenting her activism through one-way lines of digital communication; and she encourages her fans to participate offline through calls to action on her blog posts and through her own live performances at charity events. By conducting this case study on Beyoncé's methods of digital activism, we can begin to better understand how the process of identification is enacted in digital environments and what that means for promoting online and offline political participation.

Theoretical Lens: Identification

The goal of this study is to provide new insight on the work that digital activists are doing by offering an analysis of how activists are using the rhetorical strategies of identification to engage participants and spread their messages. Burke's (1969) *A Rhetoric of Motives* guides this study, with his discussion of rhetorical identification being used to understand how digital

activists are using persuasion to engage their audiences. Burke explained that “a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify with the speaker’s interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience” (1969, p. 46). The process of identification can be utilized by a skilled rhetor to help foster a sense of belonging for the audience, motivating them to not just believe the speaker’s words but to identify with their beliefs. Burke highlights the importance of this process, explaining that people are constantly renegotiating their alignment with a person or group, emphasizing the need for a continued conversation and narrative for people to identify with.

When looking at activism, the need for collective identification is fundamental to the continued momentum and success of their movement. In particular, digital activism requires a more concise sense of collective identity to guarantee that the widespread participants are able to still feel a sense of belonging. In “Activism transforms digital: The social movement perspective,” Kavada (2010) argued that “Online tools can help social movements find and disseminate information, recruit participants, organize, coordinate, and make decisions. However, this greater ease and speed of online communication does not necessarily lead to durable and stable activist networks, at least not in the traditional sense” (p. 101). While these online movements are more capable of spreading information and organizing events, Kavada explained that there is a greater need for an open narrative that participants can identify with to keep them involved: “the creation of open narrative that describe the goals of the movement in ways that invite multiple interpretations help to make such networks more long-lasting” (2010, p.

101). As Burke explained, the process of identification is ongoing and activists need to guarantee that they can continuously help people find ways to identify with their work.

This process is important to study when looking at Beyoncé's activist work in terms of her continued release of blog posts, music with activist messages, and performances as activist-related events. I will be arguing that Beyoncé has carefully created an intertextual network of tools that connects her online and offline activism in a way that engages a variety of audiences. Her "Formation" music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance were particularly strategic, and controversial, because of their references to the Black Lives Matter movement and issues related to police brutality in America. To present her activist message to a different audience than the readers of her blog and listeners of her music, Beyoncé used this public display at a highly-televised sporting event. By considering each of these three tools, I will be demonstrating through this case study how Beyoncé rhetorically invited audiences to participate in her activism.

When considering Burke's process of identification, it is also important to bring in his emphasis on consubstantiality. He argued that when people identify with a person or group, they still retain certain unique features of their own individual identity. For Burke, identification is not the same as being identical, because "identification is compensatory to division" (1969, p. 22). In order for participants to identify with an activist movement, they need to be able to see the purpose and justification for joining it based on their own beliefs and motives.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In Chapters One and Two, I identified a gap in current digital activism scholarship that indicates a need to look more broadly at the network of tools activists use online. To begin to address this gap, this chapter will describe my methodology, data collection methods, and analytical methods for studying Beyoncé’s activist tools. This case study is meant to respond to McCorkle and Palmeri’s (2014) call for more timely publications of activist work. While research has been done to study activism on and offline, it has demonstrated what Treré (2012) called the “one-medium bias” (p. 2362) in which researchers have presented a limited focus that highlights one activist tool and ignores or reduces the others that are used. This research has been designed to provide a detailed look at three separate activist tools that were employed by Beyoncé to better our understanding of how digital activists present their work and engage various audiences.

Research Site

Beyoncé Knowles-Carter was chosen for this case study because of her position as a popular culture icon, being a singer, songwriter, and actor for over two decades. Beyoncé was born September 4, 1981, in Houston, Texas, and now lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Jay Z, and daughter, Blue Ivy. She gained popularity during the 1990s as a member of Destiny’s Child, an all-female musical group, and she continued to receive recognition since beginning her solo singing career in 2006. Her popularity has since increased further with the release of her six studio albums, but recently her name has been attached to her activist work with campaigns like Chime for Change and Global Citizen.

Her position as a famous singer offers her an opportunity to present her activism to a wider audience than is typically available to digital activists. In February of 2016, Beyoncé released a music video for her new song, “Formation,” which she performed the following day during the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show. She performed alongside musicians Coldplay and Bruno Mars, and used the performance to announce her world tour. Two months later, Beyoncé released her sixth studio album, *Lemonade* (2016), which featured her strongest activist message presented through music. Between the “Formation” music video, Super Bowl performance, and release of *Lemonade*, she used these three months to promote herself as an activist in a way that had been previously limited to her private work and blog postings. Beyoncé continued to be involved in social and political work during this year by endorsing Hillary Clinton, the 2016 Democratic presidential nominee. This timely activist work, appearing across a variety of mediums, makes Beyoncé a useful case to study when responding to McCorkle and Palmeri (2014) and the need for scholarship on current activist work.

It is important to recognize that as both a performer and a public figure, Beyoncé has had access to activist tools that are often unavailable to other digital activists. Her ability to release a music video, that currently has over 52 million views since the year it was released, and perform at the Super Bowl is unique to her. The cultural capital that she has acquired sets her apart from typical activist, but it is this that makes her a useful case to study. Habermas (2006) explained the impact of social power and cultural capital in his discussion of political power in a media society:

Social power depends on the status one occupies within a stratified society; such statuses are derived from positions within functional systems. Therefore, *economic power* is a

special, yet dominant, kind of social power. It is not social power as such but rather its transformation into pressure on the political system that needs legitimation: It must not bypass the channels of the public sphere. The same can be said for the political impact of actors who arise from civil society, for example, general interest groups, religious communities, or social movements. These actors do not possess “power” in the strict sense but derive public influence from the “social” and “cultural capital” they have accumulated in terms of visibility, prominence, reputation, or moral status. (pp. 418-419)

The social power and cultural capital that Beyoncé has generated comes from her position in the media and has afforded her unique opportunities to demonstrate her activism to larger audiences. Along with the consistent one-medium bias present in current scholarship (Treré, 2012), there is also a lack of research demonstrating the reception that activist movements receive. Conducting a reception study on a digital activist would allow for a better understanding of how successful activists are at using their tools and spreading their messages to multiple audiences. Beyoncé’s cultural capital allows for a large-scale reception study to be done because of the responses that her activism has generated after her public performance at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show. While her tools are less likely to be used by other digital activists that do not have her same platform, this case study allows for an analysis of multiple activist tools as well as a reception study that can offer new ways to understand how digital activists are facilitating Burke’s (1969) process of identification within their participants.

Data Collection

This study has been designed to address the following research questions:

1. What rhetorical strategies does Beyoncé use to facilitate the process of identification within her various audiences, and how does she reinforce this process over time?
2. How does Beyoncé convey her goals and activist work across her various platforms, and what does this network look like?
 1. What are the constraints and affordances of using one-way lines of communication, such as blog posts and music, for activism?
 2. How does this network of digital tools help promote and engage various audiences?

To address these questions, the following data was collected to understand Beyoncé’s use of various activist tools:

- A sample of nine blog posts published on Beyoncé’s main website,
- The “Formation” music video, accessed through YouTube,
- Footage of the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance, and
- A sample of twenty-six tweets, ten news articles, and nine magazine and blog posts that responded to Beyoncé’s “Formation” music video and Super Bowl performance.

The goal of this data collection was to focus my case study on three predominant tools that Beyoncé used for her activism, including blog posts, digital releases of music and music videos, and live performances.

Blog Posts

While the main exigence for this research study came from the release of the “Formation” music video, a sample of nine blog posts were collected first to understand how Beyoncé

presented her activism to her readers through written text. These posts were gathered from the “#BeyGOOD” tab on her main website, <http://www.beyonce.com/>, where her blog is housed. The blog’s name, BeyGOOD, is the same name that she has often used to identify her charity work. These sample of posts were published across the span of two years, between 2015 and 2016, and were selected based on their inclusion of the following characteristics:

- Use of hyperlinks and hashtags,
- References to outside sources of information,
- Calls for readers to become active, and
- Promotion of donation sites and petitions

Each of the posts collected included hyperlinks, references to outside information, and calls to action, while numerous included links to donation sites and petitions. These posts varied in length and content, but they all explicitly directed readers to become active in some capacity, whether that was through donating, learning more information, or engaging in their own communities. Because the platform of the blog did not offer space for readers to comment or respond, these posts were collected to understand how Beyoncé promoted identification by using a one-way line of communication.

“Formation” Music Video

Beyoncé’s “Formation” music video was collected by accessing it on her website, at <http://www.beyonce.com/formation/>, and then following the video to her YouTube channel. The explicit version of the song is unlisted on YouTube, which requires that only people with the link or that visit her website can locate it. Once the video was accessed, the lyrics to the song and

video were transcribed, notes were taken alongside the lyrics to indicate which scenes appeared alongside which lyrics, and screenshots were taken of relevant scenes throughout the video (shown in Chapter Five).

Super Bowl Performance and Reception Data

For the final round of data collection, I accessed footage of the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show from the NFL YouTube channel and took screenshots of relevant scenes of Beyoncé's portion of the performance. After, I collected a variety of responses to her "Formation" music video and Super Bowl performance to understand how audiences were responding to her activism and whether these different audiences were identifying with her. This reception data came from Twitter responses posted within 24 hours of the Super Bowl, news articles that were published within the month following the performance, and magazine and blog posts published in the same span of time.

The Twitter responses were collected only from verified users, who feature a prominent blue check badge next to their username marking them as an authentic user, guaranteed by Twitter. These responses were chosen to demonstrate how other prominent voices were reacting to Beyoncé's performance and activism. According to the Twitter Help Center (2017), "An account may be verified if it is determined to be an account of public interest. Typically this includes accounts maintained by users in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, sports, business, and other key interest areas" ("Verified Accounts," 2017, para. 5). Because these verified users are of "public interest," they are likely to have their tweets receive more circulation and influence, meaning that wider audiences are likely to see and

respond to how these voices have reacted to Beyoncé's work. To locate these tweets, I used the Advanced Search option on Twitter to look for tweets published between February 6, 2016, the date of the "Formation" music video release, and February 8, 2016, the day after the 2016 Super Bowl. Specifically, I narrowed the search to include any of these terms: Beyoncé, Beyonce, Super Bowl, SB50, and #SB50. From the results, I located six responses from musicians, fourteen responses from television personalities and actors, one response from a former radio host, one response from a conservative blogger and political commentator, and three responses from other activists.

Once the Twitter responses were collected, news sources were located from a variety of platforms including the New York Times, ESPN, CNN, Fox News, Fusion, the Los Angeles Times, and Amsterdam News. Each of these articles were published within the month following the 2016 Super Bowl, and they presented their own reactions as well as reactions from other sources to Beyoncé's performance and music video. These news sources were collected because of the public nature of their responses, which allowed for further circulation much like the verified Tweets that were gathered.

After the responses from musicians, actors, and news sources were collected to understand how sources with larger audiences were reacting to Beyoncé, other sources were found from smaller blogs and magazines to view how these audiences discussed the halftime show and music video. Four magazine articles were collected, from Cosmopolitan, Teen Vogue, Dame Magazine, and Death and Taxes, along with five blog posts from BDG, Bitter Gertrude, rad fag, New South Negress, and NPR. Each of these sources were published within the month

following the release of “Formation” and the 2016 Super Bowl, and were used to see how less prominent and circulated voices responded.

