

Decoding #BlackGirlMagic: An Analysis of How Black Women at a South African University Construct and Celebrate Their Identities Through the Hashtag.

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Dedication

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Abstract

The emergence of the Black Girl Magic hashtag in 2013 marked a pivotal moment in the realm of social media, igniting a powerful movement that resonated far beyond the digital sphere. This hashtag, which initially gained traction on platforms like X/Twitter and Instagram, served as a catalyst for celebrating the multifaceted achievements and resilience of Black women. The profound impact of this movement on an individual level became the focal point of my personal journey, delving into the transformative effects of #BlackGirlMagic within the context of a media landscape historically characterised by a lack of diverse representation. The study takes a closer look at the significance of the hashtag in fostering a sense of acceptance among Black women. In a world where mainstream media has perpetuated narrow beauty standards and marginalised narratives, #BlackGirlMagic emerged as a beacon of empowerment (Mason, 2021). This research does not shy away from acknowledging the complex and nuanced dimensions inherent in this movement. It explores how factors such as featurism, colourism, texturism, body types, and nationalities intersect with the celebration, recognising that while #BlackGirlMagic champions empowerment, it also grapples with inherent limitations that need to be addressed (Sinon, 2020). The study explores how Black women students at Rhodes University use and understand the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic in their lives. The research considers the experiences and cultural practices of Black women in online spaces (Bevins, 2020). By delving into the ways in which they engage with #BlackGirlMagic, the study explores the digital landscape as a dynamic and evolving arena where identity, empowerment, and representation intersect. This approach allows for a deeper comprehension of the lived experiences of Black women in the online realm, shedding light on how Black women students at Rhodes University use #BlackGirlMagic and the challenges they face in seeking to be included and represented. By focusing on the experiences of Black women students at Rhodes University, the research can contribute to the broader discourse on digital activism and the role of social media in shaping contemporary feminist movements. This localised perspective offers valuable insights into how global movements like #BlackGirlMagic are adapted and reinterpreted within specific cultural and institutional contexts, highlighting the importance of digital spaces as sites of both empowerment and contestation for Black women.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction to Black Girl Magic

Black women at Rhodes University are a dynamic and diverse group, navigating both academic challenges and broader social issues. They contribute significantly to campus life, engaging in activism, leadership roles, and artistic expression while advocating for the rights and representation of marginalised communities. Their experiences are shaped by the intersectionality of race, gender, and class, which influence how they navigate a predominantly white academic environment. Despite these challenges, Black women at Rhodes are resilient, using platforms like social media to celebrate their identities, foster solidarity, and challenge societal norms, all while striving for excellence in their academic pursuits. This study delves into how Black women students at Rhodes University engage with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag on X/Twitter, exploring its dominant themes, their use of it for self-representation, and their personal experiences and interpretations of the hashtag. This study will make use of a qualitative Feminist Internet research study which will be discussed in chapter 4. By examining these aspects, the research aims to understand the cultural significance of #BlackGirlMagic and its role in shaping the discourse and empowering Black women students at Rhodes aligning with the broader movement's celebration of their strength, resilience, and achievement.

The Black Girl Magic movement is a cultural celebration and empowerment initiative that highlights the beauty, strength, resilience, and achievements of Black women. It aims to address the unfair treatment and neglect of Black women by showcasing their exceptional achievements across various fields, including politics, entertainment, business, and activism. The movement also challenges stereotypes and the lack of representation that often limits the visibility of Black women in mainstream media (Mason, 2021). Black Girl Magic is not just about celebration but also about reclaiming narratives, addressing historical and ongoing social injustices, and fostering a sense of community and solidarity among Black women. Through social media platforms, art, music, and literature, the movement continues to inspire a new generation of Black women to embrace their individuality and greatness. It emphasises that Black women's accomplishments are extraordinary, deserving of recognition, and rooted in their unique cultural heritage. Ultimately, Black Girl Magic embodies a commitment to lifting each other up, building a collective voice, and acknowledging the inherent power and beauty of Black womanhood (Mason, 2021).

