

**Genuine support or not: How different publics perceive performative brand allyship for
Black Lives Matter Movement**

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate how various publics interpret companies' showcasing of support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement through performative allyship. The study used the situational theory of public to categorize publics according to their level of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement in the racial injustice debate. It also examined whether various publics have varying opinions on how genuine a brand is and how much they trust it. Businesses should ensure their social justice efforts are open and will make a difference. The findings of this research were helpful for BLM activists as they devise campaigns and try to get brand support.

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Introduction

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began with a tragedy. On the night of February 26, 2012, when Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American, was walking home from a convenience store, he was spotted by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer. Zimmerman reported Martin as suspicious and began following Martin, despite being told by a 911 dispatcher not to do so. A confrontation ensued, and Zimmerman shot Martin in the chest, resulting in Martin's death. In response to the exoneration of Zimmerman in the shooting incident that led to the death of Martin, three Black women: Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometithe, started the BLM movement in 2013. The movement's main aim is to advocate for an end to brutality being perpetrated by the police and end/stop racial discrimination in the United States (Banks, 2018).

The BLM movement has caused significant transformations in American society (Faust et al., 2019). BLM has inspired waves of Black activism and political engagement. Many Black Americans voted more in the 2020 presidential election, and several Black candidates ran for office from earlier elections. Findings by Rickford (2016) indicate that people, especially those from minority groups, have turned out to register and vote to enforce change across the country. Through public campaigns, the movement has helped minority groups turn out in large numbers and vote to advocate for their right to fair treatment. Since 2013, BLM has been fighting to end police racial segregation and brutality (Nummi et al., 2019). The BLM movement revealed that police lack proper training in law enforcement approaches, including de-escalation, dealing with multiculturalism, and reducing biases, resulting in unequal treatment across the country (Hong & Peoples, 2020).

Through social media platforms, BLM has drawn attention to the over-policing of minority groups and police brutality (Dunivin et al., 2022) and equal treatment (Wellman, 2022). More people and companies have looked to be associated with BLM. A Pew Research Center poll shows that approximately 67% of Americans supported the BLM (McClanahan, 2021). CBS News estimated that more than 20 million Americans joined BLM to protest the murder of George Floyd (Clayton, 2018). The incident occurred in Minneapolis on May 20, 2020, following Floyd being accused of using a \$20 counterfeit bill. Uncensored footage shows police officers pinning down Floyd, with one of them, Derrick Chauvin, kneeling on Floyd's neck, resulting in his death (McClanahan, 2021). Floyd cried out for help by saying, "I can't breathe," but to no avail. When the case was taken to court, Chauvin was found guilty of Second-Degree Unintended, Third-Degree murder, and Second-Degree Manslaughter (Forliti, 2021). He was jailed for 22.5 years (Sanchez & Levenson, 2021).

Furthermore, the BLM movement has had a global influence (Szetela, 2020). For instance, in Brazil and the United Kingdom, the movement has inspired Black people to speak out about their experiences with racism and police brutality. The movement has also helped to shine a light on the issue of racism in countries that have long denied its existence (Mundt & Burnett, 2018).

Many companies showed concern via corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices to promote racial justice (Purtell & Kang, 2022). For example, the Jordan brand pledged \$100 million to finance the BLM movement. Netflix, Nike, and Facebook developed stringent measures to promote and uphold diversity and policies that enhance social justice. Nike company changed its slogan from "Just Do It" to "Just Don't Do It" to support the BLM movement and

stand against racial injustice (Updegrave et al., 2020). Reclaim the Block, a nonprofit organization, showed its support by bailing out wrongly arrested social justice protesters (McClanahan, 2021). Despite various brands teaming up to support BLM, some brands took the move as an opportunity to promote their products and build their brand image (Green, 2021). *Performative allyship* occurs when members of a non-marginalized group offer support and solidarity to a minor and vulnerable group. Performative allyship can offer little support to vulnerable and marginalized communities (Ahmed & Rehman, 2020). Black squares and #BlackoutTuesday are examples of performative allyship (Kalina, 2020). On the first Tuesday in June, Instagram users were encouraged to take a break from posting content and instead participate in #TheShowMustBePaused, a mission started by two Black women in the music industry, Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyemang. The idea was to hold the music industry accountable for benefiting from the “effort, struggles, and successes of Black people” (Haylock, 2020). On 2 June 2020, the movement to support Black folks in music shifted, involving other industries within the United States and other races and ethnicities. While these behaviors can bring attention to BLM, their value to BLM, and racial justice, the issue is also questionable (McIlwain, 2019). According to (Dobele et al., 2022), performative allyship demonstrates sympathy but does not take meaningful action to address or change systemic disadvantages (Bludau, 2021).

Publics have divided perceptions of brands’ involvement in the BLM movement. Some people praised companies for taking a stand on an important issue, while others criticized them for hypocrisy. For example, some argue that Nike’s “equality” campaign was a way to start a conversation about race relations in America. The company released a commercial called

“Equality,” which featured various athletes, including LeBron James, Serena Williams, and Kevin Durant. The commercial contained people of color playing basketball, tennis, and soccer. It encouraged people to take the fairness and respect they see in sports and translate them off the field. The commercial aired during the 2017 NBA Finals and was widely circulated on social media. Nike’s Equality campaign was praised by many as a powerful way to start a conversation about race in America. However, some criticized the campaign, arguing it was a performative allyship (Wang et al., 2022). They argued that Nike was only interested in promoting its brand and did not care about promoting equality.

