**“Downward Dogg: A Yogi’s Awakening to White Privilege”**

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**Introduction**

On August 28th, 2013, a Santa Barbara, California based yoga studio, Power of Your Om, hosted what it described as “a ghetto fabulous yoga event” called N.W.A: “Namaste With Attitude”

[Figure 1 here]

The event invitation detailed the class as[[2]](#footnote-2)

[a] 90-minute class where we will Vinyasa our way to the sounds of Snoop, Nate Dogg, Warren G, Coolio and many more faves.  Serious attitude, guaranteed belly laughs and various costumes to be provided.  Please come dressed in your favorite ghetto fabulous outfit, snap-back caps, corn rows, heavy lip liner or whatever you can dream up.

Within hours of the event, concerned members of the studio and the Santa Barbara community posted comments on the studio’s Facebook page about the event. The comments ranged from concern over the chosen theme, to accusations of racism and demands for an apology from the studio, as well as calls for boycotting the studio over the racial insensitivity of the class.

In the ensuing days after the event, a number of local and national online news and commentary websites including Jezebel[[3]](#footnote-3), The Santa Barbara Independent[[4]](#footnote-4), theGrio[[5]](#footnote-5), and New York Daily News[[6]](#footnote-6) picked up on the heated discussion that was taking place about the provocative yoga class on social media. The owner of the studio, Adrienne Hengels reflected on the volume of social media comments, concerns, and complaints in an interview with the local alternatively weekly, The Santa Barbara Independent. She lamented, “after reading perspectives [posted online], I felt sincerely sorry that we didn’t just keep it as a rap class…the fact is that it was a one-time thing, it is now over. We didn’t realize that it was going to piss so many people off” (Brugger 2013). Hengels concluded by bemoaning the permanence of social media adding, “Of course nothing just dies, it’s there forever with the glory of social media.”

In the end, the flood of criticism directed at the studio forced Power of Your Om to issue a formal apology on the studio’s Facebook page. The statement read[[7]](#footnote-7)

I apologize for the Namaste with Attitude Class that was held at Power of Your Om in Santa Barbara on August 28th. I should have realized encouraging people to dress up as "ghetto fabulous" is a horrible way to lift and unite a yoga community and the greater world as whole. Please forgive me for this, I should have thought it through. To make up for my error in judgement, I have reached out to a teacher of social justice at a university in L.A. to discuss how I can improve as a human being, teacher and business owner around topics of inclusion, race and differences among us.

For scholars of media and race discourse, this story is instructive for a number of reasons. To begin with, it forces us to rethink fundamental tenets of agenda setting theory. More specifically, this illustration calls into question the relationship between the public and the news media. Agenda setting has typically treated media influence as unidirectional; the news organizations tell the public what to think about (Cohen 1963). In this story, a robust social media conversation about race captured the attention of news organizations, rather than the other way around. Tracing how online deliberation and activism can influence the news agenda is a potentially rich line of scholarly inquiry. This paper reviews the classic agenda setting theory as well as the hybridized agenda theory of Chadwick (2010), then poses a hypothesis about the relationship between the social media conversation about the yoga studio’s event and news organizations’ coverage of the story.

Second, the content of the conversation as well as the participants engaged in the discourse about race and racism present a unique opportunity to look at how people discuss race on social media. We discuss some of the methodological challenges of studying conversations about race on social media, and then integrate theory on how conversations about racism often unfold, which includes the discourse of denial, white privilege, and efforts to place racism in a historical context. These theoretical concepts lead to a research question about what prevalent themes and arguments were likely to emerge in the conversation about racism and the yoga studio’s ‘ghetto fabulous’ event.

Finally, another element of this story that is enticing for scholarly study is that the conversation on social media demonstrated an attempt at what many have called political consumerism (Copeland 2013). Calls to boycott the studio or give the studio bad Yelp™ reviews were prevalent in the online discussion about the yoga event. We ask how and why boycott attempts and other political consumerist behaviors like inflicting reputational harm emerge in online discussions about racism.

To test our hypothesis and research questions, we perform a content and discourse analysis of Facebook posts, online news articles, and blogs about the yoga studio’s event. After presenting the results of the analysis, we explain why the interdependence of the public and media agendas could allow for a broader, more inclusive, and diverse discourse on race issues could emerge online. We argue that this case stands as a testament to the capacity of social media to influence the agenda of professional journalists and news organizations.We also consider how more opportunities for discussions about race online could impact the quality of deliberation about race as well as expanding the scope of the audience for talking about race online. Finally, we discuss the methodological challenges scholars confront in studying racial discourse on social media.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Agenda Setting**

At its heart, agenda-setting theory claims that increased media attention to an issue can lead to an increase in the salience of that issue for the public at large (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the words of Bernard Cohen, agenda setting theory describes the processes by which the media tells the public “what to think about” (1963, p. 13).  The theoretical construct was shown to be effective across a wide range of issues, from crime to environmental politics, and evidence for the phenomenon has been found in many developed states, including the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and Japan (McCombs, 2004). As a description of the media’s influence over the public, agenda-setting has proven to be a robust theory.