Analysis Methods

Analysis of my three sets of data was grounded in qualitative data analysis, as explained by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). As they explained, “qualitative data are not so much about behavior as they are about *actions* (which carry with them intentions and meanings and lead to consequences)” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 11). In studying Beyoncé’s blog posts, “Formation” music video, and 2016 Super Bowl performance, I have focused on her actions to better understand how she facilitates the process of identification. To identify these actions in her blog posts and music video, I have also drawn on Selzer’s (2014) explanation of textual and contextual rhetorical analysis to fully understand the rhetorical moves she makes when presenting her activism. This hybrid methodology allowed for a deeper exploration of how she has tried to get readers, listeners, and viewers to identify with her activism throughout her network of tools, while providing a thick description of each data point.

Analysis of #BeyGOOD Blog Posts

Beyoncé’s blog posts were analyzed first to understand how she presented her activism directly to her readers. While the activism she displayed in her music and music videos featured a more forceful visual message that could reach a larger audience, the nine written blog posts that were collected explicitly explained her activism to her readers while asking them to engage in her work. This line of communication offered insight into how she spoke to her readers directly, and how that dictated the methods she used to get them to identify with her. My analysis

of these posts drew from Selzer’s (2004) textual rhetorical analysis theory, which he explained considers “the issue that is taken up, of course—what the writer has to offer on a given subject to a particular audience. But it also considers, more basically, things that rhetorical advice offers by way of invention, arrangement, style, and delivery” (p. 287). My analysis was focused on considering the style and arrangement of her messages to see how she rhetorically composed and presented her activism. By looking at the style of her writing as well as the arrangement of her blog posts, this analysis sought to discover how Beyoncé adapted her writing style and the composition of her posts to best invite audiences to identify with her.

To understand the rhetorical work Beyoncé did in these posts, I began with first cycle coding as described in Saldaña’s (2009) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Descriptive Coding “summarizes in a word or short phrase—most often as a noun—the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70), and was used in this first round of analysis to get a broad understanding of the content of these posts. While Saldaña explained that Descriptive Coding looks for nouns as a way of describing the topic discussed in each line of data, I adapted this to look for actions as a way of highlighting the style and arrangement of Beyoncé’s blog posts. These Descriptive Codes, shown in Table 1, allowed me to identify common actions that Beyoncé made in her posts, such as using hyperlinks to connect her work to other sources.

Table 1: Initial Codes for Beyoncé’s #BeyGOOD Blog Posts

Initial Codes	Examples			
Hyperlinks	GivingTuesday.org	GlobalCitizen.com	Hyperlinks to petitions	Hyperlinks to external information

Initial Codes	Examples			
Hashtags	#BeyGOOD	#GivingTuesday	#BooksBuildLives	#OnceAndForAll
Inclusive Language	We	Us	Together	Our
Direct Language	You	Your		
Calls to Get Informed	“Click here to find out the best way to recycle your cell phones and other electronics”	“If you are looking to learn more about how you can get involved in #GivingTuesday join the #GivingTuesday community to receive e-news and to learn more about the movement and ways you can give back and check out the official website at GivingTuesday.org.”	“Learn more about how to support on GlobalCitizen.com and read the terms and conditions of the contest here.”	“To learn more about Turnaround Houston, click here.”
Calls to Action	“In honor of Earth Day, here are six small changes you can make to your every day routines that cost you nothing but the will to BeyGOOD to Mother Earth.”	“It’s pretty simple to get involved in 3 steps: 1. Think about what you are passionate about. 2. Find a charity that aligns with your passion. 3. DONATE! VOLUNTEER! GIVE BACK!”	“You can take action now to empower girls and women by providing them access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene. Tweet now and you’ll be entered to win a pair of VIP tickets to the Global Citizen Festival, and a chance to win a meet and greet!”	“1. REGISTER TO VOTE 2. HOST A SCREENING 3. LEARN THE FACTS 4. INVEST IN GIRLS AND WOMEN 5. WATCH THE FILM”
Calls to Donate	“Here is what your donations can do: \$6 will buy a bucket with a tap to help people collect water for	“4. INVENT IN GIRLS AND WOMEN. MAKERS is inviting you to give one dollar to the women around the world who need it	“Learn more about how you can support Equality NC by donating...”	

Initial Codes	Examples			
	<p>drinking and washing \$45 will provide 1 communal latrine facility \$54 will provide a life-saving hygiene kit to stop the spread of disease..."</p>	<p>most. Donate now to Global Fund for Women."</p>		
<p>Calls to Buy Merchandise</p>	<p>"Your purchase of a BeyGOOD Haiti t-shirt can help solve an urgent funding crisis with all proceeds from sales of this shirt directly aiding St. Damien in re-opening an abandoned wing and continuing to aid the people of Haiti. Click here to purchase a shirt and support the cause."</p>	<p>"To get some Liquid Love and provide a full day of life-saving medicine to a person living with AIDS click HERE to #BeyGOOD and give back this holiday season."</p>	<p>"Learn more about Equality NC on their website, Facebook, or Twitter, and shop their merch here."</p>	
<p>Calls to Sign Petitions</p>	<p>"Ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, sign the petition and call on World Leaders to commit new funding for education in emergencies through a global humanitarian funding platform. Tell World Leaders to fund</p>			

Initial Codes	Examples			
	emergency education for displaced children everywhere by signing the petition here.”			

After identifying these initial codes, I engaged in second cycle coding using Saldaña’s (2009) coding manual to refocus my data. This was done to locate focused categories for analysis to better illustrate Beyoncé’s main actions across her blog. These focused codes (see Table 2) highlighted Beyoncé’s primary rhetorical methods for communicating with her readers: intertextuality, identification and consubstantiality, and directives and actions. Porter’s (1986) discussion of intertextuality is used here, in which he explained that “Not infrequently, and perhaps ever and always, texts refer to other texts and in fact rely on them for their meaning. All texts are interdependent: We understand a text only insofar as we understand its precursors” (p. 34). This concept of intertextuality appeared across the blog posts in the form of hyperlinks and hashtags, which connect Beyoncé’s work to other sources and conversations that readers can use to further understand her activism. Identification is being defined using Burke’s (1969) discussion of rhetorical identification, in which he explained that “a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify with the speaker’s interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience” (p. 46). Consubstantiality is also being defined using Burke, when he clarified that “Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to

division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no reason for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (1969, p. 22). It is through recognizing division that skilled rhetoricians can facilitate the process of identification, and as such both identification and consubstantiality were recognized in this second cycle of coding. Finally, directives and actions appeared through direct calls to action, seen through Beyoncé’s mentioning of petitions, donation opportunities, merchandise sales, and calls to get further informed.

Table 2: Focused Codes for Beyoncé’s #BeyGOOD Blog Posts

Focused Codes	Initial Codes			
Intertextuality	Hyperlinks	Hashtags		
Consubstantiality and Identification	Inclusive Language (We, Us, Our)	Direct Language (You, Your)		
Directives and Actions	Calls to Get Informed	Calls to Action	Calls to Donate or Buy Merchandise	Calls to Sign Petitions

Analysis of “Formation” Music Video

Following my analysis of Beyoncé’s blog posts, I conducted a contextual analysis of her “Formation” music video to see how the methods she used in her blog translated into her use of this different tool. Selzer (2004) explained:

Contextual rhetorical analysis proceeds from a thick description of the rhetorical situation that motivated the item in question. It demands an appreciation of the social circumstances that call rhetorical events into being and that orchestrate the course of those events. It regards communications as anything but self-contained. (p. 292)

This contextual rhetorical analysis was chosen to account for the change in medium used by Beyoncé when switching to music video rather than written text. The music video included multiple references to other events and sources, including Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and black identity, all of which required a contextual focus rather than a textual one. First and second cycle coding was again used in the analysis of this video to fully demonstrate the contextual references Beyoncé made within the video to present the different facets of her activism. The examples and initial codes are seen in Table 3 below. After this first cycle of coding, the same focused codes that emerged in the second cycle of analysis for the blog were applied, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3: Initial Codes for "Formation" Music Video

Initial Codes	Examples			
References to Other Media	Martin Luther King, Jr. newspaper article	High school basketball jerseys	New Orleans bounce musicians (Messy Mya; Big Freedia)	Jackson 5
Get in Formation	Dancing (in hallway; in parking lot; bottom of pool)	Standing united (porch; police; women in house)	Interactions between genders (church; parade)	
Other Directives	"Stop Shooting Us"			
Police	Sinking New Orleans Police car	Police officers standing in front of dancing child;	Police jacket	"Stop Shooting Us"
Hurricane Katrina/ New Orleans	Sinking New Orleans Police car	Flooding and destroyed house	Voiceover of Messy Mya and Big Freedia	Edna Karr High School Drum Majors
Children	Blue Ivy	Lyrics: "Like my baby hair with baby hair and afro"	Boy dancing in front of police officers	

Initial Codes	Examples			
Black Self-Love	“Like my baby hair with baby hair and afro”	“I like my negro nose with Jackson 5 nostrils”	References to black hair	

Table 4: Focused Codes for "Formation" Music Video"

Focused Codes	Examples			
Intertextuality	References to historical figures	References to other musicians	References to New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina	
Consubstantiality and Identification	Black self-love	Children	New Orleans, Church, and Hurricane Katrina	Police
Directives and Actions	Formation	References to police		

Reception Study

After comparing how Beyoncé used intertextuality, identification and consubstantiality, and directives and actions in her blog posts and “Formation” music video, I ended my analysis with a reception study looking at the responses that Beyoncé received for her music video and 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance. This reception study heavily drew from Ceccarelli’s (2005) “A Hard Look at Ourselves: A Reception Study of the Rhetoric of Science,” in which she engaged with and considered the various reactions her book, *Shaping Science with Rhetoric*, received. Ceccarelli explained that

If a reception study is to offer any lessons for the rhetorician attempting to speak to the science studies community, it will have to examine negative assessments of our field closely and charitably to see if they have any legitimacy beyond political expediency.

And even if political expediency is the primary motivation of these attacks, a closer examination should help us to understand why rhetoricians are being construed as interlopers to be dismissed rather than as neighbors to be engaged; after all, there is no intrinsic reason why the territory of science studies cannot accommodate all. (2005, p. 259)

As she explained in her own reception study, this process allows for an understanding of why audiences reacted in specific ways and what that reveals about the success of the original product. She ended her piece by announcing that reception studies can “tell us a lot about how our appeals are being received and thus can help us to modify those appeals, if appropriate, to better communicate our worth to our academic neighbors” (Ceccarelli, 2005, p. 263). Using her article, I looked to see how various audiences, including musicians, actors, television personalities, journalists, news reporters, and bloggers, reacted to the activist message present in her “Formation” song. These responses were studied to gauge the effectiveness of Beyoncé’s attempts to get her audiences to align with her and identify with the references to black self-love, police brutality, and female empowerment in the song.