However, This empowerment is further hindered by the challenges women encounter in the digital realm where the same platforms that offer support can also expose them to harm and marginalisation. Research has shown that online spaces are often hostile environments for women, with digital gender-based violence being a widespread and persistent issue (Reneses Bosch,2023). This violence can range from trolling and harassment to violent threats, all exacerbated by the anonymity the internet provides, which facilitates more pervasive forms of abuse (Reneses Bosch,2023).

This hostile environment is further complicated by the rise of online misogynistic communities, such as the manosphere, where anti-feminist sentiments and attacks on gender equality and feminist movements are prevalent (Reneses Bosch,2023). While #BlackGirlMagic serves as a counter-narrative, celebrating Black women's resilience and beauty, the continued prevalence of networked misogyny poses a significant barrier to truly equitable representation. Particularly in South Africa, where online gender violence remains understudied, understanding these local expressions of misogyny in digital spaces is critical to addressing both the empowerment and victimisation that women face online (Reneses Bosch,2023).

Black women have historically been underrepresented in the media, and the effect of this lack of representation on young girls can be devastating (Harrinath, 2022). Research has shown that media representation plays a crucial role in shaping the self-esteem and self-worth of young people (Cox, 2020). When young girls see themselves reflected in the media they consume, they are more likely to feel seen and valued. But when they are consistently left out of the narrative through underrepresentation, they can internalise feelings of invisibility and worthlessness (Cox, 2020). From film and television to advertising and fashion, Black women are underrepresented and often portrayed in limiting and stereotypical ways (Coleman, Reynolds, and Torbati, 2020). This lack of representation sends a clear message to young Black girls: they are not worthy of being seen, heard, or valued.

The problem is not only that Black women are underrepresented in media, but also that when they are represented, it is often in a stereotypical and negative manner (Coleman *et al.*, 2020). Black women are often portrayed as angry, hypersexualised, and in need of saving (Parris, 2020). This not only reinforces harmful stereotypes but also perpetuates the notion that Black women are inferior and not worthy of respect. The underrepresentation and negative portrayal of Black women in media have far-reaching consequences, particularly for the self-esteem and

self-worth of young Black girls. Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort from both media creators and consumers to challenge and reshape existing narratives, in order to foster a more inclusive and empowering cultural landscape. These harmful stereotypes not only shape how Black women are perceived by others but also influence how they perceive themselves (Jones, 2019). The media's role in constructing societal norms further worsens the impact, creating a cycle of negative reinforcement. The narrative of Black women as inferior or undesirable is normalised, contributing to low participation and visibility in various sectors, including academia, professional settings, and leadership positions (Gammage, 2015). Furthermore, the media's failure to present diverse and nuanced portrayals of Black women reinforces a monolithic view, ignoring the intersectionality of their experiences.

Black women, like any other group, hold diverse identities shaped by factors such as class, sexuality, and ability (Matsuzaka et al, 2023). The media's tendency to flatten these complexities into stereotypes oversimplifies and distorts the reality of Black women's lives. Social media has emerged as a potent force for challenging hegemonic systems and amplifying the voices of marginalised communities (Matsuzaka et al, 2023). Hegemony, characterised by the dominance of a single group over others, has traditionally been maintained through controlling information and media (Maisura, 2020). Throughout history, mainstream media, controlled by a select few, has influenced public opinion and upheld prevailing power structures. With the arrival of social media, individuals have gained the ability to bypass traditional gatekeepers, granting them the power to directly share their own narratives and perspectives with the world (Walters, 2020).

Social media facilitates the creation of virtual communities, bringing together individuals from various backgrounds to connect, support, and validate each other. Social media offers a space where people can discover much needed representation, solidarity, and affirmation, cultivating a sense of belonging and self-acceptance (Hurley, 2021). By utilising social media, individuals have the opportunity to actively create their identities through curating and sharing content that mirrors their distinct experiences, perspectives, and cultural heritage. Furthermore, social media platforms have played a crucial role in raising awareness about social justice issues and promoting inclusivity. Activism and advocacy have found a powerful outlet through hashtags, viral campaigns, and online movements (Storer and Rodriguez, 2020). This digital activism has given marginalised communities a platform to demand change, challenge discriminatory systems, and amplify their voices on a global scale. The power of social media lies in its ability

to connect people, foster community, and empower individuals to challenge oppressive structures, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of identity (Jones, 2019).