Public perception of performative allyship is generally negative. The public sees it as a cynical marketing ploy (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Critics argue that performative allyship is a way for brands to capitalize on social and political issues without doing anything to help solve the problem (Wellman, 2022; Bhagwat et al., 2020). While the public’s perception of performative allyship is generally negative, some argue it is still a way to raise awareness about important issues and effect positive change (Sibai et al., 2021). Understanding people’s perceptions about performative brand allyship helps brands rethink their corporate social advocacy initiatives and provide insights for BLM activists to organize campaigns and mobilize brand engagement. However, no study has investigated how different groups perceive performative brand allyship and how these perceptions affect people’s trust in brands.

To fill this gap, the current study conducted an online survey that examined how different publics perceive the action of performative brand allyship. Drawing upon the situational theory of publics, the study aimed to 1) segment publics based on their problem recognition, constraint

recognition, and involvement with the racial injustice issue and 2) examine whether there are differences in perceived authenticity and brand trust among different publics.

Literature review

Different perceptions of performative allyship

BLM's online presence is rife with performative allyship. Many brands and influencers rallied during the height of the BLM movement's apex of social and media prominence to post about and be associated with it. By the following year, these same brands and influencers were silent about the movement; to them, BlackLivesMatter was just another trend. This type of ally seems to create a trend in support of BLM; however, it can potentially backfire because those brands and influencers lack knowledge of the movement and its significance (Wellman, 2022). Social justice movements will likely be devalued when viewed as passing trends, simplifying the complicated and vital problems they attempt to address (Wellman, 2022). The sincere efforts of activists to advance the cause are undermined by performative allyship. Social media may speed up raising awareness and urgency about issues, but performative action does not result in the lasting change (Stewart & Schultze, 2019).

Different publics may have different perceptions of brands' performative allyship. Some people see it as a way for brands to capitalize on social issues or to make themselves look good without doing anything to effect change (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Many may see this as exploitative and hypocritical. The exploitative aspect refers to the brand using marginalized communities and their struggles as a marketing tool without taking meaningful action (Corcoran, 2020). The hypocritical element suggests that the brand may not align with its proclaimed values

in its day-to-day operations, leading to distrust and skepticism from the public. Therefore, the brand may face backlash and negative publicity (Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020).

Another example is the controversy surrounding Starbucks' "Race Together" campaign, where the company encouraged baristas to initiate conversations about race with customers but did not address their challenges with diversity and inclusion (Wahba, 2021). Insincerity implies that the brand is not genuinely committed to creating social change and instead uses performative allyship for financial gain (Acharya et al., 2021). The public may perceive this as opportunistic, suggesting a lack of ethics and morality. The brand's reputation may also be affected if the public perceives that its actions do not align with its words and are ineffective in creating positive social change (Mukherjee & Althuisen, 2020). If the actions do not lead to tangible change, the public may view these actions as hollow and ineffective. On the other hand, some people perceive performative allyship as a genuine attempt to make a difference (Sibai et al., 2022). They see companies' efforts to raise awareness about important issues and effect positive change. They believe that brands have a responsibility to use their platform to address social issues and that they have the potential to make a real difference.

Many factors can influence public perception of brands' performative allyship. A brand's history can shape how the public perceives its efforts (Mukherjee et al., 2020). People's knowledge about the issue and personal experiences (Hamdani & Hannes, 2019) also affect their perceptions. A lack of knowledge about the issue may make them unable to distinguish between genuine allyship and performative allyship. If they have personally encountered performative allyship, their perception may be more negative. Brands must ensure that their actions and efforts

toward social justice are authentic, sincere, and effective in creating positive change (Corcoran, 2020). Otherwise, they risk damaging their reputation and facing backlash from the public.

Situational theory of publics

The situational theory of publics STP (Grunig, 2005) suggests that a population can be categorized under four publics regarding their acknowledgment and engagement with a problem. It highlights why some groups are passive or active in their quest for knowledge regarding a specific issue (Heidbreder et al., 2019). The situational theory is well-tested to explain the relationship between public opinion and communication behaviors (Kim & Krishna, 2014).

By classifying the publics into different groups, public relations professionals can better understand different public perceptions and attitudes about an issue and determine how to communicate with them strategically. STP proposes three independent variables, *problem recognition*, *constraint recognition*, and *involvement*, to segment the public into different groups. In this theory, the independent variables reflect public perceptions of a specific issue or organization, while the dependent variables reflect stakeholder communication behaviors (Grunig, 2005).

Problem recognition. Problem recognition occurs when people detect that something should be done about a situation and stop to think about what to do (Grunig,2005). A disparity between an intended condition and a current form is adequate to stimulate and initiate the decision-making process, resulting in problem recognition. Problem recognition is a crucial starting point. People can only process information if they understand their connection with the problem. Because only when people perceive an issue to be a problem for them are they likely to take action to change it.