Part of my analysis is grounded in the understanding that Beyoncé used her different activist tools to engage with multiple audiences on different levels. In analyzing both her blog posts and her “Formation” music video, I attempted to locate the strategies she employed to get these various audiences to find reasons to identify with her activism. To do so, Ceccarelli’s (1998) discussion of polysemy, or the “rhetorical strategy employed by the calculating rhetor to bring different audiences, through different paths, to a point of convergence in the acceptance of a text” (p. 396), was used to discuss how the reactions differed across audiences. By considering

how other entertainers, news reporters, and personal bloggers reacted, I aimed to see which of Beyoncé's methods were primarily cited as reasons for identifying with her activism. This reception study was designed to figure out what strategies were most successful and how those strategies transferred and were adapted based on the medium Beyoncé used.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN ANALYSIS OF BEYONCÉ'S #BEYGOOD BLOG

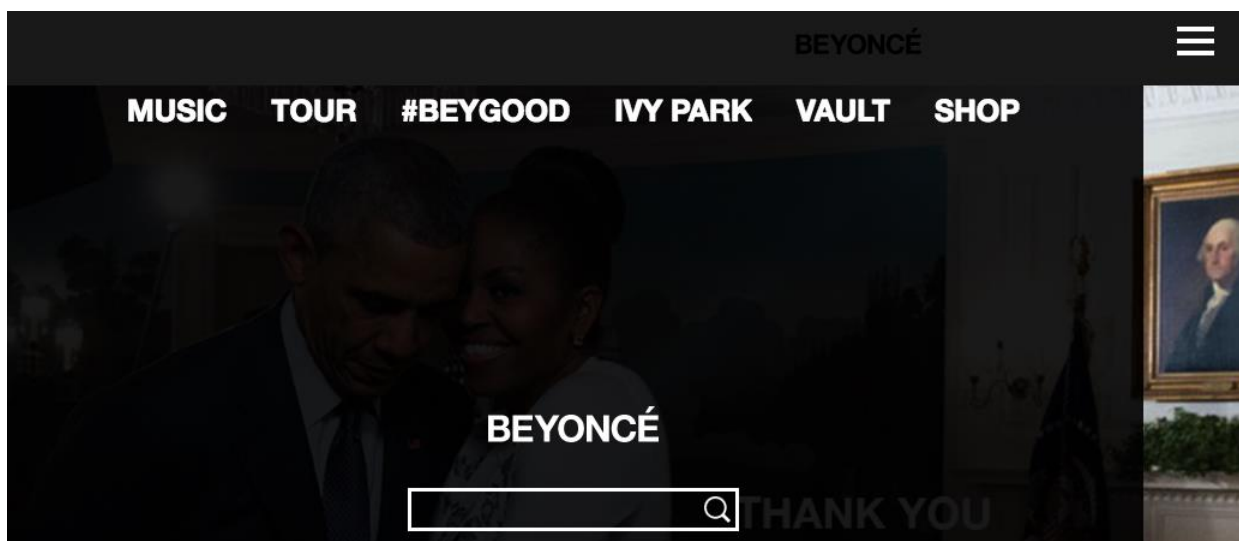
In this chapter, I present the findings of my analysis of Beyoncé's #BeyGOOD blog. This analysis was focused on the platform of the blog as well as a sample of nine blog posts, published across a span of twenty months, looking to understand the rhetorical work Beyoncé does to create opportunities for identification. The blog posts collected feature a range of topics, including activist work related to [LGBT rights](#), [pediatric care in Haiti](#), and [funding for education across the globe](#), but they all include similar features such as hyperlinks for readers to learn more information, and directed statements encouraging readers to be active and involved. These moves were tracked across the blog posts and were coded for instances of identification, intertextuality, and directives. This chapter will first discuss the findings of my analysis of the platform of the blog, and will conclude with the findings of my analysis of the blog posts.

Analysis of the Blog's Platform

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Lawrence (2010) suggested three steps for effective digital activism: 1) integration of multiple tools; 2) listening before engaging; and 3) turning online work into physical action. While this study is designed to highlight the multiple tools that Beyoncé uses to further her activism and engage her fans, her #BeyGOOD blog reinterprets Lawrence's second step of listening before engaging by asking her participants to become informed before they participate. While Lawrence directed his suggestions at other digital activists, this chapter will explore how Beyoncé refocused that suggestion at her own readers. Because her blog acts as a one-way line of communication between her and her fans, I will be arguing that Beyoncé used her blog posts to inform her readers before directing them to become

engaged. However, Lawrence’s second suggestion to listen before engaging is highlighted in this analysis to recognize the rhetorical strategies Beyoncé used to guarantee that her readers are becoming informed before participating.

The blog is located on Beyoncé’s [main website](#), and is accessible from the main menu under the title “#BEYGOOD,” as seen in Figure 1 below. Because of Beyoncé’s prominent position in popular culture as a singer, songwriter, actor, and activist, she can use her own website as the platform for her blog to guarantee that fans can learn about her activism and become engaged.



Source: Beyoncé’s Website <http://www.beyonce.com/>

Figure 1: Main Menu for Beyoncé’s Website

Because the blog is placed directly on her website, it exists in a space that is easy for fans to access while also offering new visitors to Beyoncé’s website the opportunity to witness her activism and become involved. The main page of the website features a scrolling list of photos from tour performances, magazine interviews, and other events, but has no written material for visitors to browse through. For visitors that are looking to listen to her music, shop her

merchandise, or buy tickets to her tour, they are required to access the main menu which prominently features the #BeyGOOD blog. This design choice further increases the chance that the blog will be seen, while the name “#BeyGOOD” itself does not immediately disclose that it is an activist blog. Given her recent album release, performance at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show, and work supporting 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, it is even more likely that new viewers who are looking into her will find her blog and learn about her work.

By using a prominent space like her own website for the blog, Beyoncé can promote her activism to a wide audience while asking her participants to listen before becoming engaged. The website, and especially the blog itself, offers no opportunities for readers to engage directly with her or comment on her work. By using a one-way method of communication that does not allow for comments, input, or feedback from her readers, Beyoncé is reinforcing the notion of truly listening and engaging with the conversation surrounding activist work before becoming fully engaged. Readers are forced to read Beyoncé’s writing to figure out how they can engage with her work, through the signing of petitions, giving donations, or taking the conversation to other platforms.

Across the blog posts Beyoncé uses a combination of hyperlinks and hashtags to connect her readers to other resources, providing them with further opportunities to become informed on the conversation happening around her activist work. Along with these resources, Beyoncé strategically uses a hashtag as the name of her blog to allow readers to communicate on other platforms after they become informed. The hashtag provided as the title of the blog, #BeyGOOD, does not act like a traditional hashtag that links out to other content directly on the blog itself. However, it does provide fans with the ability to use it off the blog for their own

purposes in a way that will link their conversations to other participants. Using this hashtag, Beyoncé encourages her fans to engage in fan activism, or the “phenomena where fans appropriate protest practices for personal causes outside the purview of traditional political movements” (Arora, 2014, p. 9). This hashtag is prominently featured across the blog, listed above the title of each blog post on the main page, directly under the image associated with each post. The hashtag is also listed above the title of each blog post on their individual pages, as well as within the text of numerous posts, with the reinforced prominence of the hashtag reminding readers to “be good” by becoming informed and active.

Because the blog acts as a one-way line of communication between Beyoncé and her fans, she is rhetorically working to get fans to engage in her activism in specific ways that work against arguments that digital activism, or slacktivism, is low-risk and ineffective. Scholars like Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2013) have made the argument that digital activism only requires low-risk work that is easy to do and ineffective for creating major political or social change. However, Beyoncé’s complex network of tools as well as her creation and maintenance of her blog demonstrates her commitment to her work and her continual engagement online. Her activism demonstrates a counter-example to the idea of slacktivism, while her blog specifically encouraged readers to commit to more purposeful and sustainable activist work. By using her blog to educate her readers and point them toward ways to make meaningful changes in the world, she promotes long-lasting activist work through the education of her fans.

Because Beyoncé provides this one main hashtag alongside the hyperlinked resources across the blog, she is providing readers with opportunities to sign petitions, donate, and join a growing conversation around activist work that is moved off the blog into other digital spaces,

further complicating this digital network. Along with the main hashtag, each blog post ends with the opportunity to share the post via Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest, allowing for readers to spread the information to their own audiences after they interact with Beyoncé's writing. By sharing these blog posts and including #BeyGOOD, readers can discuss Beyoncé's activism with other interested and involved readers, as well as with other audiences that may be less familiar or active. Her rhetorical decision to prohibit readers from commenting directly on the blog forces readers to engage in other ways, either through the methods she directs them towards in her blog posts or through the sharing of her work in other digital spaces.

Analysis of the Blog Posts

When analyzing the blog posts, I continued to focus on the rhetorical strategies Beyoncé was making to encourage reader involvement and identification through her writing. Her network of activist tools is complex, with her songs, music videos, performances, and Facebook posts each demonstrating different methods for communicating her activism and engaging her fans, but the blog offers the clearest and most articulated demonstration of her work. Beyoncé uses a combination of intertextual references, clear directive statements, and inclusive language to get readers engaged, informed, and involved, in a way that is more visible and pronounced than through her other tools. I used these three categories as the focused codes for my analysis, as demonstrated in Table 1 below. These focused codes were found across all nine blog posts and were used to decode Beyoncé's rhetorical strategies for facilitating the process of identification.

Table 5: Focused Codes for Beyoncé’s #BeyGOOD Blog Posts

Focused Codes	Initial Codes			
Intertextuality	Hyperlinks	Hashtags		
Consubstantiality and Identification	Inclusive Language (We, Us, Our)	Direct Language (You, Your)		
Directives and Actions	Calls to Get Informed	Calls to Action	Calls to Donate or Buy Merchandise	Calls to Sign Petitions

Intertextuality

As previously mentioned in my discussion of the platform of the blog, one of the main rhetorical functions of Beyoncé’s blog involves getting readers informed and then involved with the activist projects that she is working on. Across the posts, Beyoncé uses a variety of hashtags and hyperlinks to connect herself to other conversations off the blog. While the hashtags are not hyperlinked, as already discussed with the #BeyGOOD title, they give readers the necessary tools to discuss this activist work off the blog with others who are also engaged. If they choose to, readers are able to engage in discussions on Twitter and other social media sites using these hashtags to connect them to others in the conversation. The hyperlinks that Beyoncé uses serve a different function of helping readers expand their understanding of her activism beyond her own written word. She gives her readers the opportunity to gain a preliminary understanding of her activism, and she works to get her readers invested in her work, but she then gives them the opportunity to become further informed through their own investigation into the material she hyperlinks out to. The intertextual nature of these posts demonstrates the potential for activist work that exists in digital spaces, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of educated activist work.

The main hashtag, #BeyGOOD, reflects Beyoncé's goal of creating informed and active participants who are being good to the world around them. The blog posts cover a wide range of activist work, including education, LGBTQ rights, and the health of the planet, each with a message that prompts readers to make positive changes to the world. While #BeyGOOD is useful for connecting all readers of the blog when they discuss this work on other social media platforms, Beyoncé incorporates other hashtags throughout that provide for a more focused conversation around particular topics and projects. In the November 20th, 2015 blog post titled "[MAKERS: Once and For All](#)," she advertised the film "Once and For All" created by MAKERS, "the largest collection of women's stories ever assembled." The rest of the post was devoted to listing five steps for reader involvement, including resources for registering to vote within the United States and screening the movie. The last of the five step reads, "The Fourth World Conference for Women, Beijing 1995 was a seminal moment in the history of the women's rights movement. Learn why by watching #OnceAndForAll." The hashtag that ends this message gives readers the opportunity to join a conversation about the movie to become more involved in the work surrounding women's rights. Beyoncé's inclusion of this hashtag, which was already being used by MAKERS, gives readers the opportunity to engage online by joining the discussion in other digital spaces.

Similar work was done in the December 1st, 2015 blog post, "[#GivingTuesday](#)." The title of the blog is itself a hashtag, but it is also featured in the image at the top of the post and four times within the text. Beyoncé explained that "#GivingTuesday is a 24-hour online campaign that began in 2012, dedicated to encouraging people to make donations to charities, volunteer and generally support philanthropic efforts." This day follows the Thanksgiving holiday and

encourages people to give back to their communities. Beyoncé connected this work directly back to the overall mission of her activist work when she explained that “Giving Tuesday is a part of a global celebration of a new tradition of generosity and is in-line with the mission of BeyGOOD, to pay it forward.” This notion of paying it forward is represented throughout the blog posts, with the use of hashtags and hyperlinks serving as just one way of getting readers active in whatever way they can, whether that is through donating, signing petitions, attending events, or facilitating dialog about these issues.

