Judgment of Peers' Social Media Posts Relating to Social Justice: How Adolescents Are Making the Decision

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BACKGROUND

- The cultural confluence of the pandemic and increased visibility of the social justice movement have spotlighted the deep conflicts between self- and other-focused attitudes and actions across the United States.
- This conflict parallels developmental challenges faced by adolescents in developing identity and connectedness.
- To compound this challenge, adolescents are navigating these developmental tasks in a digital social context that became even more focal during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the current study, we examine (a) how and why youth post about social justice issues online as related to their own prosocial and socioemotional development, (b) how youth view the social justice postings of others, and (c) how postings about groups to which youth belong or not impact the reasons for posting and how they are viewed by others.

METHODS

- Participants (N = 1,670) were recruited through Character Lab, a non-profit organization that partners with schools and scholars to obtain data of mutual benefit, from a large suburban and urban school with 9th to 12th graders.
- Participants were presented with hypothetical individuals in their school and staff-developed social media posts.
- Based on the information, they were asked to rate their perceptions of those hypothetical individuals and to elaborate the reason. They were also asked about their general perception of social media posts, perception of virtual signaling behaviors, and their own social media use.
- The free responses of the participants describing their reasoning are being qualitatively coded for this project.

RESULTS

- Participants (N = 1,670) were 48.6% female and 47.3% male. The mean age was 15.4 years. 50.4% of the participants were 9th graders, 21.6% were 10th graders and 24.7% were 11th graders.
- To analyze the qualitative responses, we developed an iterative codebook based on existing literature and the free responses to guide our coding process (DeAndrea & Vendemia, 2019; Kunstman et al., 2016; Mou et al., 2015) (Table 1).

CODEBOOK (Table 1)

Code	Description
Group membership	Rater refers to the poster's group membership (poster advocates for issues faced mostly by his or her own group or issues faced mostly by others' groups).
Posting habits	Rater comments on posting habits or techniques, such as posting frequency, tagging others, original content vs. reposting others, story vs. post.
Social justice	Rater comments on the social justice stance of the poster or percpetion of social justice. Rater expresses own social justice stance. Mentions allyship, protesting, and other social justice off-line behavior of poster.
Non-social justice related content of the post	Rater comments on other aspects of the content of the post, not related to social justice.
Rater's perception of personality of poster	Rater comments on their perception of the poster's personality, including positive, negative, or neutral perceptions of the poster's personality (i.e., fake, authentic, nice, kind, quiet)
Perception of Social Status	Rater comments on the social status/standing of the poster (i.e., popular or not, has friends or not)
Rater's opinion towards content	Rater mentions agreeing or disagreeing with the content that was posted.
Judgement unfair	Rater feels there is not enough information to make a judgment of the poster (i.e., I don't know or I don't know him).
Other	Rater mentions anything else that does not fit into these categories.
Different Languages	Response written in other language (i.e., Spanish).
Trash	Rater response incoherent (i.e., strings of random letters)
No response	Response left blank.

- There is one master coder and two child coders. The three coders will need to get an intercoder reliability with the Cohen's Kappa coefficient greater than 0.8 before coding independently.

DISCUSSION

- This study will help inform researchers about what factors adolescents consider when making judgements of others on social media, especially what they consider as authentic portrayals of social justice support compared to virtue signaling.
- This knowledge would allow us to better engage adolescents in social justice issues through social media in the future.
- More in-depth qualitative research with a semi-structured interview methodology is needed to better understand the rationale behind the perceptions.
- Future research should also explore how youth engage with social justice on other social media platforms (e.g. Tik Tok, Twitter, Snapchat, etc.) and introduce quantitative elements like participants' social media use, prosocial behaviors, and social-economic status.

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