

# Social Justice Warriors: Consciousness Raising on the Digital Front

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## INTRODUCTION

- Raising consciousness about social injustice is a critical first step in promoting advocacy and social change.
- Social media has become a new front line of social consciousness raising and citizen participation.
- The microblogging platform Tumblr has a reputation for being a social justice-oriented community. Hashtags are used to identify the content of posts and to allow users to search by topic.
- There is currently little systematic study on how social media users raise consciousness about social injustice.
- The current study uses open-ended questions to examine the perspectives of social justice bloggers on Tumblr.

## METHOD

### Participants

- Tumblr users who repeatedly posted social justice-oriented content over the course of two weeks (March 16-29, 2016)
- Participants ( $n=60$ ) were mostly white ( $n=36$ ), female ( $n=40$ ), and young adults ( $M=26.8$ , range 18-63 years) from the United States ( $n=43$ ).

### Procedure

- 400 randomly selected users (of 1,159 eligible users) were sent invitations to participate using Tumblr's messaging system.
- Participants completed an online survey with open-ended questions regarding their experiences blogging about social justice on Tumblr.
- Content analysis was used to explore themes across responses from participants.

**#Feminism**

**#Racism**

**#Social Justice Warrior**

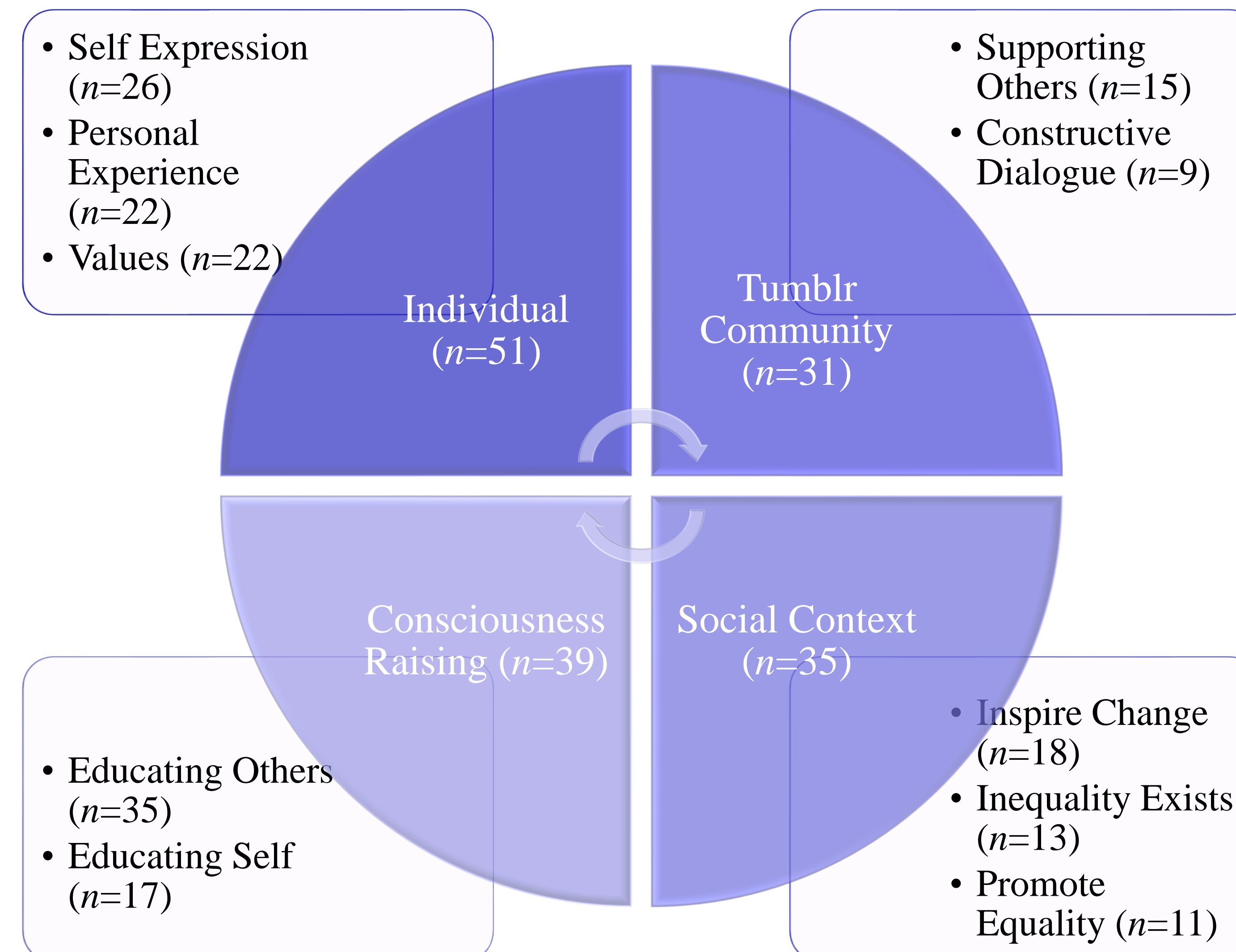
**#Black Lives Matter**

**#Social Justice**

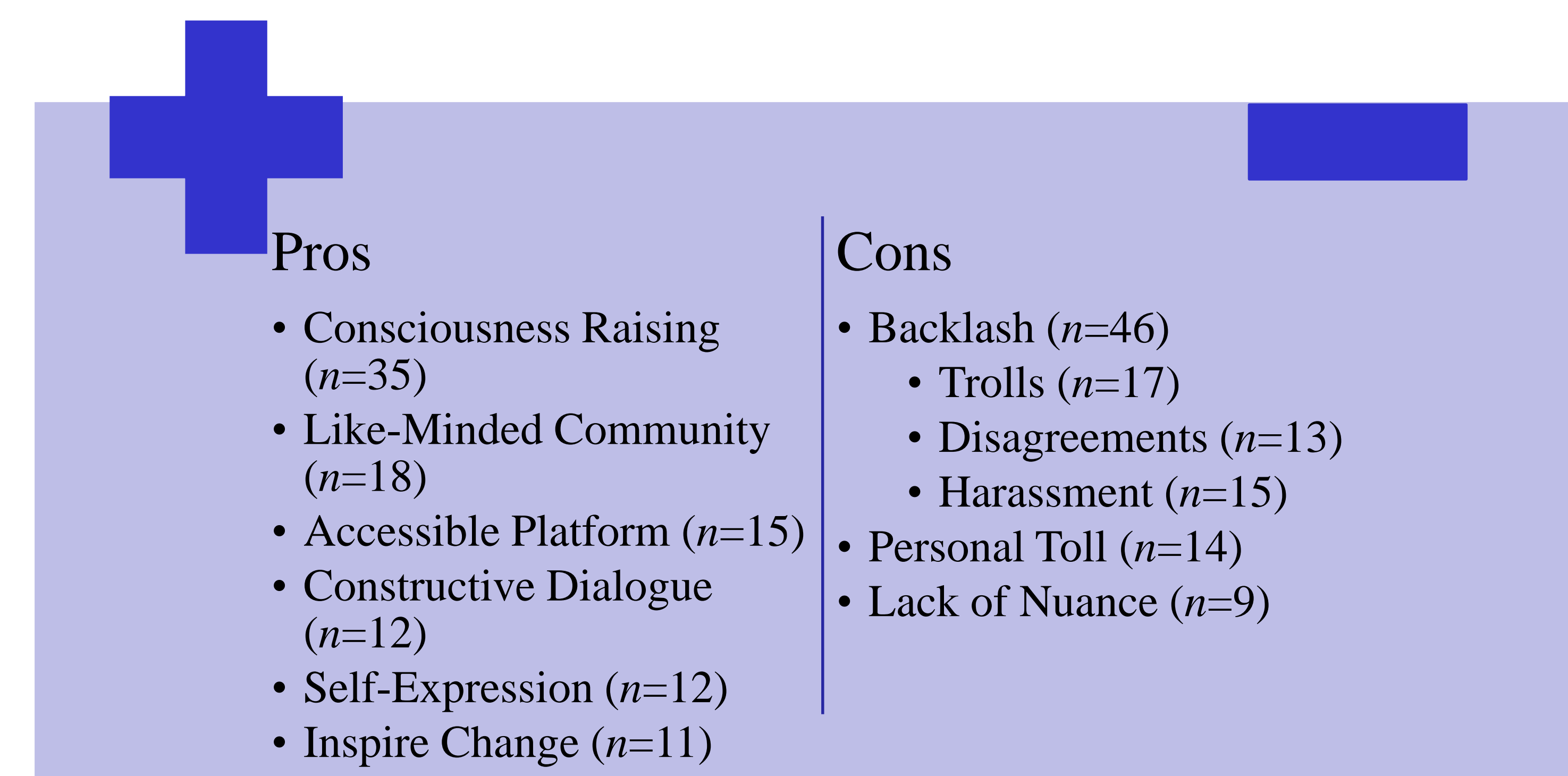
*“When it comes to social justice, I think one of the biggest ways to change minds is simply to share information. [...] There are so many things I wouldn't have learned if I hadn't started blogging. I want to give others the same opportunity.”*