Hyperlinking was more predominantly featured across the blog than these hashtags, with links being used in each post to connect readers to additional resources or to prompt them to donate, sign petitions, or otherwise get involved. By using these external resources often, Beyoncé more directly and concisely announced aspects of her activism that she wants her readers to focus on, while giving them the tools to learn more on their own. In doing so, Beyoncé gave her readers agency over their own engagement, which allowed her to limit the length and complexity of her posts while expanding on her digital network. This intertextuality is important to recognize when considering the work done by digital activists because it reveals one of the major affordances provided in online spaces. In connecting with these specific resources, Beyoncé is building her own activist identity through her blog while using these sources to convince audiences to align with her work. While she has already generated some credibility with her fans as a prominent public figure, her use of hyperlinking to other activists and organizations helps her become more credible and clear with her intentions.

In her May 3rd, 2016 post, “[Equality NC Works to Prove ‘Y’all Means All’](#)” Beyoncé discussed the work that Equality NC was doing to fight against the discriminatory House Bill 2

in North Carolina, which restricted bathrooms in the state to single-sex usage based on biological sex and not gender identification. In her discussion of their work, Beyoncé hyperlinked out to the House Bill 2, as well as to the Equality NC website, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, as well as their merchandise shop, as seen in Figure 2 below.

Learn more about how you can support Equality NC by donating, volunteering, becoming an ambassador, attending an event, or simply spreading the word!

Learn more about Equality NC on their [website](#), [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) and shop their merch [here](#).

Source: “Equality NC Works to Prove Y’all Means All”
<http://www.beyonce.com/equality-nc-formation-world-tour-north-carolina/>

Figure 2: “Equality NC Works to Prove Y’all Means All” Sample Hyperlinks

Seven hyperlinks are used in the post connecting readers to the House Bill 2, information about her world tour which was about to stop in North Carolina, and resources to learn about and support Equality NC.

While the Equality NC blog post focused on raising awareness, the “[We Are with You Nepal](#)” post from a year prior, May 1st, 2015, used hyperlinks to prioritize donations, as seen in Figure 3 below. This post was written directly following the April, 2015 earthquake in Nepal and focused on informing readers of Beyoncé’s partnership with Music for Relief, an organization founded by Linkin Park. She explains that “Since inception in 2005 Music for Relief has raised over \$7 million for survivors of multiple disasters across four continents including Hurricane Katrina, China’s Wenchuan earthquake, a cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe, earthquakes in Haiti and Japan in 2010 and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.” As part of her partnership with the organization, Beyoncé used her post to call for readers to donate to help support recovery efforts in Nepal.

We are proud to join [Music for Relief](#) as they commit themselves to immediate relief and long-term recovery in Nepal. This is an opportunity to join us and #BeyGOOD to support the people of Nepal.

Here is what your donations can do:

\$6 will buy a bucket with a tap to help people collect water for drinking and washing

\$45 will provide 1 communal latrine facility

\$54 will provide a life-saving hygiene kit to stop the spread of disease

\$153 will provide communal toilet and washing facilities for families

\$207 will provide one temporary shelter / tent for a family who has been left homeless

\$1,675 will provide one 10m bladder tank to store clean drinking water to reach 1,000 people (that is just \$1.60 per person)

\$15,000 will fund 1 mobile medical unit for 1 month, which will treat approx. 6,000 victims.

100% of funds raised will benefit survivors on the ground in Nepal.

Source: "We Are with You Nepal" <http://www.beyonce.com/we-are-with-you-nepal/>

Figure 3: "We Are with You Nepal" Sample Hyperlinks

The first hyperlink seen above takes readers to the Music for Relief website, while the second hyperlink connects directly to the donation page for the organization. By providing both links, Beyoncé encourages readers to research the group on their own before deciding to donate so that her own voice is not overshadowing the work that Music for Relief is doing. Underneath the donation link is a list explaining how donations will help the victims of the earthquake, with examples that span from a \$6 donation to a \$15,000 donation. This list along and the confirmation that "100% of the funds raised will benefit survivors on the group in Nepal" shows her readers how their donations will have a direct impact on the recovery efforts.

Consubstantiality and Identification

While Beyoncé's intertextual network is useful for helping readers become informed, she does more work than just providing them with these resources. Throughout her posts, she uses a combination of inclusive and direct terms to facilitate the process of identification for her readers, demonstrated in Table 2 below. Inclusive terms like "we," "together," "us," and "our"

are used across the blog to align readers with the work Beyoncé is doing, while direct terms like “you” and “your” are used as encouragements to get them engaged and active. Because she is relying on this one-way line of communication between her and her fans, this balance between inclusive and direct terms is essential in getting readers to utilize the resources she is providing.

Table 6: Frequency of Inclusive and Direct Terms

Inclusive Terms				
Term	We	Together	Us	Our
Frequency	11	2	2	3
Direct Terms				
Term	You	Your		
Frequency	19	18		

These inclusive terms, which are used a total of 18 times across the sample of blogs, offer opportunities for readers to feel included in Beyoncé’s activism. This method of communication demonstrates Burke’s (1969) theory of consubstantiality, in which he explains that for people to identify with a movement or person they must be able to see a purpose and justification for joining based on their own beliefs and motives. The use of the words “we,” “our,” “us,” and “together” is meant to create opportunities for identification, but they are used sparingly throughout Beyoncé’s explanation of her activism so that the focus remains on educating her readers. In the “Equality NC Works to Prove ‘Y’all Means All’” blog post, these inclusive terms are only used twice in the middle of the post, after she explained the House Bill 2:

As The Formation World Tour makes its stop in the Tar Heel state in the midst of such a controversial time, we think it is important for us to bring attention to those who are

committed to being good and carrying on the message of equality in this core of controversy.

The use of “we” and “us” in this section of her blog post connects the work Beyoncé and her team are doing directly to her readers, and is strategically placed in the middle of the post after she has already explained the discrimination against LGBT rights in the House Bill 2. By first describing the situation and hyperlinking out to the full bill, Beyoncé constructs her post to prioritize helping readers find their own motivations to be engaged before she connects with them through her inclusive language.

The direct terms are seen more frequently, with a total of 37 instances across the sample, and they are often used after inclusive terms. This structure of informing readers, aligning with them, and then directing them to do work was demonstrated in the majority of Beyoncé’s posts. This final step of encouraging readers to become active using directives is successful only when readers can identify directly with Beyoncé and find a reason to contribute to her activism. In the “We Are With You Nepal” post, Beyoncé uses this three-step structure by first discussing the damage that the April 2015 earthquake caused in Nepal. After informing readers and linking out to the Music for Relief website, she writes “We are proud to join Music for Relief as they commit themselves to immediate relief and long-term recovery in Nepal. This is an opportunity to join us and #BeyGOOD to support the people of Nepal.” The inclusive “we” and “us” terms are again seen connecting readers to Beyoncé, and are quickly followed up with “Here is what your donations can do.” The process of consubstantiality is demonstrated in this movement between educating readers, using inclusive language, and then calling on them to be active,

because it highlights Beyoncé's effort to get readers to find reasons to align themselves with her goals before she asks them to actively participate.

This consideration of Beyoncé's use of inclusive and direct language highlights the role that arrangement plays when creating activist messages in digital spaces. Beyoncé used this specific organizational structure to invite her audiences to identify with her activism by first educating them before asking them to become involved. Her strategic arrangement emphasizes the importance of audience awareness when trying to include and persuade audiences to become active online. Beyoncé's unique audience of fans, who are unable to directly interact with her through the blog itself, required a specific arrangement of information to persuade them to feel included and to find reasons to be invested, but this has implications for the larger field of digital activism. This analysis demonstrates the need for digital activists to understand and consider their audiences when creating their digital messages, especially when those messages exist as one-way lines of communication that do not allow for audiences to respond. Beyoncé's systematic arrangement helps to create consistency across her blog posts, and it allows for both new and old visitors to identify with her work without having to backtrack through old posts. This method can be similarly applied to other activist work where the participants are unable to interact with the authors.

Directives and Actions

The third step in the process discussed above is Beyoncé's main method for getting readers informed and involved. Because she has created a one-way line of communication between her and her readers, she uses these directives and calls to action at the end of each of her

posts to push them to become activists themselves so that they can be involved in her BeyGOOD work. This final move, which directs readers to become further informed, sign petitions, donate, buy merchandise, become active in their own communities, or get involved in larger discussions off her blog, is successful only through her use of hyperlinks and inclusive and direct language. By combining these three methods, Beyoncé informs her readers, helps them identify with her activism and feel motivated to contribute, and then calls on them to turn their knowledge into direct participation. Each blog included in this sample features a direct call to become engaged and active alongside her and the other organizations she is working with.

Some blog posts prioritize one specific directive, such as a call to sign a petition, as seen in the February 4th, 2016 post “[#BooksBuildLives](#).” Beyoncé used a hashtag as the title of the post, and she prioritized informing readers of the necessity of education, but the only hyperlink on the post came in the last sentence when she asked readers to sign a petition “[calling] on World Leaders to commit new funding for education in emergencies through a global humanitarian funding platform.” Other posts, such as the “#GivingTuesday” post, combine various directives to give readers opportunities to become engaged based on their own level of identification and access. This post first asked readers to become involved in their communities and spread the word of #GivingTuesday: “Just find a way for your family, your community, your company or your organization to come together to give something more. Then tell everyone you can about how you are giving.” Later in the post, Beyoncé added in another directive asking readers to inform themselves on other ways to become active: “If you are looking to learn more about how you can get involved in #GivingTuesday, join the #GivingTuesday community to receive e-news and to learn more about the movement and ways you can give back and check out

the official website at GivingTuesday.org.” “Your” appeared four times in these two quotes, with “you” appearing another five times, demonstrating again how Beyoncé is using her direct language to clearly speak to her readers asking them to become engaged.

Beyoncé’s combination of intertextual references to other sources, inclusive and direct language to facilitate her reader’s process of identification, and direct calls to action demonstrates the rhetorical strategies she employs to gain support for her activism. These three strategies were evident across the sample of blog posts, and they highlight Beyoncé’s focus on informing and engaging her audiences. While each of these moves are evident, most of each blog is dedicated to the first step of educating her readers on the work she is doing. By using both her own language and the hyperlinked resources, she took time in each post to offer space for readers to find reasons to identify with her work, regardless of whether they were already familiar with her activism, before she asked them to become engaged. Beyoncé’s focus on informing her audiences before allowing them to engage is important when considering the question of sustainability in digital activism and social movements.

One prominent criticism of digital activism is the ease with which people can sign a petition or tweet their opinions and be done (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Morozov, 2013). To avoid this, it is important for activists to offer reasons for participants to do more consistent work. By providing information and resources for further learning, Beyoncé built her own credibility across these posts and used it to facilitate the process of identification. As the platform of the blog does not allow for readers to comment directly on her posts, people who are able to identify with Beyoncé are forced to follow the channels that she provides at the end of each post. This alone does not guarantee sustainable work, but Beyoncé’s effort to offer opportunities for

new and returning readers to identify with each new post promotes more consistent and meaningful online participation. This work that Beyoncé has done in her posts reflects the need for more research on digital activism work that considers the strategies that activists are employing to create sustainable online movements. By studying more long-term digital activism work, scholars can offer a repertoire of strategies that encourage lasting online participation.

This chapter has detailed the work that Beyoncé does in her #BeyGOOD blog posts to begin to see how she uses writing to identify with her audiences. The next chapter will continue this work to see how her methods of communicating her activism transfer to the medium of music and visuals through an analysis of her “Formation” music video.