Constraint recognition. Constraint recognition occurs when people perceive obstacles that limit their ability to do anything about the situation (Grunig, 2005). Constraints slow down the process of solving a problem. People who feel that no matter how much effort is made, the situation has a high constraint recognition and are less convinced to be active. Constraints might be cognitive; for instance, a lack of self-efficacy is the belief that a person is competent to carry out an action needed to create specific results.

Involvement. Level of involvement is the extent to which people connect themselves with a situation (Grunig, 2005). The degree of participation someone can have in a situation depends on how directly and psychologically meaningful they find it to be. People are thought to involve themselves in a problem they find meaningful to themselves. Participation makes people more likely to pay attention to something and understand communication. Direct involvement allows a person to get firsthand information about a situation. The degree to which a person is involved in an issue is one of the essential factors in determining whether that individual will be part of an active or passive public and take action to address the issue. For instance, if two people have the same amount of issue awareness, the one with a greater involvement will be the more active (Wang et al., 2020). Scholars argue that the level of involvement is the most critical variable of STP because of its predictable powers compared to problem and constraint recognition (Aldoory & Sha, 2007).

Four publics

STP suggests that people can be classified as active publics, aware publics, latent publics, and non-publics based on the group's problem recognition, constraint recognition, and issue involvement (Grunig, 2005). The situational theory research has used active, aware, latent, and

nonpublic categorization to analyze an array of occurrences. One study, for example, reviewed how public relations professionals segment the publics according to organizational issues (Kim et al., 2008). This study found that some organizational news and issues may arouse the active public and cause too much enthusiasm.

Active Publics. The active public comprises knowledgeable people who are well-informed about an issue. The active public is attributed to working on a problem to find and develop a solution for the problem involved (Tam & Kim, 2019). Active publics are more prone to be affected and see problems but less apt to recognize constraints. Such a public will actively discover and react to data since they know how the issue impacts them and think they might do something about it. The active public has high problem recognition and involvement and a low constraint recognition level (Robles et al., 2020). The active public is fast to think about a problem, its effects, and the possible solution. The active public look for information all through, and they are ready to act. Active people cannot ignore a burning issue that needs one to speak out. Some situational theory research found that active publics will not only actively consume information but also share the topical information and encourage others to seek the information (Aldoory & Sha, 2007).

Aware publics. The aware public is a group of people that has recognized that there is a problem (Kim, 2011). The aware public will absorb data and may respond, but they would need more than limited degrees of participation and awareness or elevated amounts of restriction identification. The aware public can process information that may lead them to act. However, they have a limitation of high constraint recognition, low involvement level, and problem

recognition. For an aware public, if constraints are lowered, this public will likely become involved with the active public categorization (Aldoory & Sha, 2007).

Latent Publics. The latent public is unaware of how a situation affects them or does not recognize it as a concern. They are merely not involved in the matter as facts alter people's perceptions of the problem and may also become more engaged or conscious (D'Urso, 2018). The latent public is not concerned about how an issue involves them simply because it does not concern them (Wakefield & Knighton, 2019). The latent public can also be aware or active concerning an issue. Once the latent public has a heightened problem recognition, they can become aware public. Latent publics have the most passive communication behavior compared to active and aware publics (Grunig, 2005).

Non-Publics. The non-public type of STP comprises passive sets of groups (Chen, 2020). These groups need to gain more knowledge or may be unaware of certain situations covered in communication or media. Scholars believe non-public should not be considered in campaign and message designs because this group typically does not receive or process campaign information due to their low level of involvement and problem recognition (Aldoory & Sha, 2007).

Information acquisition behaviors by different publics

An individual's problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement affect their information acquisition behavior (Kim & Grunig, 2011). Each group of publics shows different ways of active information seeking and passive information processing, i.e., information attending (Kim & Grunig, 2011) about a situation (Grunig, 2005). For effective communication, it is essential to understand how different publics perform information acquisition differently. Research has found that passive informative processing publics are most likely to receive and

process topical information through the media instead of word of mouth (Aldoory & Sha, 2007). Information-seeking individuals will actively search for information about an issue from various sources such as mass media, interpersonal communication, digital communication, and social media (Aldoory & Sha, 2007).

According to STP, information seeking is a type of active information taking. It is defined as “planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specified topic” (Grunig, 1997, p. 9). Information processing is a type of passive information taking, which is defined as “the unplanned discovery of a message followed by continued processing of it” (Grunig, 1997, p. 9). STP suggests that individuals’ level of problem recognition is positively related to their information seeking and information attending, while the level of constraint recognition is negatively related to both information behaviors. In addition, the level of involvement is positively related to information seeking, and negatively related to information attending behavior. Based on STP, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Problem recognition will be positively related to information seeking (H1a) and information attending (H1b).

H2: Constraint recognition will be negatively related to information seeking (H2a) and information attending (H2b).

H3. Involvement will be positively related to information seeking (H3a) and information attending (H3b).

H4: Active racial justice public members will have higher information-seeking (H4a) and information-attending (H4b) behaviors than non-active racial justice public members.