The theory is, however, largely one-sided: while it predicts media influence over the public, it expects there to be little to no public influence over the media (known as reverse agenda setting). Research largely bore this out for decades, with just a few cases of reverse agenda setting occurring (e.g. Smith, 1987). This was largely a consequence of the logic of the media environment of the latter half of the 20th century, in which a few large media sources set the media agenda, with most smaller and regional media sources following their lead (Danielian & Reese, 1989). In effect, this top-down environment did not create opportunities for the public to influence the media’s agenda.

The rise of digital media may provide such opportunities. Consequently, scholars have been rethinking the relationship between the public and the news media since the late 1990s in order to clarify this interaction (e.g. Chaffee & Metzger 1999). The interactivity inherent in social media may amplify any such interaction. A number of scholars are finding examples of social media and blogs driving the agenda of professional journalists (Wallsten 2010; Warner, McGowen & Hawthorne 2012) in addition to the traditional dynamic of the news setting the public’s agenda (Leskovec, Backstrom & Kleinberg, 2009; Meraz 2009; Wu, Hofman, Mason & Watts, 2011).

Much in the media environment has changed since the Internet became mainstream in the mid-1990s, but one of the most critical changes has been the lowering of barriers for publication and distribution – in effect, giving anyone the platform to discuss and share anything on their mind, particularly through blogs or social media tools such as Facebook or Twitter. As a consequence, recent studies have shown that reverse agenda-setting can occur in the modern environment, particularly in blogs (e.g. Lee, 2007; Meraz, 2009; Schiffer, 2006), but also on Youtube (Wallsten, 2010) and Twitter (Kushin, 2010). Moreover, the Internet has made it easier for activists to quickly spread awareness of an issue, with increased attention online pressuring the traditional mass media to cover it (Dreier & Martin, 2010; Warner, McGowen, & Hawthorne, 2012).

Internet tools have consequently become important for the creation and propagation of news, and in some ways, professional journalists have led the charge. Use of social media platforms like Twitter has become ubiquitous among journalists and as a result, such platforms are now integrally linked with the professional norms of journalists. In fact, journalists adopted Twitter at a faster rate than the general public, with many newsrooms and journalists incorporating Twitter into their news routines (Arceneaux & Weiss, 2010).  Because Twitter is at heart a set of networks that makes little technical distinction between the offline social status of users, it is relatively easy to map networks between elites and non-elites and develop an understanding of partisan structures online (Bruns, 2011; Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, & Shah, 2010).  Such research frequently shows that elites tend to generate most links or tweets that are then retweeted throughout their follower networks, showing a continued influence on elites over the public’s attention (Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011).

Following Chadwick (2013), this research suggests that the resulting media environment is hybridized. In a hybridized environment, the agendas of the media and the public are interdependent, with competing power centers and structures across new and old mediums. As a consequence, agendas can originate anywhere within the system and prominent issues can flow freely and be altered across mediums. For instance, a news story can start on Twitter, then garner the attention of traditional news sources, leading to more social media debate, some of which can be led by elite sources. This is a complex, multi-causal and multi-directional process that is difficult to disentangle, but even cursory analysis can offer insight into the media systems undergirding this environment.

This leads to an expectation:

**H1: The public agenda will not directly follow the media’s agenda, but there will be signs of the interactivity expected within a hybrid environment.**

**Internet Discourse on Race**

In addition to describing social media and news attention to the yoga event, examining the substantive themes of the discussion that unfolded online provides a fuller understanding of why the story resonated and how participants in the discussion found meaning in a conversation about racism. Since the early 2000’s scholars have grappled with Internet discourse and the politics of race that emerge in virtual space.  Race and racism persist online and coexist with forms of racial discourse that are centuries older.  Additionally, broad cultural changes have led to an alteration of racist comments; once stated in overt Jim-Crow style epithets, now racist discourse finds expression in subtle and largely symbolic form (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Gallagher 2003).

Looking at how racial discourse surfaces online provides digital traces of the more nuanced elements of the discourse. Scholars have called for more attention to studying conversations about race on the Internet. For example, McDaniels and Hughley (2013) argue that scholars need to create a Racial Internet Literacy (RIL).  According to them, RIL and related emergent methodologies need to attend to the context of the story and the dominant political and racial climate.

In order to analyze contemporary forms of racial discourse in the digital realm, scholars must attend to the common appeals like principles of liberalism like tolerance and mutual respect, or ‘political correctness’ and implicitly held stereotypes that arise in conversations about race (Hughley and Daniels 2013). Often this includes looking at the privilege of dominant groups in society that can appear in racial discourse (McIntosh 1988).  When people confront accusations of racist behavior it often forces them to confront their own privilege and this can be an unsettling experience (Sullivan 2006). Studying naturalistic discussions of race, political correctness, and privilege in the form of social media comments provides a way to look at how discursive strategies emerge, how arguments and counterarguments evolve, and the broader context in which these discussions unfold (Hastie & Rimmington 2014). Seeing particular forms of argument and discourse appear in social media and eventually find their way into local and national forms of traditional media like newspapers and broadcast news may also give some indication of how ideas are born in popular discourse.