CHAPTER FIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE “FORMATION” MUSIC VIDEO

On February 6, 2016, the night before her 2016 Super Bowl halftime Show performance, Beyoncé released the music video for her song “Formation.” This song and video were released without any advertising or notice, and featured lyrics and footage that heavily referenced police brutality in the United States, black self-love, female empowerment, and unity. This was not Beyoncé’s first song or video with an activist message, as the 2011 song “Run the World (Girls)” promoted female empowerment, and the 2013 song “***Flawless” featured Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s speech defining feminism. However, “Formation” was her most prominently activist song to date given the wide range of social and political problems she addressed. The video referenced New Orleans, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, her family history, and the Black Lives Matter movement to give various audiences an opportunity to identify with her message to “get in formation,” or to stay united.

This chapter will focus on deconstructing the rhetorical choices Beyoncé made in the song and video, while Chapter Six will look more closely at how her audiences received and responded to her music video and Super Bowl performance of the same song. Because she targets several political issues in the video and performance, I am applying the idea of polysemy as defined by Ceccarelli. Specifically, she says that “polysemy is a rhetorical strategy employed by the calculating rhetor to bring different audiences, through different paths, to a point of convergence in the acceptance of a text” (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 396). Because the video and performance had a wider audience than her blog posts, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which Beyoncé attempted to connect with as many groups as possible. To analyze the

“Formation” music video and song, the same focused codes used in my analysis of her blog were applied, as seen in Table 3 below. By looking for instances of intertextuality, consubstantiality and identification, and directives and actions, I hoped to understand how her methods for getting readers to identify with her activism through her blog translated into this medium.

Table 7: Focused Codes for "Formation" Music Video

Focused Codes	Examples			
Intertextuality	References to historical figures	References to other musicians	References to New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina	
Consubstantiality and Identification	Black self-love	Children	New Orleans, Church, and Hurricane Katrina	Police
Directives and Actions	Formation	References to police		

Intertextuality

Within the music video, Beyoncé included and referenced historical figures, other prominent black musicians, New Orleans locals, and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Each of these references were made so that a variety of audiences could find reasons to identify with the message of unity and organization that is persistent across the video, as the title “Formation” suggests. By creating an intertextual video that uses distinct references to further her own message, Beyoncé builds her credibility just as she did through her blog posts.

The music video began with a voice-over of Messy Mya, a New Orleans bounce artist and comedian who was murdered in 2010 at the age of 22, saying “What happened at the New Orleans?” Messy Mya’s voice introduced Beyoncé’s own commentary on Hurricane Katrina while simultaneously connecting back to the crime and violence that is still persistent in the

United States, especially in places like New Orleans. Big Freedia, another prominent New Orleans bounce artist, is briefly featured a minute into the video saying “I did not come to play with you hoes! I came to slay, bitch! I like cornbread and collard greens, bitch! Oh yas, you besta believe it.” This brief interlude comes between two renditions of the chorus of the song in which Beyoncé sings “Earned all this money, but they never take the country out me. I got hot sauce in my bag, swag.” The repeated references to Southern foods, including cornbread, collard greens, and hot sauce, further connect Beyoncé back to the Southern life that she is trying to depict and celebrate in the video and song. Along with the food, Beyoncé connected her frequent use of the lyric “Cause I slay” to Big Freedia’s line “I came to slay” to further identify her music with these bounce artists. Beyoncé promoted and celebrated New Orleans hip hop music by featuring Messy Mya and Big Freedia in her video while further associating herself with Southern black culture. This use of intertextuality identifies the strategies that Beyoncé used in her music video to align herself with different groups to allow multiple audiences to associate themselves with her. By connecting to New Orleans artists and Southern black culture through these sound clips and visuals, Beyoncé has positioned herself alongside specific audiences that she intended on addressing through the song.

Beyoncé also used references to Martin Luther King, Jr. and The Jackson 5 in the video to offer further opportunities for viewers to identify with her message. While including Messy Mya and Big Freedia allowed for select audiences to identify with her, it limited her reach to people who were already familiar with these New Orleans voices. By including more widely recognizable names alongside the bounce artists, Beyoncé extended her audience to offer more groups to participate. Martin Luther King, Jr. appeared in the video when a man is shown

holding up a newspaper with a front-page article titled “More Than A Dreamer,” seen in Figure 4 below, as the lyrics “I dream it, I work hard, I grind till I own it” play over it. The newspaper article and reference to Martin Luther King, Jr. is used by Beyoncé to reference the continued conversation surrounding racial inequality within the United States.



Source: “Formation” Music Video <https://youtu.be/LrCHz1gwzTo>

Figure 4: Martin Luther King, Jr. Newspaper from the "Formation" Music Video

While Martin Luther King, Jr. appeared through this visual in the video, The Jackson 5 were mentioned directly in Beyoncé’s lyrics: “I like my negro nose with Jackson 5 nostrils.” The Jackson 5 were a popular black musical group made up of five brothers, including Michael Jackson, who began their career in the late 1960s. By referencing them in these lyrics, Beyoncé continued to promote black self-love, which was one of the main themes in the song. The inclusion of these artists, alongside Messy Mya and Big Freedia, expanded her audience further by appealing to others familiar with The Jackson 5’s music as well as those who understood her message of self-love. By combining the voices, images, and names of these black artists and cultural leaders, Beyoncé attempted to create a space for a wide variety of audiences to recognize her references and identify with her political message.

Alongside these well-known names, Beyoncé included references to other aspects of New Orleans culture, including high school basketball and marching band. While each of these images only appear once, they add to the complex intertextual narrative she presented within this video. The basketball jerseys worn in the video, seen in Figure 5 below, read “Bamas,” which is neither an official high school basketball team or jersey.



Source: “Formation” Music Video <https://youtu.be/LrCHz1gwzTo>

Figure 5: High School Basketball Jersey from the "Formation" Music Video

However, Ward (2016) explained in her NPR article “In Beyoncé’s ‘Formation,’ A Glorification Of ‘Bama’ Blackness” that from her experience in college the term “bama” had a complicated meaning: “That’s when I understood what ‘bama’ meant, and I didn’t bother denying it. I knew that as soon as I told my classmates I was from the South, they saw me as an under-educated, ignorant, foolish rube. Sometimes, in the rarefied environment of that elite college, I thought the same of myself” (para. 3). She continued to explain that she saw Beyoncé’s use of the word to be a way of reclaiming the term for her own purposes: “If they want to call you bama, let ‘em, Beyoncé croons. Let them hate on all this life, this beauty. Let them know we bear the weight of the whole country’s history, and we still love our Afros and Jackson 5 noses. That we still love

our babies and our Negroes” (Ward, 2016, para. 9). By using the term in her lyrics and written across the basketball jerseys, Beyoncé continued to present black heritage and culture in a positive light.

Along with the high school jerseys, a scene in the video featured four drum majors from the Edna Karr High School Marching Band, located in New Orleans. Nathaniel Kenner, Rashad Dillon, Josh Brown, and Lawjahn Johnson appeared in their drum major attire, shown in Figure 6 below, again referencing back to life in New Orleans. This scene is used alongside other images of New Orleans life, including church sermons and street parades, all of which is mixed in with footage of flooded streets and a sinking New Orleans police car. By alternating between images of daily life and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Beyoncé showcased the persistence of the New Orleans citizens while forcing her audiences to witness the hardships they have had to endure.



Source: “Formation” Music Video <https://youtu.be/LrCHz1gwzTo>

Figure 6: Edna Karr High School Marching Band from the "Formation" Music Video

Beyoncé's intertextual references in this music video reflect her rhetorical consideration of the various audiences she is interacting with. Much like her blog, Beyoncé uses these references to invite audiences to become invested in her work through their own self-interest in issues related to police brutality, queer culture, black identity, or Southern culture. The visuals and audio used throughout the video act as individual references aimed at generating a response in her audiences, while the overall combination of these references asks readers to consider why they are aligning with her message, whether it is based on one visual or sound, or multiple. Her careful rhetorical work in this music video demonstrates another way in which intertextuality can be successfully used across digital tools. When considering digital activism, we can assume that activists are looking to engage multiple audiences when they use publicly, or at least widely accessible, online platforms. If this is their goal, this analysis of Beyoncé's music video as well as the analysis of her blog in the previous chapter offer methods for using intertextuality to connect with these various audiences.

Consubstantiality and Identification

Beyoncé presented numerous activist themes in her "Formation" song and music video, including black self-love, feminism, and police brutality. To successfully push this message in a way that would get her viewers to understand, appreciate, and further spread her messages, she had to use images and references that would provide her audiences with reasons to identify with her work. This was accomplished in her blog through her use of hyperlinks to other sources as well as through inclusive language, but it took on a different appearance within the video. Beyoncé combined a variety of modes of communication in the song, using the voices of Messy

Mya and Big Freedia, the mention of The Jackson 5 in her lyrics, and the visuals of Martin Luther King, Jr., New Orleans life, and Hurricane Katrina. While these voices and images created an opening for some audiences to interpret and connect with her song, Beyoncé predominantly relied on other visuals to more directly connect her with her viewers.

As previously mentioned, black self-love is a prominent theme that is presented through Beyoncé's lyrics and video. The video identifies issues relating to black identity and police brutality in the United States, and Beyoncé used her platform as a prominent black female musician to promote pride and ownership rather than fear or guilt. During the song, the following lyrics appear twice:

My daddy Alabama,

Mama Louisiana.

You mix that negro with that Creole make a Texas-Bama.

I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros,

I like my negro nose with Jackson 5 nostrils.

While these lyrics are being sung, images are presented of Beyoncé dancing with other black female dancers, black portraits hanging on the walls of an old Southern house, and Beyoncé's daughter, Blue, smiling at the camera alongside two other young black girls. These references to black women dancing in formation, and of smiling black children, works alongside the lyrics to demonstrate pride and representation.

Children appeared in multiple scenes throughout the video, but these appearances present two contrasting scenarios. The first situation promotes black self-love and cultural pride, with Blue being the first example, followed halfway through the video by an image of a young child

dancing in a parade costume. These scenes, which depicted smiling children, were disrupted by the final child that appeared in the second half of the video. This young black boy, shown in Figure 7 below, was shown in multiple scenes dancing in front of a row of police officers in riot gear, with graffiti spelling out “Stop Shooting Us” on the wall next to him. This direct reference to issues of police brutality in the United States connects back to the growing number of young black men who were shot and killed by police officers before the release of this video.



Source: “Formation” Music Video <https://youtu.be/LrCHz1gwzTo>

Figure 7: Child Dancing from the "Formation" Music Video

By contrasting these two scenarios, Beyoncé used her video to highlight the innocence of children, especially of black children, while still bringing attention to the current conversations surrounding police officers. These scenes and lyrics served as another attempt at getting audiences to identify with her activism, by using two easily recognizable groups. This image of the young child and the police officers holding their hands up, as “Stop Shooting Us” appears across the screen, appeared in the final thirty seconds of the music video and presented Beyoncé’s strongest political message regarding racial tensions and the need for unity. Throughout the video women are seen dancing in formation—in perfect unity alongside one

another—but the only representation of united men appeared in this row of police officers. In ending this video with the police officers and the young boy standing in formation, both with their hands raised in surrender, Beyoncé positions herself against issues of police brutality while clarifying that she is not opposing police officers overall. By using the image of the innocent black child, she referenced the recent murders of numerous unarmed young black children in the United States while still presenting a message of unity.

Along with themes of black self-love and police brutality, Beyoncé used references to Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans as her main method of encouraging identification. The video began with Messy Mya’s “What happened at the New Orleans?” while Beyoncé is shown standing atop a New Orleans police car that is submerged in the flooded aftermath of the hurricane. This image is used consistently across the video, with the final scene showing Beyoncé and the police car fully sinking below the water. Other images of flooded streets, Southern homes, and church also emerged to further the connections to New Orleans that were made through the intertextual references already discussed. Ceccarelli’s (1998) discussion of polysemy is fully represented in this video through Beyoncé’s complex blending of images and activist themes. By mixing these scenes with the lyrics of her song, Beyoncé targeted a variety of audiences to ensure that viewers would find images that resonated with them.