Perceived authenticity and brand trust by different publics

Authenticity is a customer's perception or belief that they derive from communication content that leads them to connect objective data in CSR messages with the identity of a business that engages with social issues or CSR activities (Pérez, 2019). Authenticity is conceptually defined in terms of three dimensions: *genuineness*, *reflection of identity*, and *consistency* (Lim & Jiang, 2021). Genuineness means that an entity must be sincere in its behavioral motives expressed in communication (Lim & Jiang, 2021). According to (Brown, 2015) reflection of identity refers to the loyalty of oneself to one's own past, heritage, and ethos (the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its beliefs and aspirations). Consistency refers to whether the words and actions of an organization are in line with or consistent with its identity (Lehman, et.al 2019). Each dimension can be recapitulated with the following principles for practice: (1) uphold sincerity (relational authenticity), (2) stand for real (self-verification), and (3) deliver on your commitment (impression management) (Lim & Jiang, 2021). Spry et al. (2011) examined the performative allyship of celebrities and public figures in the BLM movement. The authors used a content analysis of celebrity tweets to analyze how allyship was performed. The results showed that celebrities generally used allyship to increase their social capital and to build their brand. The authors suggest that this inauthentic allyship can lead to negative perceptions of celebrities and their brands. According to recent study by Chatterji and Toffell (2019), the organization further framed their messages by choosing where to express support for the party affected by the issue. It was found that organizations expressed their solidarity in three main ways: words only, visuals only and both visuals and words. Tweets commonly used phrases "stand with the African American Community (n = 34) and "BLM" (n =

17) to verbally express support and predominately used a black colored background (n = 45) visually.

Brand trust is defined by (Ki & Hon, 2007) as the extent to which one party has confidence in and is willing to open up to the other side. Three dimensions stand as the foundation of trust: integrity, dependability, and competence. Hon and J. E. Grunig (1999) defined the following underlying dimensions of trust: (a) integrity: “the belief that an organization is fair and just,” (b) dependability: “the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do,” and (c) competence: “the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do” (p. 19). Brand trust is the ordinary consumer’s reliance on the brand’s efficacy in fulfilling its advertised function. When customers have trust in a company, they feel safer (Molinillo et al., 2020). Brand trust is the end consequence of careful planning, while brand emotion develops more swiftly and with less room for introspection.

White (2020) examined differences in people’s perceived authenticity, brand trust, and brand attitude across publics with respect to performative allyship on the BLM movement. The findings revealed the publics who perceive the allyship in question as performative are less likely to trust the brand and are more likely to have a negative attitude towards the brand (White, 2020). The publics who perceive the allyship as genuine are more likely to trust the brand and are more likely to have a positive attitude towards the brand (White, 2020). There is an emerging body of work that looks at how brands can use their platforms and resources to show support for social justice movements, such as the BLM movement. While the literature on allyship is still nascent, there is already evidence to suggest that active allyship can be an effective way for brands to build trust and goodwill with consumers. Three hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Active racial justice public members will perceive allyship as less authentic than non-active racial justice public members.

H6: Active racial justice public members will have less brand trust than non-active racial justice public members.

H7: Brand trust will be positively related to authenticity.

Methodology

Overview of survey

In this study an online survey was conducted to study explore different publics' perceptions and attitudes about performative allyship in the BLM movement. Survey research is a quantitative research method to obtain information from a sample of respondents using well-structured questions. It allows researchers to collect a good amount of data within a relatively short period of time. Survey research is suited to study people's perceptions, attitudes, and opinion of a substantial matter. Survey research also allows for anonymous response which can encourage people to be more honest in their selections.

The online survey was administered via Qualtrics. Qualtrics is a potent online survey tool that allows researchers to create and distribute the survey questionnaire to the respondents (Ginn, 2018). An online survey can reach a broader respondent, and the participants can regulate the question at their convenience.

A total number of 229 participants completed the Qualtrics online survey. The average age of this study was 36.5. As for gender, survey respondents could select from four different gender identity categories. Of the 229 participants, 25.76% (n = 59) of survey respondents selected male as their gender, and 69% (n = 158) selected female as their gender. A total of

3.06% (n = 7) selected non-binary/third gender as their identity. After the survey asked the participants about their age and gender, a demographic question asked participants about their ethnicity group identification. A total number of 24.89% (n = 57) of the survey population indicated they were white, 47.16% (n = 108) selected they were Black or African American, 0.44% (n = 1) selected American Indian or Alaska Native as their ethnicity, 4.37% (n = 10) selected Asian as their identity, and 23.14% (n = 53) selected “Other” for their identity.

Participants were broken into seven categories. A total of 0.44% (n = 1) participants selected an education level less than a high school degree, 8.30% (n = 19) selected an education level of high school graduate, 20.09% (n = 46) participants selected some college, 10.48% (n = 24) selected an education level of a 2-year degree, 24.02% (n = 55) having a 4-year degree, 27.5% (n = 63) having either a masters or professional degree, and 9.17% (n = 21) selected having an education level of a Doctorate (See Table 1).