In our foray into understanding the intricacies of racial discourse online, we pose the following questions:

**RQ1:** **What kind of themes would emerge in the online discourse about the yoga studio’s ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga event?**

**RQ2: Would the same themes appear in the social media discourse as the news and blog posts about the yoga studio’s ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga event?**

**Political Consumerism**

Political consumerism has been the subject of much scholarly attention (Copeland 2013; Shah et al. 2007; Baek 2010). In essence, it is “the deliberate purchase or avoidance of products or brands for political or ethical reasons” (Copeland 2013). It often takes the form of boycotts and buycotts. Preliminary evidence points to the notion that people who use social media are more likely to engage in political consumerism (Zuñiga, Copeland & Bimber 2013). Citing anecdotal evidence such as a “Boycott BP” Facebook group that emerged after of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, Zuñiga, Copeland & Bimber (2013) theorize that digital media use, particularly for social purposes should be associated with political consumerism because consumption practices have the potential to spread through social influence and information-sharing behavior online. In the aftermath of the ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga event, social media served an information-sharing function. This affordance of social media might have been useful for activists trying to exercise social influence over others by allowing them to easily and quickly encourage people in their online social networks to boycott the yoga studio over of its perceived racist actions. Considering the online discursive opportunities for acts of political consumerism, we ask:

**RQ3: What forms of political consumerism emerged in the online discourse about** **the yoga studio’s ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga event?**

**Method**

**Data Collection**

To examine agenda setting and test a hypothesis about the evolution of the relationship between the public and news agendas, we follow the story of a yoga studio in Santa Barbara, California that hosted a “ghetto fabulous” yoga event that received an outcry on the studio’s Facebook page regarding racism, cultural misappropriation and white privilege. Within hours of the event, the studio offered an apology and several national news organizations and blogs picked up on the story.

For the agenda setting analysis, we investigated the time sequence of blogs and online news posts, Tweets, and Facebook comments. Because of the short time horizon, traditional time series analysis techniques such as vector auto-regression are inadequate to the analysis. Accordingly, we mostly used qualitative inspection and summary statistics to analyze this relationship. To collect data, we relied on several techniques.

We track attention to the story across 3 mediums: online news and blogs, Twitter, and Facebook comments on the Power of Your Om corporate Facebook page. For each data source, we collected data from August 28, 2013 to September 20, 2013 - well after discussion of the issue had died down in each medium. To collect online news and blogs, we performed a search on Factiva for articles with “yoga” and “Santa Barbara” and then discarded articles that were not about the event. We validated this dataset with a similar search on Google Blogs. Finally, we included sites that were referenced in Tweets. This resulted in 61 blogs or other online news sources, including The Huffington Post, The New York Daily News Lifestyle blog, Jezebel, and NBC’s The Grio, which we collapse into a category with smaller, less established blogs.

Twitter data was collected through Topsy.com’s free public historical API, which provides a random 1% sample of all public Tweets. While we have no control over the contents of that sample, the random selection of its data should ensure that it represents public discussion across the medium. We selected this data through a similar keyword search, although the terms slightly differed. In an initial search of “Santa Barbara” and “yoga”, we found a high number of false positives. However, we also found that much of the informal discussion utilized a variant of the ‘ghetto fabulous’ term used in the event announcement flyer. Accordingly, we searched for the terms “ghetto” and “yoga” as well. In a random test of 10% of tweets from the first search that were identified as relevant to the discussion, we found that none were missing in the second dataset (which was also much more expansive). There were 811 tweets in this dataset.

Facebook comments were selected by copying all comments from a post on the Power of Your Om’s Facebook page that announced the event as well as all of the comments from the studio owner’s apology for the event. Although this method does not include any posts regarding this event on personal walls due to privacy concerns, it captures the very public debate about the yoga class that ensued in this forum. We captured 238 such comments, although there was some evidence that comments were being deleted, and later analysis showed an even lower number of comments. To analyze the themes and content of the blogs, articles, and social media comments, we used an analytical framework that includes some content analysis as well as some discursive analysis.

**Content Analysis**

Though quantifying broad themes and arguments in the social media discourse is an ambitious undertaking, we made a modest attempt to identify and quantify some of the larger themes that emerged in the conversation about the ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga class. Upon identifying specific, concrete concepts from previous literature about racial discourse, we looked for and identified those concepts through several careful readings of the social media comments. Then, we meticulously wrote coding instructions detailing the concepts of interest, providing examples and quotations that embodied the concepts. In the end, we identified eight core themes: (1) Apology not genuine/not accepted (2) Apology accepted (3) Racism (4) Cultural Misappropriation (5) Implicature (6) Denial (7) White Privilege (8) Political consumerism. Briefly, these themes are explained as follows.