Representation is not only about visibility; it is also about empowerment and the ability to envision oneself in various roles and positions of influence (Ergha and Allen, 2020). The scarcity of positive role models in media hinders Black women's ability to imagine themselves as leaders, professionals, or trailblazers. Limited representation in successful and empowered roles sends the message that such achievements are exceptional rather than the norm for Black women (Drewery and Johnson, 2010). This scarcity of representation in positions of power and influence has implications for career aspirations and opportunities. Studies have shown that media representation can influence career choices and goals (Cox, 2020). The lack of diverse role models in media can limit the career aspirations of Black women, reinforcing stereotypes that discourage them from pursuing certain fields or positions. Moreover, when Black women do not see themselves represented in leadership or successful roles, it contributes to a broader societal narrative that suggests they are not suited for these positions (Tabassum and Nayak, 2021). This narrative becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, limiting opportunities and perpetuating systemic barriers. Efforts to challenge the underrepresentation of Black women in media must go hand in hand with dismantling harmful stereotypes (Gammage, 2015). Media creators, including writers, directors, producers, and casting directors, bear a responsibility to present diverse and authentic portrayals of Black women. The industry must move beyond tokenistic representation and actively seek narratives that reflect the richness and complexity of Black women's experiences (Love, 2021).

The inclusion of diverse voices behind the scenes is crucial to achieving authentic representation. Increasing the number of Black writers, directors, and producers can ensure that narratives are crafted with nuance and cultural sensitivity (Hargittai, 2020). When Black women have agency in shaping their own stories, the potential for positive and empowering representation is significantly enhanced (Gammage, 2015). The underrepresentation of Black women in media is a deeply ingrained issue with profound effects on individual identity, societal perceptions, and opportunities for empowerment. The media's role in shaping narratives and reinforcing stereotypes perpetuates a cycle of marginalisation and inequality (Gammage, 2015). Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that involves media creators, consumers, and educational institutions (Loja, 2022). Efforts to diversify

representation must prioritise authenticity and positive portrayals (Manning, 2020). The inclusion of Black women in decision-making roles within the media industry is crucial for ensuring that narratives are crafted with cultural sensitivity and nuance (Jones, 2021). Moreover, media literacy and education play a vital role in empowering individuals to challenge harmful stereotypes and demand more inclusive representation.

1.2. Representation of Black Women in Media

Black women have been historically treated as inferior in various contexts, including in the sciences, popular culture, law, and everyday life (Terry, 2018). Their marginalisation is further perpetuated by invisibility, as they are underrepresented in leadership roles, office jobs, and popular cultural images (Terry, 2018). Black feminist scholars such as Moya Bailey (2021) have highlighted that this marginalisation is further amplified by a lack of representation in the media. When Black women's experiences are depicted, the full range of human emotions and experiences are not reflected (Terry, 2018).

The socially constructed image of Black women is further examined in St. Jean and Feagin's *Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism* (1998), where the authors argue that due to a lack of social science research, Black women are misrepresented and misunderstood in public and private discourse (Terry, 2018). With the advent of moving pictures in the 1890s, existing stereotypes of Black people and racist ideologies were represented on the big screen. During this time, white people played African Americans on stage and in film by using Blackface (Terry, 2018). Blackface Minstrelsy, which emerged in the early nineteenth century, featured skits, acts, dancing, and musical performances that mocked people, particularly those of African descent (Terry, 2018). Typically, Black people were portrayed as dim-witted, lazy, buffoonish, irrational, and happy-go-lucky in these shows (Terry, 2018).