Directives and Actions

The final code that was used to analyze Beyoncé’s blog posts referred to her use of directives and explicit calls to action. This appeared in the blog posts through her hyperlinks and instructions asking readers to donate, share information on social media, get informed, or sign

petitions, but it is used in the music video through the consistent repetition of the lyrics “Ok, ladies, now let’s get in formation.” This phrase, which refers to the title of song, is an emphasis Beyoncé’s main activist argument; women, and people in general, need to be “in formation” by standing united and working together, but they also need to gain “information” by educating themselves. By connecting issues related to police brutality, black identity, and Southern culture in her video, Beyoncé began the process of spreading information to her viewers. The purpose of this was to get her various audiences to identify with her and her activism, and, as a result, to stand in formation alongside her.

The song’s message calling on listeners to get in formation is demonstrated in the video through the repeated scenes of women dancing synchronously. These scenes took place in the hallway of a house, at the bottom of an indoor pool, and in a parking lot, all of which featured Beyoncé dancing alongside a group of black female dancers. Aside from the scenes of the Hurricane Katrina aftermath and streets of New Orleans, these women dancing in formation is the most prominent visual presented in the video. The scene of the women dancing at the bottom of a drained indoor pool, shown in Figure 8 below, presented a direct connection between these two main images.



Source: "Formation" Music Video <https://youtu.be/LrCHz1gwzTo>

Figure 8: Beyoncé and Dancers from the "Formation" Music Video

Given the consistent reference to flooding used throughout the video, this scene depicting these women dancing alongside one another at the bottom of a drained pool further promoted the idea that remaining united is the only way to survive disaster. As previously discussed, the images of daily New Orleans life that contrasted the images of Hurricane Katrina were used to display the resilience of New Orleans citizens, as a way of recognizing their struggle while highlighting their survival. By using this scene at the bottom of the pool in a similar way, Beyoncé again acknowledged survival as one result of being in formation. Because she heavily referenced police brutality in the video, it can be understood that this scene was meant to imply that getting informed and remaining united is the best way to survive.

Much like in the #BeyGOOD blog posts, the use of directives and calls to action was the most prominent rhetorical move made in the "Formation" music video. By using these scenes and themes in her video, Beyoncé promoted her message to "get in formation" while giving her audiences opportunities to identify with her. It was only through the mixing of these methods that she was able to successfully promote her activism through this medium. This strategy of

blending methods is representative of Beyoncé's activist work in when considering her blog and "Formation" music video separately, but it is also evident in her overall network of tools, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX: A RECEPTION STUDY OF BEYONCÉ'S 2016 SUPER BOWL HALFTIME PERFORMANCE

On February 7, 2016, during the Super Bowl halftime show, Beyoncé performed alongside musicians Coldplay and Bruno Mars. While Coldplay headlined the show, Bruno Mars and Beyoncé were heavily featured during the performance. Because this annual televised football event consistently reaches such a wide audience, Beyoncé used the event to perform her new song “Formation,” which was released the night before. As discussed in Chapter Five, the video for this song featured strong connections to black identity and police brutality, both of which transitioned over to her Super Bowl performance. She used only black female backup dancers during her performance, all of which wore outfits that referenced the Black Panther Party, while her own outfit mimicked Michael Jackson’s attire from his performance during the 1993 Super Bowl halftime show. Along with the references embedded in their attire, the choice of lyrics that Beyoncé sung during the show highlighted black identity, and part of the choreography placed the dancers in an X formation, indicating Malcom X, a historical civil rights activist. Because this study seeks to understand how digital activists work to get their audiences to identify with them, this chapter is a reception study of Beyoncé’s “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance. As Ceccarelli (2005) demonstrated, a reception study is useful when considering how a message has been received by its audiences, and that it can “tell us a lot about how our appeals are being received and thus can help us to modify those appeals, if appropriate, to better communicate our worth to our academic neighbors” (p. 263). The purpose of this reception study is to see how successful Beyoncé’s methods are for encouraging identification, which were discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

This reception study focused on the responses Beyoncé received from verified Twitter users, news sources, and bloggers.

Responses from Twitter

Beyoncé's cultural capital and prominent social position affords her a wider reach than most activists and allowed for her performance during the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show to receive responses from a vast number of audiences. To focus this reception study, responses that came from sources with larger chances of circulation were identified using Twitter as well as popular news sources. This section will focus on the responses that Beyoncé received from other musicians and celebrities using Twitter. Most of these responses focused on the overall performance, such as the tweet shown in Figure 9 from Chance the Rapper, a popular rap artist. His response, which referenced Michael Jackson's 1993 Super Bowl performance, received over 3,000 retweets along with nearly 7,000 likes. This reference to the 1993 Super Bowl reveals Chance the Rapper's own support of performances that featured strong activist messages, as Michael Jackson's performance included direct references to his humanitarian work and beliefs. Similarly supportive tweets came from singers Taylor Swift and Cher Lloyd, who praised the performance and the artists involved.



Source: Chance the Rapper Twitter Account

https://twitter.com/chancetherapper/status/696508751705174016?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

Figure 9: Tweet from Chance the Rapper

Other Twitter responses featured more direct references to Beyoncé’s role in the performance, including one from Nile Rodgers, a famous record producer, songwriter, and musician, and previous member of the Black Panther Party. His response, shown in Figure 10, demonstrated his alignment with Beyoncé’s message in “Formation.” By including this image of his own activist work at such a young age, Rodgers presented himself as not just a fan of Beyoncé’s work, but as an ally with the work that she was advocating for. Encouraging and supportive responses were popular among celebrities and musicians, who unanimously tweeted their support for her political statement during the performance. In getting this audience to identify with her work, Beyoncé proved that she could rhetorically portray her activism through her music in a way that other musicians were able to pick up on.



Nile Rodgers 
@nilerodgers

 Follow 

I love @Beyonce song #formation. That's me standing in #formation outside the NYC courthouse. I was 16 yrs old.



RETWEETS 1,642 LIKES 2,571



1:40 AM - 9 Feb 2016

 44  1.6K  2.6K

Source: Nile Rodgers Twitter Account

https://twitter.com/nilerodgers/status/696946715853717504?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

Figure 10: Tweet from Nile Rodgers

Television personalities Andy Cohen, Ryan Seacrest, and Ellen DeGeneres used their tweets to offer their own support of the halftime show. While Ryan Seacrest and Ellen DeGeneres used their tweets to praise the overall Super Bowl performance, Andy Cohen directly acknowledged Beyoncé by tweeting “Let us give praise in every way to @Beyoncé #SB50.”

This response was consistent with the support provided by actors Reese Witherspoon, John

Stamos, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Kerry Washington, and Kristen Bell, all of which added their input during and right after the performance.

Given the 140-character constraint afforded by this platform, most of the responses that Beyoncé received from Twitter were short yet supportive when looking at celebrities and musicians. Kerry Washington and Kristen Bell used multiple tweets to present their full support, while others used just one to state their support. However, it is evident that not all users on this platform identified with her message when looking at other verified Twitter users. Michelle Malkin, a conservative blogger, tweeted her disapproval of the performance by saying “Cuz nothing brings us all together better than angry @Beyonce shaking her ass & shouting ‘Negro’ repeatedly. #sb50.” Neal Boortz, former Libertarian radio host, had a similar response when tweeting the morning after the Super Bowl, “Didn’t realize Beyonce’s song last night was basically anti-cop. Screw her.” While these responses from Malkin and Boortz demonstrate opposition to Beyoncé’s activism, they present themselves as audience members who did not identify with her message. Beyoncé included references to police brutality in the “Formation” music video, and the Black Panther Party attire from the halftime show performance highlighted her opposition to police brutality, but her message was “anti-cop” as Boortz implied.

The negative responses on Twitter were limited to these examples, but their existence demonstrates that Beyoncé’s work to engage multiple audiences was not always successful. When considering the rhetorical concept of polysemy, this reveals that Beyoncé was only successful in relating her activism to specific audiences, including celebrities and musicians, while other audiences were unwilling to fully recognize the intentions of her performance. Musicians, actors, and television personalities announced their alignment with her and her

message, if not just their support, and in doing so demonstrated that audiences that were involved in the arts and in entertainment were more likely to support her demonstration of her activism. While Beyoncé attempted to make her “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance polysemous through the numerous references she embedded in each, her various audiences only picked up on select visuals and based their interpretations off those. Her audiences that were involved in the arts acknowledged the rhetorical choices that she made throughout the performance, while other audiences such as those represented by Malkin and Boortz were unwilling to consider the performance as anything other than angry and anti-police.

Responses from News Sources

After the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show, a variety of news sources published articles responding to Beyoncé’s performance. Like the tweets that were collected, these news articles were chosen for this reception study based on the circulation of their messages and the likelihood that their reaction would spread Beyoncé’s work to further audiences. These sources included The New York Times, ESPN, CNN, Fox News, Fusion, the Los Angeles Times, and Amsterdam News. Unlike the responses on Twitter, most of these news sources prioritized presenting overall coverage of the performance and the responses that others had, rather than clear support or disapproval.

The New York Times posted two articles relating to Beyoncé, one regarding her music video and one regarding the Super Bowl performance. Caramanica, Morris, and Wortham (2016) published “Beyoncé in ‘Formation’: Entertainer, Activist, Both?” just hours after the release of

the music video, focusing on the overall themes of black identity and pride that were previously mentioned in Chapter Five. Regarding her political message in the song, they stated:

She wants us to know — more than ever — that she’s still grounded, she’s paying attention and still a little hood. I think she wants us to know that even though she’s headlining a mainstream event like the Super Bowl, she has opinions and isn’t afraid to share them, nor is she afraid to do it on a national and global scale. (Caramanica, Morris, & Wortham, 2016, para. 7).

The tone of the article further emphasized their support of the video and recognition of the political and activist message that created the foundation for the song. Caramanica (2016) individually published an article the following day regarding her Super Bowl performance, where he acknowledged Beyoncé’s political tone and references to Michael Jackson and black pride.

Unlike these articles from The New York Times, the articles published by CNN, Fusion, Fox News, and the Los Angeles Times focused on recognizing the responses that Beyoncé’s performance gathered from other sources. The Los Angeles Times focused on the support that Beyoncé received from other musicians and Twitter users, while sources like CNN, Fusion, and Fox News prioritized discussing the backlash that Beyoncé received. These sources explained the negative feelings that police officers across the country felt regarding her performance and references to the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as the Boycott Beyoncé movement that many attempted to start. The article from CNN explained that “police have argued that the imagery in the music video is anti-law enforcement, and her apparent tribute to the Black Panthers fell just as flat, given that group’s history of tensions with authorities” (France, 2016,

para. 6). This response is unsurprising when considering the references Beyoncé made to police brutality in the “Formation” music video, but it demonstrates that this audience of police officers, broadly defined, were unwilling to identify with her activism regarding this issue of racial injustice.

These news sources were less polarizing than the Twitter responses, with only the articles from The New York Times presenting a strong message of support for Beyoncé’s work. The other responses collected attempted to discuss how other groups and people have reacted while remaining less forceful with their own beliefs, but a tone of disapproval was present across. This reception reveals that reporters and news sources exist as a separate audience from the musicians and celebrities that reacted via Twitter. While both are in positions that would likely receive large reactions from their own audiences, they were also restricted by their own audiences to react in specific ways. These news sources were expected to be more unbiased than the Twitter users who were free to post their personal beliefs, which restricted these journalists’ ability to publish their full reactions to the Super Bowl halftime show. However, their commentary is still important when considering the full impact that Beyoncé’s performance had based on the continued spreading of her activist message.