We coded all of the social media, news articles and blog posts for passages with references to these eight themes. Passages could range from a few words to several sentences or paragraphs. Some passages were tagged with several codes because they embodied multiple themes. We now turn to explaining these themes. For more details, see the Appendix at the end of the paper.

Two themes that were present in the social media discourse about the yoga class involved whether or not the studio owner’s apology over the class was sufficient. On one hand, some commenters did not think the apology was genuine or that it did not go far enough to remedy the problem. On the other hand, some commenters found the apology to be authentic and were appreciative of the sentiment behind the apology. These themes are embodied by the categories “apology not genuine/not accepted” and “apology accepted”.

The “racism” category captures the claim of bloggers, journalists, and commenters that the ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga class was racist or that the yoga studio’s culture was promoting racially insensitive stereotypes. The category “cultural misappropriation” identifies ways in which people adopt the cultural norms and practices of other people in an inappropriate, dishonest, or insensitive way. Previous studies have suggested this concept is an under-theorized aspect of white privilege (Kleisath 2014). We recognize the two concepts are related, but we treat them as separate and distinct concepts in this study.

“Implicature” is drawn from McPhail (2002) and Bacon’s (2003) analysis of rhetoric of racism in the United States.  According to McPhail and Bacon implicature places emphasis on the interrelatedness of black and white American past and present experience. It is grounded in the premise that current racial disparities/inequality are rooted in past racial injustice: slavery, Jim Crow style segregation, and white supremacist ideology. Further, some of the implicature passages contain references to white Americans both benefitting from and perpetuating their racial position and privilege.

The “denial” category is broad category that encompasses several themes. It includes passages of “unknownability”, which is used to assert that an observer cannot know if a subjects words or deeds are racist because it is impossible to ‘know’ definitively if another person’s intentions are in fact racist (Anagnostopoulos et al. 2013).  Related to this are passages of mitigation, relativization and reversals.  In short, these strategies are aimed at deflecting guilt and responsibility for racial injustice and inequality away from white Americans.  For the purposes of this study we fold such passages into a broadly encompassing deniability category.

The next category, “white privilege” identifies racial inequalities by focusing on advantages that white people experience from their position in society in contrast to the disadvantages that people of color experience because of their position in society (Williams 2003). Finally, we coded for “political consumerism”, which we previously explained in the theoretical section as the deliberate avoidance or purchase of consumer goods for political or ethical reasons (Copeland 2013).

To code for these concepts or themes in our content analysis, we devised a coding instruction form and used Dedoose v. 4.5. Dedoose is a web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed method research data (Dedoose 2013). Dedoose allowed us to code each of the categories of interest in the articles, blogs, and social media comments from our sample. To test for inter-coder reliability of this procedure, we used two validation techniques. Dedoose has a training tool, in which a coder must correctly identify and tag the appropriate code to an excerpt that has already been coded by someone else. One of the authors performed all of the coding and the other two authors used the training tool to learn how to correctly identify and apply the codes. In all, 147 codes were applied to 238 Facebook posts and 52 codes were applied to the 24 blogs and articles, bringing the total to 199 codes. Once the other two others could reliably identify and correctly tag the appropriate codes, they recoded a sample of ~15% from the overall sample, which amounted to 40 posts. We used Cohen’s kappa to test for reliability and each of the coders obtained kappa’s of .8 or higher for all eight of the categories.

**Discursive Analysis**

To move beyond the content analysis, we wanted to have a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how different themes emerged in the conversation about the yoga class. To do so, we engaged in discursive analysis. In analyzing discursive strategies that Americans use when talking about contemporary race and racism we adapted Discourse historical analysis (DHA) of contemporary discourses.  Ruth Wodek and colleagues developed DHA as an interdisciplinary variant of critical discourse analysis designed to integrate historical, political and socio-cognitive dimensions into analysis and interpretation of discursive events.  This assumes a multilayered notion of context: (1) the content and linguistic features of a text or discourse; (2) the sociological considerations and institutional frames of a specific discursive event; and (3) the broader socio-political and historical contexts in which discursive practices are embedded (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In addition to DHA, we follow previous research (Hastie and Rimmington 2014) on racial discourse by focusing on common rhetorical justifications and denials of racism and how activists attempt to counter racism by mobilizing support for collective action, more specifically in this case, for a boycott of the yoga studio over its racially insensitive class.

**Results**

***Agenda Setting***

[Figure 2 here]

Figure 2 shows online news and social media attention to the yoga event. The most simple and obvious interpretation of online news and social media attention to the yoga studio’s event is that attention was compressed to a short period of time. Within two weeks of the studio hosting the event, the attention of blogs, news organizations, Twitter and Facebook communities had dissipated completely. These results also show an order effect between digital mediums. Attention appears to begin on a few online news and blog sources, which are picked up by Twitter users. This attention is then transferred across online news and blogs and, eventually, is reflected in the increase in Facebook comments on the Power of Your Om site.