In the 1980s and 1990s, more television shows featuring multiracial casts were produced. This history underscores the importance of critically examining media's impact on shaping perceptions and attitudes towards marginalised communities (Gray, 1995). This evidence highlights how early media, particularly television, offered an extremely restricted portrayal of characters who were not white. Furthermore, a significant number of these earlier portrayals were riddled with racist stereotypes and caricatures, perpetuating harmful and offensive images (Gray, 1995). Over time, there was a noticeable increase in the representation of Black people

on television, with a notable shift from supporting to main roles (Cummings, 1988). However, there existed extremes in television for a considerable period. On one side, there were positive portrayals of integrating and respectable Black characters, while on the other side, there persisted the harmful stereotype of the Black criminal and various negative clichés associated with Blackness (Entam, 1994).

The increase in cable networks and digital platforms has led to more representation of the Black experience on television (Shattuc, 2020). This includes more diverse and complex stories that reflect the rich landscape of Blackness primarily in the United States including variations based on factors such as sexuality, socioeconomic status, and geographical location (Shattuc, 2020). Examples include shows like *The Chi* created by Lena Waithe, *Insecure* created by Issa Rae, and *Pose* which centres on chosen families, particularly in the LGBTQ Black community. This variety of representation also includes shows like *Dear White People* set on college campuses, historical fiction shows like *Lovecraft Country*, and the multicultural superhero drama *Watchmen*. These shows challenged the earlier representations of Black people on television and television shows in earlier times began to include people of diverse backgrounds including Black people (Harwood and Anderson, 2002).

The widespread use of social media and cable television has led to a more diverse representation of different types of people on screen (Harwood and Anderson, 2002). Previously, only white people were represented, but now a wider range of cultures and races are represented. Although there have been some improvements, Black women are still underrepresented in our modern society (Harwood and Anderson, 2002). Cable and digital television have contributed to increased representation of marginalised individuals and communities on screen. By offering more channels and programming options, cable TV has created opportunities for a wider range of voices to be heard. This includes showcasing diverse casting choices, storylines that address social issues, and programming that reflects the realities and experiences of underrepresented groups (Harwood and Anderson, 2002).

However, in South Africa, Mapokgole (2019) highlights the shortcomings of popular television shows like *Skeem Saam*, *Muvhango*, and *Isidingo* in fully reflecting the experiences of Black women, noting that these shows often fail to meet the standards set by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Women's Protocol,

which call for the elimination of gender-based discrimination and the promotion of women's rights.

The representations of Black women in these shows often lack depth and are raceless or ahistorical, which erases the complexities of Black womanhood and fails to portray them as fully realized individuals with agency (Mapokgole, 2019). As African feminist theory highlights, this marginalisation in traditional media contributes to the broader cultural stereotyping of Black women, reducing them to simplistic or stereotypical roles. However, the rise of digital media has created new opportunities for Black women to assert their presence and challenge these limiting portrayals (Mapokgole, 2019).

This increased visibility helps challenge stereotypes, break down barriers, and promote inclusivity. Moreover, social media has been instrumental in shaping representation (Tucker et al, 2017). Social media has significantly challenged the marginalisation of certain individuals and communities by amplifying their voices, facilitating community building, promoting advocacy, increasing representation and visibility, and fostering direct engagement with media entities (Tucker et al., 2017). These platforms have given marginalised individuals the power to redefine narratives, demand inclusivity, and effect social change. One of the most notable ways that social media has been used to challenge systems is through the rise of social movements (Tucker et al., 2017).

The rise of social movements on social media has significantly contributed to giving marginalised communities a voice in various ways (Tucker et al, 2017). Social media platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of information and the organisation of collective action (Tucker et al, 2017). Activists and community leaders can use hashtags, posts, and events to mobilise support, plan rallies, and coordinate actions, increasing the impact and visibility of their movements (Tucker et al., 2017). Another way that social media has been used to challenge hegemonic systems is through the creation of alternative media (Gehl, 2015). Alternative media refers to media that is produced outside the mainstream and is often used to challenge dominant narratives. Social media has provided a platform for independent journalists, bloggers, and activists to share their work and reach a wider audience (Gehl, 2015). This has led to the creation of a more diverse and varied media landscape, which is less controlled by a small group of people. Social media has also been used to challenge hegemonic systems through the creation of online communities. These communities provide a safe space

for people to share their experiences and perspectives and to build relationships with others who share similar experiences (Zhu et al., 2021).