Other Responses

Looking at verified Twitter users and published articles from recognizable news sources provides a useful understanding of how authors with a wide influence have reacted to Beyoncé’s “Formation” video and performance. However, these are not the only audiences that Beyoncé was attempting to have identify with her through this politically-charged song. Because of the

references she made to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, black pride, Southern culture, and police brutality, it is evident that her intended audiences extended beyond mainstream media and voices. To understand how other audiences reacted, commentary articles from various magazines as well as numerous blog posts were collected.

The magazine articles that responded to Beyoncé's "Formation" came from *Cosmopolitan*, *Dame Magazine*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Death and Taxes*. Hughes (2016) article from *Cosmopolitan* praised Beyoncé's activism and willingness to use her art to express a political message, much like Patton's (2016) *Dame Magazine* article. Both authors emphasized the success of the music video and Super Bowl performance, while Viera (2016) used her *Teen Vogue* article to educate readers on the Black Panther Party that Beyoncé promoted during the halftime show. While the 2016 Super Bowl show was the 50th anniversary of this annual event, it also marked the 50th anniversary of the Black Panther Party. The history and purpose of the party was absent from the news sources previously discussed, yet Viera used her article to inform the young readers of *Teen Vogue* to help facilitate this discussion. Viera explained that criticism against the Black Panther Party stemmed from the belief that they were a violent organization, but in actuality, "They weren't for violence. They did believe in self-defense against the violence being inflicted on them and the black community as a whole" (2016, para. 11). By using this platform to raise a more critical awareness of the movement that Beyoncé referenced in her performance, Viera visibly aligned herself with Beyoncé while furthering her message. This reception is revealing because it highlights the circulation that Beyoncé achieved in getting other audiences to spread her message and help others identify with her. While Beyoncé was not successful in getting all of her audiences to understand and identify with her references to police

brutality and the Black Panther Party, she convinced these other voices to explain her message so that wider audiences could witness and react to her activism.

Despite the positive reactions from these authors, other responses provided a less supportive response. London (2016) published an article in *Death and Taxes* magazine that pronounced a distrust of Beyoncé's activism, arguing that her message was meant to result in her own financial gain rather than in the empowerment of black women and men. She ends her article by telling her readers that "As much as we might feel empowered by the grace of their choreography and the back beats of their latest anthems, we as black Americans should allow ourselves the space to question the messages we are given, even if those messages are tailor-made for us" (London, 2016, para. 14). This response is mirrored by the voices of Jones (2016) and rad fag (2016), two self-identified queer bloggers who spoke out against Beyoncé in the days following her halftime show performance. Jones (2016) used her post on BGD, a blog that identifies as a voice for queer and trans people of color, to argue against Beyoncé's use of Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans in her music video. As someone born in New Orleans, Jones reacted to Beyoncé's video with anger over the use of a disaster and life that Beyoncé never experienced. Rad fag's (2016) response to the video similarly argues against Beyoncé's form of black empowerment, mimicking London's and Jones' discussion of her as an icon and not an activist with the same lived experiences of the people she advocates for. In his post, rad fag (2016) criticized Beyoncé for her "appropriation of queer and trans genius" (para. 6), as well as her continued appearance as a "white passing" light-skinned black woman (para. 16). These responses, which come from black and queer audiences, reveal an important tension between Beyoncé's activist intentions and her actual success. While Beyoncé rhetorically created her

“Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance to be polysemous so that multiple audiences were invited to identify with her, there was often a tension that was created when certain audiences pushed back as demonstrated here. Jones and rad fag reflect two audiences that were directly targeted in Beyoncé’s “Formation” music video, through her references to New Orleans and queer musicians. Their distrust and anger with her work using these references highlight this critical disconnect that Beyoncé created.

While Beyoncé attempted to encourage various audiences to identify with her work through these references to Hurricane Katrina and the use of queer New Orleans artists Messy Mya and Big Freedia, these responses showcase issues that digital activists face when they are disconnected from the groups they are trying to connect with. Other bloggers, including Bitter Gertrude (2016), zandria (2016), and Ward (2016) aligned themselves with Beyoncé’s message of black pride and self-love, but the support is not unanimous as it was from musicians tweeting about the halftime performance. Musicians and entertainers accepted Beyoncé’s message as political and artistic genius, but the critical commentary provided by these handful of journalists and bloggers indicates that Beyoncé’s activist message of unity and formation was not being met with full support.

This chapter has focused on the reception that Beyoncé received from her “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance. This chapter, along with Chapters Four and Five, have devoted considerable time to looking at each tool separately to analyze how Beyoncé presented her activism to her various audiences. While this reception study more clearly considers how successful her work was by looking at the reactions her work generated, it is important to consider how her tools all act as a cohesive network rather than as individual

entities. In Chapter Seven I will synthesize these results to demonstrate how these tools act as complex intertextual facets of her activism that all contribute to her overall work.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In Chapters Four and Five I presented my analysis of Beyoncé’s activist blog and “Formation” music video, and in Chapter Six I discussed her performance at the 2016 Super Bowl alongside the responses that her performance and music video received. To best counteract Treré’s (2012) discussion of the persistent one-medium bias in digital activism scholarship, this research was conducted in three stages to guarantee that each tool was thoroughly analyzed individually before being considered as a full network. In this chapter I aim to synthesize the results from these chapters to present the implications that this research has when considering the complexity of digital activism, as well as provide answers to my main research questions. I will argue in this chapter that Beyoncé used her different tools to engage multiple audiences through her one-way lines of communication with the main goal of generating conversation and broadening the reach of her activist messages. Specifically, I am arguing that it is because of the prominent activist messages in the “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance, and the various responses that both received, that readers were encouraged to access her blog, read about her activist work, and identify with her work.

Beyoncé’s Network of Digital Tools

When looking at each tool separately, as has been done in the previous chapters, it was possible to see how Beyoncé invited audiences to identify with her in each instance. Beyoncé’s activism has highlighted Burke’s (1969) discussion of identification and consubstantiality when considering the strategic rhetorical work involved in her arrangement of each tool. Burke argued

that a rhetor's use of persuasion is essential when encouraging audiences to identify with their work:

As for the relation between "identification" and "persuasion": we might well keep it in mind that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience. So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ("consubstantiality") and communication (the nature of rhetoric as "addressed"). (Burke, 1969, p. 46)

Burke's emphasis on rapport-building and persuasion is evident in the process of identification that Beyoncé has facilitated through each of her tools. The blog focused on educating readers, while the "Formation" music video used intertextual images and references to generate a more emotional response in her audience that would allow them to identify with her song. Her 2016 Super Bowl performance then targeted a larger audience of sports enthusiasts and anyone else watching the game, while using intertextual references to Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party to promote her political and social beliefs.

These each acted as individual tools with specific intentions and audiences, but it is only through aligning the results from my analysis of each that Beyoncé's rhetorical work can be fully understood. My focused codes for analysis indicated that the main methods Beyoncé used in her activism included the creation of an intertextual web of sources, the promotion of identification and consubstantiality through her use of language and visuals, and the use of directives and actions to get her audiences engaged. These moves, which were seen across these individual

activist tools, can be applied to her overall activist network. Beyoncé has created a complex intertextual network, as shown in Figure 11 below, which has allowed her to spread her activism to a large collection of audiences.

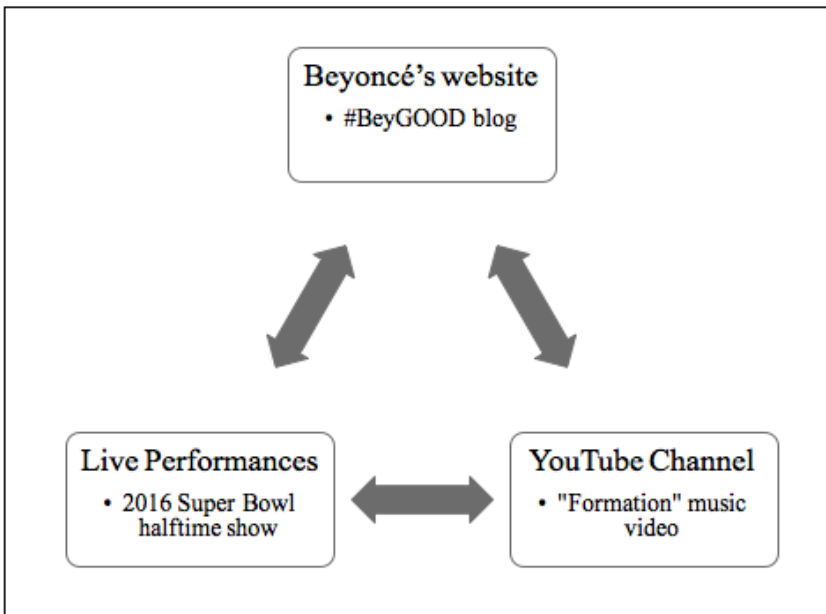


Figure 11: Beyoncé's Intertextual Network of Tools

The intertextuality of this network has helped facilitate the process of identification by offering opportunities and platforms by which readers, listeners, and viewers can engage with Beyoncé's activism. Beyoncé has embedded subtle instructions into each of her tools that direct audiences to navigate between them to fully understand her activism. Her "Formation" music video and 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance both acted as visible demonstrations of her beliefs, but it is in her blog that her activism is most easily understood. By directing audiences to move between these tools, Beyoncé consistently pushed her audiences toward her website, and through that her blog, as a way of asking multiple audiences to read about her activism rather than just interpret it from her performances.

The #BeyGOOD blog is the only written representation of Beyoncé’s activism, and as such it was important for her to generate a conversation that would lead audiences back to her website. To create this conversation, Beyoncé used her “Formation” music video and Super Bowl performance to present a visibly political message that could raise attention to her activist efforts. The “Formation” music video was a forceful visual representation of her activist views regarding equality for marginalized groups in the United States, including people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ citizens, but it was also carefully published online to direct readers to her website. As an unlisted YouTube video, only audiences with a direct link to the video could watch it, but it also exists on the “Music” tab on <http://www.beyonce.com/>, two tabs over from the #BeyGOOD blog tab. By restricting access to the video in such a way, she increased the chances that more audiences would interact with her website and potentially her blog when seeking out her newest music video.

Much like the music video, the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance worked to direct audiences to Beyoncé’s website. By performing “Formation,” which was released less than 24 hours before the performance, Beyoncé encouraged audiences that had not already seen it to seek out the full music video. Along with this directive back to her website, Beyoncé used the performance to announce her 2016 world tour, with tickets available for purchase through the “Tour” tab on her website. While these two directives predominantly attracted fans and other audiences interested in her music, they alone did not encourage each audience that witnessed the performance to visit her website. To guarantee that multiple audiences would access her website, even those less engaged with her music, she used the performance to present a strong political

statement that matched the tone of the “Formation” music video. This statement, which was presented at a large sporting event, generated a lengthy discussion as shown in Chapter Six’s reception study. By starting this conversation, regardless of the tone of the responses she received, Beyoncé created a space in which her music and activism was ensured to circulate to other audiences that she could not simply reach through just her blog, music, or music videos. Her most important rhetorical work here was in using polysemy to ensure that she could successfully facilitate the process of identification, and it is through this circulation of information that she further spread her reach. The reception study showed that the sources with the most influence, including other musicians, television personalities, and news sources, predominantly supported her work, while even those featuring a negative or disapproving tone still directed readers to consider the “Formation” music video and live performance.

The complexity of Beyoncé’s network exhibits Burke’s (1969) discussion of consubstantiality, in which he argued that identification is only possible through division and not complete alignment, as she continues to allow for disagreement as well as identification across her tools. She relied heavily on visuals in her “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance to persuade audiences to find reasons to identify with her work, but her persuasion was most prominent in the blog where she actively called on readers to become informed and engaged. It is only through this intertextual network that she could connect each method to ensure that her activism reached as many audiences as possible.