Looking more in depth, we found that 90% of Tweets included a URL. Of these Tweets, 50% were driven by three sources: the New York Daily News’ Lifestyle blog; Jezebel, an online feminist news site; and the Huffington Post. The first, the New York Daily News, is the online representation of a print newspaper; the rest are online only sources. The next 10 sources were referenced in 38% of Tweets.  These sites which were a mix of general blogs like LAist, yoga sites, local Santa Barbara news sites, liberal politics sites, and sites on African-American politics and culture. The remaining 36 sites included personal blogs, yoga blogs, general news sites, and some African-American culture blogs.

Attention on Twitter to Internet sites peaked on 9/3/2013, several days after the event occurred. It appears that the first site to pick up the story was Jezebel, and many of the initial tweets referenced their post on the event. By the afternoon, the New York Daily News had picked up the story, although it is unclear if this was a result of the initial Jezebel story or because of increased Twitter attention. Tweets throughout the remainder of the day cited Jezebel and New York Daily News most frequently. By the next day, however, the New York Daily News was no longer referenced; instead, attention was directed toward the article on Jezebel and on new articles on the Huffington Post and Colorlines, an African-American culture and politics blog. Attention to articles from these sites had died down within 2 days.

While there were some instances of mainstream, traditional news picking up this story (such as the New York Daily News or local television news), much of the attention on Twitter was driven by people Tweeting links to the story on non-traditional sites like Jezebel or Colorlines. Intriguingly, this attention occurred simultaneously with attention toward traditional sites. Additionally, 43% of Tweets were re-tweets of other Twitter users. Consistent with H1, which expects interactivity between the public on social media and the news media via blogs and online news sites driving attention to the yoga story, there was a mix of influences driving coverage, particularly popular online sites and other Twitter users, and, as expected by the hybrid model, this attention was fluid and dynamic.

Facebook comments coincided with attention in other mediums with the exception that some early commenters began to respond before the event even was held, and days before other media picked up on the story. Nonetheless, as online media and Twitter users began to discuss the event, Facebook comments increased in tandem (albeit at a lower volume). We will discuss this further in the political consumerism section.

***Race Discourse***

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 helps us answer research questions 1 and 2 by showing how many times each of the themes or passages appeared in social media comments, news articles or blog posts. RQ1 asks what themes would emerge in the online discourse about the ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga event? As Figure 3 shows, accusations that the yoga class was racist or racially insensitive dominated the conversation on social media, but to a lesser extent in the news and blog coverage of the class. It seems reasonable that the debate over whether the ‘ghetto fabulous’ theme was racist or not would dominate the social media conversation.

First, social media is a platform that is not always conducive to deep, lengthy conversations about a topic. Often, posts are short and terse; a debate about whether something is racist or not can be expressed in only a few words or short sentences. Second, Deciding on whether the yoga studio’s actions were racist was a relatively easy and superficial way to weigh in on the topic at hand, but at the same time, determining whether the class was racially insensitive was also at the core of whether or not there was an actual problem that required the studio’s redress. To illustrate the brevity of these comments, a few examples from Facebook were “this is disgusting. Racist, racist crackers everywhere” or “This class is extremely racist and inappropriate. That should be so so so obvious to everyone at the studio.” Similar posts were prevalent throughout the conversation on Facebook and on Twitter as well. In sum, establishing the offensive and racist features of the studio’s class was a dominant topic of conversation on social media.

Aside from accusations that the class was racist, many Facebook commenters emphasized the white privilege of the studio’s members or students that participated in the ‘ghetto fabulous’ class. Comments from Facebook like “Privilege means never actually ever having to know what a ghetto actually is. God Bless Y’all…You don’t even know that you don’t know any better” point to commenters feeling not only that the studio was tone deaf for hosting the event, but that the privilege of those who orchestrated the event is that they wouldn’t recognize why there behavior was problematic in the first place.

Many of the studio’s defenders commented on the need to “move on” after the event took place or claimed that the class was “no big deal”. This disturbed a number of commenters who identified this as a core element of privilege. They responded to such dismissiveness with comments like “‘try moving on’ spoken only hours after the fact is the essence of white privilege, is it not?” This reflects the notion that part of privilege and advantage for dominant groups is their ability to not think critically about their own problematic behavior or insensitivity.

Related to privilege, cultural appropriation, or in this case, misappropriation was a common feature of the discourse about the class. Many commenters were dismayed that yoga was being improperly used to ridicule ghetto culture rather than as a unifying exercise and spiritual practice. One particularly upset commenter wrote

The world will be a much better place the day racist white people stop stealing everything from people of color. Because you do it so poorly. You really do. How can cross-cultural understanding happen when the culture thieves have no idea what they’ve done and will continue to do? Shameful behavior.

In a similar sentiment, one commenter also expressed discomfort about how yoga was being practiced in a way that was hurtful and far removed from how yoga culture emerged in India. That commenter observed with a mocking tone, “Culturally appropriating an Indian practice and using it to caricature black/brown folk in America. That is what y’all have turned yoga into. Have fun transcending the bounds of the material world with your $120 yoga pants.” To summarize, in addition to highlighting the privilege and blissful ignorance of the studio’s practitioners, many also expressed outrage that the studio was practicing a brand of yoga, which instead of being unifying, was insensitive, divisive, and offensive.