This has been particularly important for marginalised communities, who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream spaces. Social media have provided a platform for these communities to connect and build solidarity, which has been critical in the fight against hegemonic systems (Zhu et al., 2021). Therefore, social media provide individuals with new avenues for activism, political resistance, and protest that are unavailable through traditional political forums (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, and Bimber, 2020). Online spaces can be spaces of representation and identity development for marginalised communities (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, and Bimber, 2020).

As a result, activists are now able to plan large-scale social movements and other actions, which gives them the ability to work toward addressing social issues and bringing about social change (Chon and Park, 2020). More significantly, it has made it easier for individuals to express their thoughts and ensure their voices are heard (Chon and Park, 2020). Overall, the functionality of social networks as a means of sharing information and as a tool for organising protests, social movements, and creating online communities has been highlighted (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, and Bimber, 2020). The multifaceted dimensions of social media as a catalyst for activism, exploring its role in shaping representation, providing spaces for identity development, and elucidating its transformative potential in fostering social change. By analysing the current scholarly discourse and identifying key trends, this exploration aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between social media and contemporary activism.

1.3. Positionality

This research seeks to analyse the hashtag by exploring what type of Black women is most associated with the hashtag, and how Black women students at Rhodes University make use of and interpret it in their own lives. However, given the proximity of the study to my own identity and interest in #BlackGirlMagic, it is necessary to discuss my positionality in relation to the study and my participants. Positionality refers to the social, cultural, and personal factors that shape the researcher's identity, beliefs, and perspectives (Boureke, 2014). It includes aspects such as their gender, race, ethnicity, social class, and other intersecting identities (Boureke,

2014). Positionality, a foundational concept in the social sciences, recognises the profound impact of an individual's social and cultural context on their perspectives and experiences (Haraway, 1988).

When I looked at how people use the hashtag on social media, I saw that it represented Black women in a very positive way, which was great and that made me curious. In 2013, the term #Black Girl Magic gained popularity on social media which was Twitter now known as X, celebrating the accomplishments of Black women. I was immediately fascinated and began referring to myself as having Black Girl Magic. I started to feel accepted by the media that had long rejected me. Growing up, I rarely saw people cast in movies and series that resembled me. I yearned to be called magical, yet the thought of being considered magical felt out of my reach.

Accounting for positionality requires introspection and a critical examination of how personal experiences, shaped by systemic inequities, inform one's worldview and role within social justice movements (Hamilton, 2020). For instance, as a researcher with a personal connection to the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic, my positionality affects how I perceive and analyse the movement's representation of Black women. This lens enables me to explore not only how the hashtag empowers but also how it might perpetuate certain biases or limitations. My engagement with #BlackGirlMagic as a Black woman who has experienced media exclusion and longing for representation adds a layer of personal insight into this study. The concept of positionality stresses the importance of acknowledging how my experiences and identity influence my research perspective. This self-awareness helps in critically examining how the hashtag resonates with or excludes certain groups within the Black female community. It also necessitates a careful approach to understanding how my background intersects with broader themes of race, gender, and social class in the movement's portrayal.

Furthermore, positionality connects to the research aim by guiding the investigation into how Black women at Rhodes University interpret and utilise the hashtag. It ensures a nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which race and gender intersect in these representations. By recognising my own positionality, I aim to approach the study with an awareness of potential biases, seeking to present a more comprehensive view of the hashtag's impact on Black women's identities and experiences.