The results of this study demonstrate the complex nature of digital activism beyond the considerations present in the current scholarship. This analysis has revealed that Beyoncé’s work heavily relied on the rhetorical concepts of intertextuality and identification when attempting to

get her numerous audiences engaged in meaningful online activism. Through the creation of an intertextual network of tools that consistently referred audiences back to her website, and by association that her blog, Beyoncé created opportunities for audiences to witness her activism and identify with her messages regarding political and social movements within the United States and across the globe. As Burke (1969) explained though, the process of identification is ongoing and requires consistent effort on the part of the rhetor to ensure that audiences are aligning with their messages. Beyoncé has used, and continues to use, her often monthly blog posts to ensure that this process is successfully ongoing, by treating each post as a new opportunity to present her activism to her audiences and allow for them to identify with her goals.

The #BeyGOOD blog acts as the main demonstration of Beyoncé's activism, and it is through her use of other tools that she continued to expand her audience to offer further opportunities for new readers to interact with her activism and become engaged. While this case study of Beyoncé reveals a deeper understanding of the complex intersection of identification and polysemy in digital activism, more research needs to be done to look at this work in other situations where more traditionally accessible activist tools are being used.

Circulation in Activist Movements

This research was conducted to understand how activists use multiple digital tools to present their activism to their audiences, and what their use of those tools revealed about identification within digital activist movements. In using Beyoncé as a case study, this research needed to consider the unique role that she played as an activist with a large amount of influence

because of her cultural capital and social position. While the focus of this research was not on the circulation of her activism, it became a prominent point of analysis when looking at the reception that Beyoncé received from her “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance.

Porter (2009) discussed distribution and circulation in his discussion of computer-mediated interactions and the digital delivery of information:

Digital distribution refers to rhetorical decisions about the mode of presenting discourse in online situations: What is the most effective way to distribute a message to its intended audiences, in a timely manner, and in a way that is likely to achieve the desired outcome? Circulation is a related term that pertains to how that message might be recycled in digital space (should you want that to happen). When you add a phrase like “Please feel free to re-post this call for proposals” to an email announcement, you are signaling to readers that you want broad circulation of your message. Distribution refers then to the initial decision about how you package a message in order to send it to its intended audience. Circulation refers to the potential for that message to have a document life of its own and be redistributed without your direct intervention. You can design your discourse to achieve a high degree of circulation, or you can design it to limit circulation, depending on your wishes. (p. 214)

In Beyoncé’s network, she has used her blog to call on readers to distribute her activism by asking them to share her posts and tweet using the hashtags she provided. However, it was in the reception data that was collected that the circulation of her activism was made more visible. The conversation that she generated required no further work on her part to guarantee that her activism, music video, and political and social views were being spread to more extensive

audiences. This conversation, which I have argued was instrumental in directing audiences back to her music video, YouTube channel, website, and blog, has circulated her activism across Twitter, blogs, and news sources to allow for new audiences to witness her messages.

This consideration of the circulation, while unintentional, brings about the question of how information is circulated within interconnected digital networks. This study has emphasized the intertextuality of Beyoncé's tools and network, but it has not fully considered the role that circulation plays in moving her activist messages to other platforms and audiences outside of Beyoncé's immediate network. Scholars have already considered how information is being circulated online (Edwards, 2016; Eyman, 2007; Penney & Dadas, 2013; Porter, 2009; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009), but they have not yet explored how rhetoricians can study the circulation of social and political movements when looking at an entire digital network, or how activists themselves can use circulation to rhetorically refine their messages and distributions methods. By looking at this more closely and purposefully than has been done in this study, scholars can begin to better consider how various audiences are becoming involved in activist movements through circulation rather than direct connection to the original source.

Interconnections Between Polysemy and Identification

Along with circulation, another main finding of this research study relates to the interconnectedness between polysemy and rhetorical identification. When considering the ways in which activists invite their audiences to identify with them, specific focus needs to be given to the rhetorical strategies that they use to connect with each audience. As this analysis of Beyoncé's activism has revealed, she employed various visuals and references in her

“Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance to allow for her audiences to identify with her activism. While she was promoting messages relating to gender equality, black self-love, Southern black culture, and the opposition to police brutality, she rhetorically considered what images and lyrics would allow for most of her audiences to align with her work. However, the reception study revealed that her attempts were not unanimously successful. The negative reception she received from news sources and bloggers demonstrated a tension between her intended use of these visuals and the actual reactions from her audiences. This tension is important to consider when doing further reception studies of activist work, because it highlights the complex relationship between identification and polysemy.

Ceccarelli (1998) defined polysemy as the “rhetorical strategy employed by the calculating rhetor to bring different audiences, through different paths, to a point of convergence in the acceptance of a text” (p. 396). This deliberate strategy of getting various groups to accept a rhetorical message is directly connected to Burke’s (1969) discussion of rhetorical identification because of the persuasive nature of both terms. Both polysemy and identification reflect the rhetorical work involved in getting audiences to accept and align with a message, but the concept of polysemy helps us better understand the strategies that rhetors use to reach multiple audiences. However, Ceccarelli further argued that “Instead of simply recognizing and celebrating the polysemous text, we must ask some very important questions of it, including ‘who does it benefit?’ and ‘how should we judge it?’” (1998, p. 397). As she argues, the analysis of polysemous texts should expand beyond simple recognition of its presence, or praise of its use. To fully consider the connection between polysemy and identification, we need to look at why a

rhetorical message has been designed to be polysemous and what the reception of that message is.

This study attempted to analyze the polysemy of Beyoncé's activist tools, while considering what strategies she used to convince multiple audiences to accept and identify with her messages. As already explained, a tension was identified when looking at the reception of her work, whether that was because certain references placed audiences at odds with one another or because the references remained unrecognized or unaccepted. Considering these tensions can help us begin addressing Ceccarelli's (1998) questions of who polysemous messages benefit and how these messages should be judged. While it has been accepted in this research that the polysemy of Beyoncé's activism was meant to benefit the various groups she has advocated for, it appeared from the reception study that some audiences understood her work as an attempt to benefit herself, through further financial or social gain, rather than the groups that she discussed in her blog. Bloggers Jones (2016) and rad fag (2016) were instrumental in understanding the tension that Beyoncé created when they directly opposed her references to New Orleans and use of queer musicians in her music video. Other bloggers and sources used those two references as grounds for identifying with her activism, but this reading of the "Formation" music video was not consistent across her audiences. This was not made visible until the reception study was conducted, which implies that close analyses of rhetorical messages and activist tools are not going to be enough to judge polysemous texts as Ceccarelli has called for scholars to do.

Limitations and Opportunities for Further Research

There were several limitations of this study, particularly considering the scope of the research design. When this project was designed, Beyoncé's main activist tools included her blog, "Formation" music video, and 2016 Super Bowl halftime show performance. At the time, she was not engaging in activism on her other social media accounts and she did not have other recent music videos with strong activist themes. However, at the end of my data collection Beyoncé released *Lemonade* (2016), her sixth studio album, which was released alongside a full length visual album with numerous songs featuring strong activist messages. At the same time, Beyoncé began using her Facebook account to present her activism regarding the 2016 presidential election. These data points would have been useful when mapping out her activist network, and would be useful to consider for further research into her network.

Another major limitation of this research study is that there were no human participants involved when completing the reception study of Beyoncé's work. While speaking directly with Beyoncé would likely not be possible given her position and current world tour, interviews with members of the Beyhive, Beyoncé's official fan club, would have elaborated on how audiences already associated with Beyoncé responded to her music video and her activist blog.

Contributions to the Field

The results of this study support Treré's (2012) claim that we need more scholarship that expands beyond a focused look at one specific medium of communication in activist movements. Based on these results, there are two main contributions that this study offers to the field of digital activism:

1. Circulation plays a critical role in how activist messages are spread beyond the limited scope of a rhetorician's immediate network; and,
2. There is a complicated interconnection between polysemy and rhetorical identification that must be balanced when persuading multiple audiences to accept a rhetorical message.

These two main findings were only made visible when analyzing the multiple tools that were used by Beyoncé. While this study was designed to counteract the one-medium bias popular in current digital activism scholarship, it revealed the complex nature of interconnected digital networks that had not previously been discussed.

To continue building on the findings of this analysis, this study calls for further research that seeks to understand the role of circulation in digital activism network as well as the connections between polysemy and identification. This research, which should focus on the intertextuality of digital networks, can help to consider how rhetorical strategies are transferred across tools, how circulation impacts the spread of activist work, and how polysemous messages are being received by their multiple audiences. This study has proposed methods that can be used to continue studying the rhetorical work of other activist movements, specifically through the tracing of codes across activist tools as well as reception studies looking at how rhetorical identification is happening. In continuing this research, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how information is spread in digital spaces while continuing to combat the arguments that digital activism is nothing more than simple, low-risk slacktivism (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Morozov, 2013). In the creation of more timely scholarship that demonstrates the complexity and careful creation of activist networks in online spaces, we can begin to better

depict digital activism as meaningful and capable of creating political and social change. Because this form of activism relies on the circulatory power of online spaces, we need to broaden our methods to understand how the internet allows for the further spreading of these movements.

As my discussion has shown, it was only through studying Beyoncé's full network of tools that it became clear how much rhetorical work went into guaranteeing that audiences were being directed back to her website and blog. As the first study to investigate this, the results from this research provide methods for more detailed explorations into digital activism. While Beyoncé was used as the case study for this research, the intention is not to present her as a model for other digital activists to follow. Instead, the methods that have been demonstrated and practiced here can be employed by future scholars when tracing activist work across platforms to better see how they adapt their strategies and relate to various audiences. What this case study has revealed is that by considering multiple activist tools at once, we can better understand how digital activists are representing their work and generating sustainable online participation. The move away from a one-medium bias requires careful methods that consider the transfer of rhetorical strategies between mediums.

Digital activism has continued to receive criticism as being slacktivist and less successful than offline "boots on the ground" movements (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2009; Morozov, 2013), but more research like this can help present digital activism as a valid method of participation. This study has focused heavily on intertextuality, and I am arguing that this rhetorical concept needs to be considered further when looking at other examples. If we as scholars intend on acknowledging that the tools activists use online and offline exist within a

complex network, focusing on the intertextuality of their methods will allow us to present strategies for creating successful online movements. Lawrence (2010) argued that there that successful online engagement requires the use of multiple tools, the need for listening before becoming engaged, and the move from online involvement to physical action. While these are strong suggestions, more research like the study presented here needs to be published to offer clear methods for turning these suggestions into clear examples.

Along with a focus on the intertextual nature of activist tools, another contribution that this study presents is in the reception study that was done in Chapter Six. In looking at how others have represented and reacted to activist movements, we can gain a deeper understanding of how successful activist work is in both online and offline spaces. It is not enough to consider the rhetorical work that activists are doing from our limited perspective as rhetoricians and digital activist scholars. It was only through this reception study that I was able to identify the purpose behind her political demonstration at the 2016 Super Bowl as well as the directives she embedded in her tools. I have argued that while Beyoncé received mixed responses to her “Formation” music video and 2016 Super Bowl performance, she used this conversation to further spread her activist messages. It is only because of the excessive number of responses that she could further direct audiences back to her work. When considering receptions further, we can see how circulation exists in online spaces and what that means for the overall work that activists do.

While the research presented here has been limited because of the research site and the unique activist tools used by Beyoncé, it provides us with a push toward more complicated digital activism scholarship. More research needs to be done to apply these methods to activist

work using more traditionally accessible activist tools. In doing so, we can avoid the bias that served as the exigence for this study and continue to generate methods for understanding these digital networks.

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