

Chapter 17

“What Kind of Blackfella Are You Anyway?”: Digital Violence, Intersectional Racism, and Discrimination Against Australian Aboriginals and Black Americans


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ABSTRACT

Social media can bring together diverse people, providing a platform to facilitate discussions about various issues across races, cultures, and religions. These platforms shape social change by bringing to light individuals' perceptions on social issues whilst simultaneously becoming echo chambers that exclude contradictory or dissenting voices. Increases in digital violence, racism, and discrimination can be seen on social media websites, particularly towards those whose ideas challenge the dominant discourses of their cultural groups. The authors explore this phenomenon through four case studies: Aboriginal Australian academic Anthony Dillon, Aboriginal politician Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, African American former gubernatorial candidate and radio presenter Larry Elder, and African American political commentator Candace Owens. Their experiences are considered through the lens of free speech, civil discourse, and how social media users choose vilification instead of debate to address dissenting voices.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3380-5.ch017

INTRODUCTION

Social media has great potential to stimulate discussion, engage a broad range of people, perspectives and experiences. Social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter can promote social change, as they influence and are influenced by rich diversity, and provide a constant stream of updates and information, pervasive to many peoples' lives. At the same time, when social media users only engage with perspectives they agree with, there can often be hostility, racism and outright aggression towards views that are deemed offensive or unacceptable.

The objectives of this chapter are to:

1. Explore digital violence expressed against two controversial Aboriginal Australian and two African American personalities who challenge the dominant discourses of their cultural groups, and attract the mire of blatantly racist and vilifying comments;
2. Consider the role and importance of free speech, and the function of promoting this via social media platforms. The authors view this as imperative to promote the best ideas within social discourse, even when disagreement occurs;
3. Outline how social media users do not aid in developing meaningful ideas about controversial personalities' ideas when resorting to vilifying attacks, but instead attempt to silence such dissent.

BACKGROUND

The Impact and Potential of Social Media

Social media platforms bring together diverse people, providing them with a platform where they can engage in discussions about various issues across races, cultures, or religions (Bouvier, 2015; De Zuniga et al., 2012). Important to note is that the online discussions that individuals engage in expand peoples' consciousness of innate social and cultural bias, prejudices, and stereotypes about social issues (Keum & Miller, 2018). Therefore, social media plays an important role in shaping the discourse in contemporary society, especially in relation to identity issues (Bouvier, 2015). Furthermore, social media platforms contribute to shaping social change by bringing to light individuals' perceptions on social issues (Shang & Harb, 2021). One of the key challenges of social media in the recent past has been the increase in the extent of digital violence, racism, and discrimination (Haughton, 2014). As social media platforms have increased in diversity, expressions of covert and blatant racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and stereotypes have become more common (Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021).

Complexities of Digital Racism

Over time, expressions of covert racism through digital attacks have become more complex and continued to evolve (Keum, 2021). One of the complex forms of digital violence that has emerged relates to individuals who present political or philosophical perspectives that diverge from those held by people within the different groups they belong to (Fenton and Smith, 2019). For example, in Australia Jacinta Nampijinpa Price who holds views that are at times divergent from those held by her Indigenous Australian community experiences frequent online attacks from people within and outside her community. A

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