1.4. A Note on Language

It is important to note that at times Black Girl Magic is written as three separate words and at times as a hashtag as #BlackGirlMagic. It is also referred to as a movement and as something which Black women possess. These three variations of Black Girl Magic appear in the following ways and for the following reasons:

1. **Black Girl Magic (the movement):** This refers to the larger socio-cultural movement celebrating the achievements, resilience, and empowerment of Black women. When used in this context, Black Girl Magic represents a collective call for recognition and celebration of Black women's contributions across various fields. The movement seeks to counter narratives of invisibility and marginalisation by highlighting the excellence inherent in Black womanhood.
2. **Black Girl Magic (belonging to Black women):** Here, Black Girl Magic is used to describe something inherent within individual Black women an inner strength, beauty, or quality they possess. This usage emphasises the personal and intrinsic nature of the magic, highlighting how Black women embody this concept through their daily lives and accomplishments, often in the face of adversity.
3. **#BlackGirlMagic:** As a hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic is primarily associated with social media activism and the digital expression of Black women's power and beauty. It allows for the amplification of individual stories, creating a shared narrative that spans across communities. By using the hashtag, Black women both celebrate and find solidarity with others who share similar experiences. The hashtag serves as a digital space for visibility, recognition, and empowerment.

To reiterate, each of these variations appears throughout this thesis. When discussing the broader social movement, Black Girl Magic is used. When emphasising the personal qualities or experiences of individual Black women, the Black Girl Magic is used to highlight the sense of personal ownership and power. Finally, when analysing social media discourse, the #BlackGirlMagic is used to refer to the collective, yet individual, expression of identity and pride within the online space.

1.5. Research Aim

The research aim of this study is to question and challenge the prevailing narratives within the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic by exploring the types of women it represents. This exploration delves into the ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the particular type of Black women frequently celebrated within the hashtag. Furthermore, this research aims to explore the processes through which Black women at Rhodes University build and express their identities using the hashtag as a platform for celebration. Additionally, the study seeks to explore any recurring patterns in the predominant representation of Black women, taking into consideration factors such as skin tone, body types, and facial features, and to explore the significance of these representations for Black women.

1.6. Research Questions

In order to achieve the research aim, three key research questions were explored in this study, they are:

1. What are the most common themes and topics associated with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag on X/Twitter?

This question addresses the thematic landscape within which the hashtag operates on X/Twitter. By delving into the prevalent themes and topics, the study aims to uncover the recurring motifs that define the discourse surrounding #BlackGirlMagic on this particular social media platform. In doing so, it seeks to identify the central narratives that have emerged and persisted within the hashtag's usage.

2. How do Black women students at Rhodes University use this hashtag?

Focused on the local context of Rhodes University, this question aims to explore the specific ways in which Black women students engage with and utilise the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. By investigating the nuances of its application within this academic community, the research seeks to discern the motivations, expressions, and individual agency of Black women in utilising the hashtag as a tool for self-representation and celebration.

3. How do Black women students at Rhodes University experience and interpret the hashtag as it is used on X/Twitter?

This question delves into the lived experiences and interpretations of Black women students at Rhodes University in relation to the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag on X/Twitter. By examining

their subjective perspectives, this aspect of the study aims to uncover the personal and communal meanings attached to the hashtag within the specific context of the University, shedding light on the ways in which Black women navigate, interpret, and contribute to the broader discourse surrounding #BlackGirlMagic.

1.7. Significance of the Study

This study aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on social media representation, race, and gender by critically examining the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. Informed by a theoretical framework, discussed in greater detail in chapter three, consisting of Hall's theory of representation (1997), Connell's gender order theory (1987), and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1989), the research explores the hashtag's narratives, particularly within the context of Rhodes University. By addressing the research questions, the study aims to highlight the multifaceted ways in which Black women navigate and contribute to the evolving discourse surrounding #BlackGirlMagic on X/Twitter.

The study is driven by specific research questions that aim to uncover and analyse the aspects of the narratives surrounding #BlackGirlMagic, especially within the context of Rhodes University. The emphasis is on revealing the different ways in which Black women actively participate in and contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the hashtag on the X/Twitter platform. This approach seeks to move beyond surface-level analysis and delve into the intricacies of Black women's agency and contributions in shaping and participating in the evolving discussions related to #BlackGirlMagic. The ultimate goal of this research is to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the broader societal understanding of the impact of digital movements like #BlackGirlMagic.