Sampling and respondents

The target population for this research were U.S adults. The questionnaire of this study was distributed throughout my personal social media account (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), the Equity Alliance email list, and students at Tennessee State University (TSU). The email list contained people with different backgrounds, race, and gender volunteering for the Equity Alliance.

The Equity Alliance is the leading, Black-led grassroots organization in Tennessee promoting intentional, unapologetic, innovative, and culturally relevant year-round civic engagement among Black communities, while providing our communities with the tools and knowledge we need to be self-determining and create sustainable change. The organization strives to get more people of color active in the political process and to increase civic participation to achieve social and economic justice. Through civic engagement, leadership development, grassroots organizing, and issue advocacy, our

work is focused across three goal areas of Democracy, Growth, and Power, which is grounded in our dedication to improving the Quality of Life for Black people. The organization asserts that its primary vision is a society where the precepts of racism and its impacts have been expunged. The Equity Alliance is built on the pillars of offending a status quo of racial dominance and concurrent discrimination. (Who We Are, 2021)

There were 308 people that took part in this study. I used two ways to distribute my survey: a QR code and an anonymous link. I put the link on my social media accounts, and through the Equity Alliance email list, I received 283 responses. The QR code was distributed to students at TSU. I received 25 responses. Since some responses were incomplete, I had to remove those respondents. Therefore, I had 229 respondents in the final sample after data cleaning. The completion rate of my survey was 74.35%.

In the survey, respondents were asked to report their problem recognition, constraint recognition, and issue involvement of racial justice. Next, they were asked to report their perceived authenticity and brand trust. Before measuring authenticity and trust I inserted the following background information to the survey: "In June 2020, many companies and brands shared black squares along with hashtags including #BlackOutTuesday and #BlackLivesMatter on their social media. The reaction to #BlackOutTuesday has been divisive - some see it as genuine support, while others see it as performative. I'd like to know what your thoughts are on the matter?" I asked the respondents to recall what brand they remembered that took part in the #BlackOutTuesday. I provided an open entry in my survey to allow them to write brand names that they can remember. Whether it was brands such as Nike, Apple, or BET that they saw participation on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. All variables were measured by a 5-point Likert or semantic differential scale. Finally, the respondents' demographic information was collected, including age, gender, ethnicity, and education level.

Measures

Problem Recognition. Problem recognition means the extent to which individuals recognize a certain problem. A five-point Likert scale was adopted from Kim and Grunig's (2011): "I consider racial justice a severe matter," "Something must be done about racial justice," "I believe racial justice is a serious societal problem." Respondents were asked to report their agreement with the statements from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; Mean = 4.31, SD = 1.12, Cronbach's alpha = .94)

Constraint Recognition. Constraint recognition refers to the extent to which individuals realize barriers that prevent them from addressing a given problem. People are less inclined to talk about an issue if they believe there is anything in the way. A four-item Likert scale was adopted from Kim and Grunig's (2011) The statements include "I can do something to cause a difference in the terms of social justice," "I am not afraid to act in response to the problem," "I can act in a way to improve the issue of racial justice.," and "I feel I possess the ideas to solve the problem." (Mean = 3.89, SD = .87, Cronbach's alpha = .82)

Involvement: Involvement refers to one's level of participation and emotional investment into a given issue. People will be more active if they are involved in more activities. The measure of involvement was adopted from Lim and Zhang (2021). The respondent was asked about "how much does the problem of racial justice affect you personally?" "How much does the problem of racial justice involve you at some point?" and "How much of a connection do you see between yourself and the problem?" (1 = none at all, 5 = a great deal; Mean = 3.35, SD = 1.15, Cronbach's alpha = .81)

Information Seeking. Information seeking refers to an active communication habit that is defined as the purposeful scanning of the environment on different topics. The measure of information seeking, a 5-point Likert, was adopted from Kim and Grunig (2011). The statements include, “I actively search for information about racial justice”, “I compare new information I receive to previous research I’ve conducted regarding racial justice”, “I have a collection of stories I check regularly for new information regarding racial justice.” (Mean = 3.42, SD = 1.02, Cronbach’s alpha = .83)

Information Attending: Information attending refers to a passive communication behavior that involves the unplanned finding of a message and still process it afterwards. Information attending is also described by others as message discovery and news attention (Clarke and King, 1974). Information attending was measured by a five-point Likert scale that was adopted from Kim and Grunig (2011). The statements include “If I hear someone talking about racial justice, I am likely to listen,” “If I see a link posted by a friend through social media about social justice, I usually click the post and read more,” and “I pay attention to news reports about social justice.”: (Mean = 4.04, SD = .88, Cronbach’s alpha = .76)

Authenticity. Authenticity refers to “the genuineness and consistency of the firm’s commitment to the advocated issue reflecting the organizational true identity” (Lim & Young, 2021, p.5). Authenticity was measured by a five-item Likert scale adopted from Lim and Young (2021). The items include “A company is being true to itself with its racial justice advocacy” “Those brands are being true to themselves with racial justice advocacy” “Those brands are standing up for what they believe in.,” “Those brands' actions and communication are consistent over time.,” and “The way the company communicates racial justice preserves what the company

means to me.” (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree; Mean = 2.86, SD = .98, Cronbach’s alpha = .88)

Brand trust. Brand trust was measured by a three-item Likert scale from 1: “strongly disagree” to 5: “strongly agree.” Respondents was asked about their agreement or disagreement on the following three items: “I trust brands to do the right thing when social justice issues come up,” “I rely on brands to make the best decision when choosing what and how to support,” and “Brands are honest in what they put out about BLM movement.” (Mean = 3.25, SD = 1.04, Cronbach’s alpha = .84)

Results

There were two analyses that this research used: correlation analysis and independent sample T-test. Correlation analysis is used to test the linear relationship between two variables. Independent T-Test is to compare group means between two groups.