In contrast to the accusations of racism, suggestions about the studio’s behavior reflecting white privilege, and claims that the studio was misappropriating yoga or ghetto culture, some of the commenters came to the studio’s defense and sought to express denial of whether a problem actually existed. These comments ranged from arguing that the class was not intended to be racist to expressing frustration that activists were blowing the nature of the problem out of proportion, to calls for the studio not to apologize because there was no wrongdoing. One comment read

Don’t listen to these people. Many of these responses are intentionally hateful towards the studio. Nothing suggests to me that the studio’s motive in doing this was to belittle black people, but many detractors are clearly trying to make the owner feel like shit for doing it. These people tell people they care about equality so they have no excuse to be mad at people like you.

This comment represents the belief of some of the studio’s proponents that the yoga studio itself was actually the victim because of the harsh attacks and accusations of detractors on social media. Others were just plain dismissive in a terse manner, “Time to move onward & upward. It’s unnecessary to keep rehashing this.” To counter claims that the problem was trivial or that it was becoming hackneyed, many of the offended commenters countered with a discursive strategy of implicature.

These commenters situated the tension about whether the class was offensive and racist or “no big deal” in a historical context. Images from the event of white girls parading around in do-rags flashing gang signs with bling and metallic grills evoked a strong parallel to the imagery minstrelsy for many commenters. As one detractor of the studio chided, “just wait for their next event: Yoga Minstrels in blackface!” Others were puzzled that the studio would make such an elaborate effort to mock “the pain and suffering of historically oppressed populations” such as those who have lived in the ghettos.

In addition to the themes discussed here, a number of passages in the conversation concentrated on whether the yoga studio’s apology for the event was sufficient to repent for the inappropriate behavior shown in the class. On one hand, 16 comments suggested the apology was insufficient or not enough to rectify the situation. 3 comments indicated some appreciation that an apology was made. Others thought it was a nice start, especially if coupled with some form of cultural sensitivity training. One commenter suggested to the studio’s owner, “…this is a super fabulous opportunity to get some serious sensitivity training for yourself, your staff, and all of the practitioners in the class!” In all, the conversations about the apology really brought into focus what the studio and the yoga community should do in response to the class and to make amends.

Figure 3 also helps us answer RQ2, about whether the social media themes were also present in the news coverage and blog posts about the ‘ghetto fabulous’ class. Overall, cultural misappropriation was the most common theme of the news and blog coverage about the story. 26 passages from our sample focused on the studio’s misappropriation of ghetto culture and of yoga practices. We think this theme resonated in the coverage because there were alarming photographs of the event with girls flashing gang signs, wearing do-rags and fake grills. The imagery of the girls in ghetto costumes at the event clearly embodied cultural misappropriation and provided an easy storyline for journalists and bloggers to pick up. Aside from cultural misappropriation, the themes racism and implicature, which both appeared in 8 different passages, were also dominant themes in the blogs and news articles.

In the context of the news and blog passages coded as “racism”, journalists and bloggers were often directly quoting and sourcing social media comments of people who had accused the studio of racism. The same was true of the news and blog passages about implicature. A number of stories referenced Facebook comments about the parallels between the event and minstrel shows. These findings echo previous scholarship that notes mainstream journalists are adopting social media as professional tools. Further, tools like Facebook and Twitter are being used in the process of news selection (Jordaan 2013).

Perhaps the most striking disparity between the social media conversation and the news and blog coverage of the yoga story, is that while much of the social media conversation was about white privilege of the yogis from the studio, the concept emerged only once in the news and blog coverage of the event. We speculate the reason for the absence of privilege from the blogs and news articles might be that confronting privilege is an unsettling experience for journalists and readers (Sullivan 2006). Journalists and bloggers that explored the privilege aspect of this story might also prime readers to think about their own privilege. Rather than confront this thorny issue, focusing on whether the class was racist and how it misused others’ cultural practices might be more digestible for audiences that would follow this story.

Likewise, the theme of deniability, in which Facebook commenters came to the defense of the studio and denied that the class was racist, was also absent from the news and blog coverage. This indicates that journalists largely accepted and agreed with the claims of people who were angry about the insensitivity of the event. The reporters and bloggers did not come to the studio’s defense, but rather amplified the grievances of the studio’s detractors. In the end, cultural misappropriation seemed to be the only theme that was prominent in both the social media conversation and among the news and blogs in our sample. Accusations of the yoga studio and its members embodying privilege were central in the social media discourse, but less of a factor in the news and blog coverage.