## RESULTS

### TOP REASONS TO BLOG ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE



### PROS AND CONS OF BLOGGING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES



## DISCUSSION

- Participants described individual, group, and societal reasons for blogging about social justice issues on Tumblr. Positive aspects of social justice blogging involve finding a like-minded, accessible community that engages in a constructive dialogue to raise awareness about different issues. However, many participants acknowledged the negative experience of receiving backlash and described feeling a personal toll at times due to these activities.
- The Tumblr social justice community is active in creating and disseminating content. Social media has become an accessible and prevalent strategy for individuals to convene around a range of issues in real time. The participatory nature of social media means that users create and distribute the content that is important to them, rather than being passive consumers of information.
- Future research could explore the impact of online consciousness-raising efforts in offline movements. Critics of social justice bloggers describe these activities as “slacktivism,” reflecting the notion that blogging is not meaningful. However, there have been more and more instances of social media campaigns affecting real world change (e.g., police accountability in deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown). Systematic research is needed to understand the link between online and offline political activism and movements for change.

*“I feel like more and more people are resigned to what is happening around them because they think they can't change anything. I want them to know that voices alone can make great waves if put together well.”*

*“It spreads awareness among young people, who are the majority of the people who visit blogs. And young people are exactly the ones we have to wake up! We are the future of this world, if we don't trigger revolution, who will?”*