In hypothesis 1, I hypothesized that problem recognition would be positively related to information seeking (H1a) and information attending (H1b). A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between problem recognition and information seeking and attending. The results indicated a weak correlation between problem recognition and information seeking ($r = 0.216$, $p < 0.01$) and a moderate correlation between problem recognition and information attending ($r = 0.502$, $p < 0.01$). Participants who had higher recognition demonstrated greater information seeking and information attending. Therefore, H1 was supported.

In hypothesis 2, I hypothesized that constraint recognition would be negatively related to information seeking (H2a) and information attending (H2b). The results of the correlation

analysis indicated a moderate correlation between constraint recognition and information seeking ($r = 0.354, p < 0.01$) and a moderate correlation between constraint recognition and information attending ($r = 0.450, p < 0.01$). Participants who had higher constraint recognition demonstrated greater information seeking and attending. Therefore, H2 was not supported.

In hypothesis 3, I predicted that involvement would be positively related to information seeking (H3a) and information attending (H3b). The results indicated a moderate correlation between involvement and information seeking ($r = 0.458, p < 0.01$) and a moderate correlation between involvement and information attending ($r = 0.407, p < 0.01$). Participants who had a higher level of involvement indicated more information seeking and information attending. Therefore, H3 was supported.

In this study, I divided respondents into two groups (active and non-active) based on their problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement (See Table 2). I used the mean scores of problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement to classify each of the variables into high and low levels. Active public respondents have a high problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high level of involvement. In contrast, non-active respondents have low problem recognition, high constraint recognition, and low involvement. There were 167 active respondents and 62 non-active respondents.

In H4, I predicted active racial justice public members would have higher information-seeking (H4a) and information-attending (H4b) behaviors than non-active racial justice public members. As predicted, active publics ($M = 3.5, SD = 1.01$) had higher information seeking, $t(227) = 2.22, p = 0.028$, than non-active publics ($M = 3.17, SD = 1.00$). Also predicted, the

information attending of the active publics ($M = 4.29$ $SD = .64$) was significantly higher, $t(77.889) = 6.564$, $p < .001$, than non-active ($M = 3.35$ $SD = 1.06$). Therefore, H4 was supported.

In H5, I predicted that active racial justice public members would perceive allyship as less authentic than non-active public members. However, the result of the t-test indicated that active publics ($M = 2.96$ $SD = 2.57$) perceived allyship more authentic, $t(227) = 2.699$, $p = 0.007$, than non-active publics ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 3.31$). Therefore, H5 was not supported.

In H6, I predicted that active racial justice public members would have less brand trust than non-active public members. However, the result indicated no significant difference in trust between the active publics ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.09$) and non-active publics ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.869$), $t(136.565) = 1.657$, $p = 0.1$. Therefore, H6 was not supported.

Also, a Pearson correlation analysis was computed to assess the linear relationship between brand trust and authenticity. This result indicated strong correlation between authenticity and brand trust ($r = 0.628$, $p < 0.01$). Participants whose responses indicate greater brand trust also tended to indicate greater authenticity. Therefore, H7 was supported.

Discussion

The BLM movement was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of Trayvon Martin. The movement's primary goal is to end police brutality and racial discrimination in the US. Performative allyship is when influential individuals express support for a cause without acting. This study assesses public opinion of this activity by conducting an online poll. It aimed to compare differences in perceived authenticity and brand trust between different publics and divide them based on their problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement in racial injustice issue.

In H1-H3, I examined the correlations between problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement in information seeking and information attending, respectively. The findings of H1 indicated a weak correlation between being aware of the problem and actively seeking solutions. This finding is consistent with the propositions of the situational theory of publics: people who have high problem recognition tend to have high information seeking and attending. Individuals who actively seek information and attend related events may benefit from having a more in-depth understanding of the issue of racial injustice, its causes and the parties involved. This may help people build effective methods for dealing with the issue whether those efforts include attending a local council meeting, a change in law, direct action, or anything else. When a person actively seeks out information and pays attention to information about racial injustice issues, their sense of agency empowerment may rise. It also can foster a sense of community and solidarity with those who are similarly committed to finding a solution to the problem. However, contrary to the situational theory, I found that constraint recognition positively correlated with information attending and seeking (H2). One possible reason why H2 was not supported may be that the majority of my respondents were Black and affiliated with a social justice organization. These individuals may be especially aware of and involved in the fight for racial and social justice. They are relatively more likely than the general public to know what resources are available. Even though they also may be relatively more aware of the obstacles the BLM movement faces, they may also have a greater sense of the need for perseverance to conquer those challenges. Knowing the difficulties, they are still confident to fight and address the issue of racial injustice in the long run. This conclusion is crucial because it implies that those with greater levels of participation are more likely to take action to solve a