***Consumerism***

The final research question in our study, RQ3, asks whether we would see elements of political consumerism, including boycotts of the studio. As Figure 3 shows, we coded for 12 passages in the social media conversation about political consumerism as well as 2 passages about political consumerism in the news articles and blogs. Political consumerism in the social media conversation could be characterized as promoting a boycott of the studio and attempts to damage the reputation of the studio on review sites, which serves the purpose of encouraging economic damage to the studio. One commenter left a link for the studio’s Yelp page on studio’s Facebook wall. Another commenter observed the importance of inflicting economic damage as a means to send a message to the studio by noting, “in this capitalist society it takes an assault on one’s finances in order for a message to resonate with that person”. While it is obvious that some of the commenters wanted to inflict economic harm on the studio, it is not clear how serious or successful this effort was.

Calling for a boycott on social media is substantially easier than carrying out and mobilizing others to do so. The attempt to organize a boycott in response to the studio’s racially insensitive class might be an example of what others have referred to as ‘clicktivism’ or slacktivism (Breindl 2013). Clicktivism is about how digital media, particularly social media provides easy opportunities to get involved in collective action, but often, such actions are ineffectual at bringing about change; it requires low effort, but the rewards are also low. Concerning the boycott for the Santa Barbara studio in this study, there is little evidence that people beyond the social media conversation joined the effort against the studio.

**Conclusion**

One of the central findings of this study is that the news and public agendas interweave in a complex way. Public conversations on Facebook and Twitter can fuel news coverage and in turn, news coverage can increase social media attention to a news story or event. The fact that several themes which emerged from social media also appeared in the news articles and blogs about this ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga class points to the notion that the public now has substantial discursive opportunities to influence how journalists cover a news event. Yet, not all of the points addressed in the social media conversation made it into the news discourse.

While activists and concerned yogis successfully drove news attention to the studio’s cultural misappropriation of ghetto culture and yoga practice, the social media cries about the yogis from Power of Your Om and their perceived white, upper-class privilege did not appear in the broader news coverage of the story. This raises questions for researchers about why certain topics of conversation about race and racial injustice appear in news coverage while others are neglected or ignored altogether. To examine this in more depth would require a broader selection of news stories and in-depth interviews with journalists, as well as a more substantive focus on how news routines and values influence journalists’ news selection and sourcing practices.

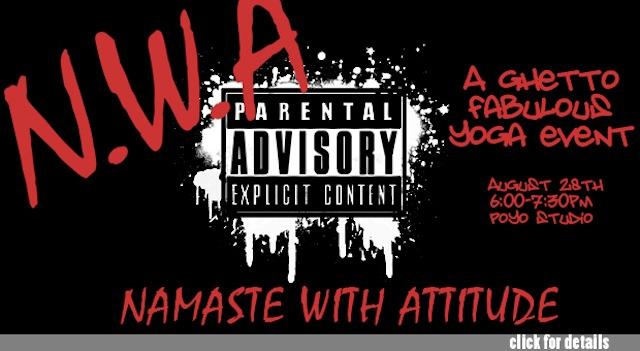
Whether or not the media agenda expands and includes more diverse perspectives as a result of using social media in news coverage really hinges on whether journalists consider the whole range of arguments that come up in discussions like the one analyzed here. Future research should also seek to connect social media discourse on race in a broader discussion of deliberation. Do conversations on social media meet the ideals of a deliberative setting? Are conversations on social media about race inclusive? Are they well considered? Do participants consider the reasons and arguments of others involved in the discourse? The literature on deliberation and how marginalized groups are disadvantaged in deliberative settings could be helpful in clarifying the role of social media in making race discourse more thoughtful, inclusive and democratic (see Sanders 1997). In the case study examined here, it appeared as though many of the commenters on social media would not otherwise have been involved in a conversation about racism and intolerance. If social media facilitates a conversation about racism among people that have little experience thinking about, identifying, or understanding what racism is and what it looks like, it likely shows social media can expand the range of participants, arguments, and opinions considered in a discourse about race and racism.

In addition to looking more critically at how social media can expand or constrict the range of perspectives in a conversation, we also would like to study further how provocative debates like the one examined here lead to attempts at collective action and mobilization. We focused on political consumerism and about how calls for a boycott surfaced on social media. Yet, we also found that commenters were interested in doing more than just boycott the yoga studio, they wanted to attack the brand and image of the studio by leaving bad reviews on various review websites. Clearly this behavior is not the same as a boycott, but the intent is definitely economic harm. Does this still constitute political consumerism? Brand harm and reputational damage is not the same as consciously buying or avoiding certain products, but the intended consequence, economic damage, is still the same. Scholars should dig deeper into the limits or boundaries of political consumerism. If reputation harm is not political consumerism, does it still constitute some sort of political activity if the reasons for engaging in this activity are political or ethical?

Finally, we conclude by noting the methodological difficulties in analyzing social media comments. In our case study, there is substantial evidence that the studio went to great lengths to delete the posts of commenters, especially when they were critical of the studio. We were diligent in our attempt to grab as many of the comments as we could, as quickly as possible to avoid capturing an extremely modified version of the social media conversation about the ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga class. However, this raises questions about data collection and sampling procedures. We call for more attention to the potential problems that arise when analyzing social media content. When we sample content online, particularly from social media, the timing matters. A social media conversation is not always a complete archive of a conversation when there are attempts by some participants to delete comments or remove criticisms. We issue a strong call to researchers that study social media to find creative ways to sample content and workaround the issue of data loss from deletion or revision.