problem or issue despite the barriers in the process. Furthermore, there was a strong correlation in H3 between involvement, information seeking, and information attending. It is significant because it indicates that individuals with higher levels of involvement are more likely to engage consistently and actively in information-seeking and information-attending. This behavior will likely result in a greater understanding of the issue and more effective action. Motivation may explain why greater involvement is associated with greater information seeking. People who are more concerned with racial injustice are often motivated to learn more about the issues that they are passionate about. This inclination may be motivated by a sense of commitment to oppose injustice or a desire to be part of a group of like-minded individuals. When they are driven to seek information, they are more likely to actively seek knowledge that will help them better understand and actively confront racial injustice.

Based on the respondents' problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement, I separated the respondents into two categories (active and non-active). A high problem recognition, a low constraint recognition, and a high level of involvement are characteristics of active public respondents. Respondents who are not participating, however, are less aware of problems, more aware of constraints, and less engaged. For H4, active public members' proclivity to seek information is linked to their investment in their communities, access to information, social capital, and opportunity to engage with information. While non-active public members may have less desire to seek information, it is critical to identify ways to engage these folks and offer them the information they need to make educated decisions about their communities. Active members have a higher interest in public affairs, a great sense of efficacy, and more responsibility to act on the issue of racial injustice than non-active public members.

Regarding H5, the study's findings revealed that the active public saw allyship as more authentic than the non-engaged public. This was inconsistent with my hypothesis. I think the reason is that active public members may be quicker to spot dishonesty and more willing to observe and evaluate a brand's ally efforts. They quickly applaud an organization's earnest efforts to support social justice and diversity. They are more likely to applaud and support a business that is actively taking part in ally programs. Customers who aren't actively involved with a brand, however, might not be aware of or appreciative of the company's efforts to build allies. The authenticity of the brand's ally efforts could be challenging for people to discern if they are unfamiliar with the brand's message or its social issues. This suggests that individuals who are genuinely committed to being responsible allies and supporting the BLM movement are more likely to engage in information seeking and attending and are more likely to trust and perceive a brand as authentic. Additionally, I think those who are already committed to a cause are more likely to respond to a brand's allyship initiatives by acting. They can do things like promote the brand's message on social media or purchase the brand's products or services to demonstrate their support. Active public members are more likely to experience this since they are more invested in the company and respect its allyship initiatives. Because they may not be as aware of the endeavor or may not trust the brand's intentions, non-active members of the public may be less inclined to respond to a brand's allyship initiatives. For H6, there was no difference in brand trust between the active and non-active public group members. When a brand puts out wrong information both publics know about it know. The active publics already know what information is factual, but now the non-active public members know about the problem, their trust in the

brand goes away. The non-active public members weren't paying attention before because they put their energy into something else.

Based on my findings, there are various implications for brands to consider while undertaking an allyship. The respondents categorized as active publics did not perceive performative allyship as less authentic and did not generate less brand trust. I think this is because active publics appreciate any efforts made by those brands who are willing to show any kind of support to the BLM movement. Even though some people may think #BlackOutTuesday is a little bit performative, they still think this will increase public awareness of the importance of the movement. They still appreciate the efforts made and think that the brands were authentic. They are privy to the cause and want to help every step of the way rather than non-publics. The active publics is always eager to march or get the work done. However, this finding does not suggest that a brand's performative allyship is encouraged. In the long run, genuine support seems more important. To demonstrate a genuine commitment to allyship, corporations should actively seek out information and heed the experiences of underrepresented people. This might entail completing research and participating in meaningful dialogue with people and institutions from these areas (Craig et al., 2018). Brands should avoid tokenistic representation and instead prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. This means actively seeking out and elevating diverse voices and ensuring that these voices are not simply used for brand image or profit. Ultimately, companies should strive for authentic and purposeful allyship, taking actual steps to help underrepresented populations and valuing their perspectives and experiences. Brands may develop genuine and long-lasting relationships with their consumers while also contributing to more remarkable societal change in this manner.

Limitations

Convenience sampling was used to choose respondents for the research. As a non-probability sampling technique, a convenience sample selects individuals depending on their availability and willingness to participate. I distributed my survey questionnaire to my social media accounts and through the Equity Alliance email List. Since I categorize myself as both black and a woman, I have more respondents that are my friends in my group that fight for racial injustice. Therefore, this study contained a higher proportion of females and Black individuals compared to the overall US population. Furthermore, the people who are in the Equity Alliance are more engaged with racial injustice issues. They have more problem recognition on the issue and are more likely to be involved in the BLM movement. As a result, their stand on performative allyship may not represent the general US population opinions. The past disparate experiences with systemic racism and police violence, Black people and women are frequently seen as the ideal responders for studies on BLM (Wilkins et al., 2019). Law enforcement has long targeted and discriminated against black people and they have been disproportionately more murders and instances of police brutality in USA hence appropriate for the sample. In response to the injustices, the BLM movement was born, and it works to confront systemic racism and police brutality. Black people are, therefore, more likely to have firsthand experience with the problems the BLM movement aims to address and may be more eager to share their experiences and viewpoints on the subject. Similar women, especially women of color, are frequently disproportionately impacted by problems with institutional racism and police violence. They might also be more open to discussing their perspectives on the BLM movement. Overall, not every member of these groups will have the same experiences or viewpoints on the BLM

movement (Pradhana & Tania, 2021). To ensure that the sample of respondents is representative of the population, it is crucial to utilize a probability sampling technique which has not been taken into consideration by the study.

Conclusion

My study aimed to identify differences in the perception of performative allyship from different publics. I found that active public members are likelier to seek information regarding the racial justice issue than non-active public members. I also found that the active public appreciated any efforts to express support for the BLM movement, although some efforts seemed performative. The BLM movement leaders should correct organizations and corporations when they are wrong about the information they put out regarding awareness. There will not be any obstacles they have to face when there is factual and up-to-date messaging in the long run. It will let the different publics know that they have done their research on the matter. Brands should focus on contacting the community about what is going on and the needs and injustices of the community. Future research could examine other variables leading to allyship, such as individual principles and convictions, using more objective behavior pattern measures.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your views on racial justice. (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

- I consider racial justice a severe matter.
- Something must be done about racial justice.
- I believe racial justice is a serious societal problem.

Q2. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding racial justice. (1= strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)

- I can do something to cause a difference in terms of racial justice.
- I am not afraid to act in response to the issue of racial justice.
- I can act in a way to improve the issue of racial justice.
- I feel like I possess the ideas to improve the issue of racial justice.

Q3. Please indicate your level of participation and emotional investment into the issue of racial justice. (1 = none at all, 5 = a great deal)

- The issue of racial justice affects me.
- I'm involved in the issue of racial justice.
- There is a connection between me and the issue of racial justice.

Q4. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your information-seeking behaviors. (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

- I actively search for information regarding racial justice.
- I compare new information I receive to previous research I've conducted regarding racial justice.
- I have a collection of stories I can check regularly for new information regarding racial justice.

Q5. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your information-attending behaviors.

- If I hear someone talking about racial justice, I am likely to listen.
- If I see a link posted by a friend through social media regarding racial justice I usually click and read more.
- I pay attention to news reports about racial justice.

Q6. In June 2020, many companies and brands shared black squares along with hashtags including #BlackOutTuesday and #BlackLivesMatter on their social media. The reaction to #BlackOutTuesday has been divisive - some see it as genuine support, while others see it as performative. We'd like to know what your thoughts are on the matter?

Q7. Can you name some of the companies and brands involved in #BlackOutTuesday?

Q8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your perception of those brands that tapped into the #BlackOutTuesday. (1 = none at all, 5 = a great deal)

- Those brands are being true to themselves with racial justice advocacy.
- Those brands are standing up for what they believe in.
- Those brands' actions and communication are consistent over time.
- The way those brands communicate racial justice preserves what the company means to me.

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your trust in those brands that tapped into the #BlackOutTuesday. (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

- I trust those brands to do the right thing when social justice issues come up.
- I rely on those brands to make the best decision when choosing what and how to support regarding Black Lives Matter Movement.
- Those brands are honest about what they put out about Black Lives Matter Movement

Q10. I identify as:

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary/Third Gender
- Prefer not to say.

Q11. Age

Q12. Please indicate the highest level of education achieved:

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- 2-year degree
- 4-year degree
- Professional degree

Q13. I identify as:

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

Q14. We appreciate your participation. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions, thoughts, and opinions on performative allyship for the Black Lives Matter Movement. Performative allyship is a term used to describe the act of publicly expressing solidarity with marginalized and oppressed groups without actually taking meaningful action to support them. If you should have any questions about this research study or possibly injury, please feel free to contact PI Breanna Dickey (bd4g@mtmail.mtsu.edu). You can also contact the MTSU Office of compliance via telephone (615 494 8918) or by email (compliance@mtsu.edu). This contact information will be presented again at the end of the experiment.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Audience (Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Education)

Demographic	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Woman	158	69%
	Man	59	25.7%
	Nonbinary	7	3.06%
	Prefer not to say	5	2.18%
Ethnicity	White	57	24.89%
	Black or AA	108	47.16%
	American Indian	1	0.44%
	Asian	10	4.37%
	Other	53	23.14%
Education	Less than High School	1	0.44%
	High School Graduate	19	8.30%
	Some College	46	20.09%
	2-year degree	24	10.48%
	4-year degree	55	24.02%
	Professional Degree	63	27.5%
	Doctorate	21	9.17%
Age	Average- 36.5 years old		

Table 2. Different Publics

Publics	Problem Recognition	Constraint Recognition	Involvement
Active	High	Low	High
Active	High	High	High
Active	High	Low	Low
Active	High	High	Low
Non-Active	Low	High	Low
Non-Active	Low	Low	Low
Non-Active	Low	High	High
Non-Active	Low	Low	High