**Appendix I: Figures**

**Figure 1: Event Flier**



**Figure 2: Blog, Online News, and Social Media Attention to the Yoga Event from 8/27/13 to 9/20/13**

**Figure 3:** Passages from Facebook Posts, News Articles, and Blogs

**Appendix II: Coding Instructions Worksheet**

**Themes/Passages:**

***Apology Not Accepted-***comments about the studio’s apology not being genuine enough; comments about the studio’s apology not going far enough to remedy the situation; comments about not accepting the studio’s apology

**Quotes:**

“And your reply is totally a non-apology. That makes it even more offensive.”

"It most commonly entails the speaker saying that he or she is sorry not for a behavior, statement or misdeed, but rather is sorry only because a person who has been aggrieved is requesting the apology, expressing a grievance, or is threatening some form of retribution or retaliation.

***Apology Accepted-*** comments expressing appreciation for the studio’s apology or that the apology was enough to rectify the situation

**Quotes:**

“you know what, good of you to respond, and acknowledge that there is room for improvement, changing and growing. It all starts with a step, and good of you to make it! Change starts with a step!”

***Cultural Misappropriation-*** when a group or person adopts a cultural practice that is not his or her own in an insincere, dishonest, or otherwise inappropriate way

**Examples:** comments or statements in an article about white people misusing rap music or ghetto culture; angry Facebook comments about the yoga studio inappropriately applying yoga practices

**Quotes:**

**“**the irony of mocking ones culture, while tastelessly and horribly appropriating another culture. True fail...”

***Denialability-***attempts by dominant groups or individuals to deflect guilt or deny culpability for racial injustice, acts of racism, etc.

**Examples:** claims to defend the studio against criticism for being racially insensitive; attempts to discredit those critical of the studio’s actions; comments suggesting the studio holds no obligation to accept responsibility for the event or address grievances

**Quotes:**

“Don't listen to these people. Many of these responses are intentionally hateful towards the studio. Nothing suggests to me that the studio's motive in doing this was to belittle black people, but many detractors are clearly trying to make the owner feel like shit for doing it. These people tell people they care about equality so they have an excuse to be mad at people like you. If they were so compassionate and accepting they would give you the benefit of the doubt and politely address their grievances. Don't let people make you feel like you have to apologize for things you don't think are wrong.”

***Implicature-*** a form of argumentation or discourse that claims racial injustice or racism is historically bounded

**Examples:** comparisons of the yoga studio’s event to minstrelsy

**Quotes:**

“The main reason this problem is even arising is because we have white people teaching an artform that originated in the Middle East/India. Like Miley Cyrus twerking, and minstrelsy (yes, you better believe it) they think that doing something "ghetto fabulous" which is mocking and horribly racist, is supposed to be fun. The white mentality hasn't changed that much, it's just more subtle and acceptable. I'll be sure to tell my friends in that area to steer clear of this place for sure.”

***Racism-*** a set of beliefs or practices that classify historically oppressed or marginalized people as inferior or superior

**Examples:** accusations that the studio’s ‘ghetto fabulous’ yoga class was racist

**Quotes:**

“As disgusting as this is...I want to know of NWA gave you permission to use their name to promote your clearly racist & offensive event. If they didn't I hope you get sued!”

***White Privilege-*** examining racial inequalities by focusing on advantages that white people experience from their position in society in contrast to the disadvantages that people of color experience because of their position in society

**Examples:** accusations that members of the yoga studio do not have to think about the disadvantaged position of people who live in the ghetto because they enjoy comfortable, problem-free lifestyles; claims that members of the yoga studio are entitled, affluent, and wear expensive yoga outfits

**Quotes:**

“Unfortunately I'm not surprised that you are clueless about the offensive nature of your "event"... You make a mockery of yoga and you have made a fool of yourselves. Karma works that way though. You have been publicly shamed, and you have embarrassed your friends and family. You dare to lead a YOGA class? Talk about unqualified and unenlightened. Do you even know what namaste means? NO. You just put on your lululemon costume and "act".. You are inauthentic and don't have a clue. I can't wait until this whole thing goes viral on twitter too. (aka Paula Deen) Talk about public shaming-- you haven't seen nothing yet! Maybe your next event should be themed "Bitchy, Ignorant, Shallow, Sorority Girls".. at least then you wouldn't have to act. Big belly laughs for everyone. lol.”

***Political consumerism-*** the deliberate avoidance or purchase of products for political or ethical reasons

**Examples:**

Suggestions to boycott the yoga studio; suggestions to join and financial support the studio; efforts to tarnish the reputation of the studio through online review websites

**Quotes:**

“These people are awful. We should create a petition to close the studio for good.”

“i'm just gonna leave this here...http://www.yelp.com/...”

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