By bringing together the theoretical perspectives of representation, gender order, and intersectionality, the study aims to offer a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond the examination of hashtags. It aspires to emphasise the lived experiences of Black women in digital spaces, emphasising their agency, resilience, and contributions in shaping narratives that challenge and redefine societal norms. Through this exploration, it aspires to amplify the voices of Black women, recognising their role as active agents in shaping the narratives that define and redefine the contours of digital spaces.

1.8. Conclusion

The underrepresentation of Black women in media, coupled with the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, emerges not merely as a scholarly concern but as a societal imperative demanding urgent attention. The narratives woven by media creators highlights a profound influence, shaping not only how Black women are perceived but, crucially, how they perceive themselves. This study aims to highlight the ways in which Black women navigate, interpret, and contribute to ongoing discourse of representation. The significance of this research extends beyond the walls of academia. It is a call to action among media creators, consumers, and universities to collaborate in challenging and reshaping existing narratives about Black women.

Black Girl Magic celebrates the inherent beauty, strength, resilience, and achievements of Black women. It highlights their diverse talents, contributions to various fields, and their capacity to thrive in the face of adversity. This celebration is not just about recognition but also about reclaiming agency and self-definition in a world where Black women's voices and stories have often been silenced or distorted. In online spaces, where misinformation and harmful stereotypes can spread quickly, the promotion of Black Girl Magic serves as a vital counter-narrative. It provides positive representation that challenges the status quo and offers a more accurate portrayal of the richness and complexity of Black women's experiences.

This chapter has outlined the study by focusing on the marginalisation of Black women and examining how various representations impact the self-esteem of both individuals and their communities. It also emphasised the crucial role of social media in transforming the narrative surrounding Black women's representation. By highlighting the significance of these platforms, the chapter demonstrated how social media empowers marginalised groups to reclaim and redefine their power.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In the past few years, the rise of technology and the internet have tremendously transformed society, more specifically how people communicate with each other (Bouvier and Machin, 2020). Social networking sites (SNS), are at the forefront of this paradigm shift in communication technologies and have become woven into the fabric of society (Bouvier and Machin, 2020). This growing influence of SNS is exemplified by the role they played in the social movements of the Arab Spring, which were often dubbed Twitter uprisings or Facebook revolutions, highlighting how social media became a powerful tool for political activism. While some edited volumes cover activities across Africa, there is limited academic research focused specifically on South Africa (Bosch, 2020).

In contrast, *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics* (Bosch & Roberts, 2020) explores the role of digital platforms in helping Kenyans form new communities across ethnic lines, highlighting how the use of digital tools can shape social dynamics in different African contexts. Similarly, *Social Media and Politics in Africa* provides case studies from across the continent, demonstrating how social media is reshaping political engagement, though it also sometimes reinforces existing power dynamics. *Social Media and Elections in Africa* (Mano & Ndlela, 2020) delves into the influence of social media on political campaigns and electoral processes across the continent. However, South Africa remains underexplored in these discussions, with minimal research on how social media apps impact everyday life (Bosch, 2020).

A recurring critique of social media research, globally and in Africa, is the lack of demographic representativeness among social media users compared to the broader population. This issue is particularly evident in South Africa, where internet penetration is not yet universal. Despite this, social media has become integral to daily life for those with access. For example, 61% of X/Twitter users visit the platform regularly, with over two-fifths engaging multiple times a day. Mobile access is a significant driver of social media usage, with 85% of South Africans accessing X/Twitter via mobile phones or tablets. For many users, mobile devices are the primary means of engaging with social media (Bosch, 2020).

Mobile access plays a crucial role in enabling movements like #BlackGirlMagic to flourish, as it allows users to engage with platforms that amplify diverse voices and challenge stereotypes,

particularly for Black women (Paris, 2020). In this way, #BlackGirlMagic has thrived with the rise of the internet, as mobile access provides a space to not only challenge stereotypes but also celebrate the diverse identities and achievements of Black women worldwide (Paris, 2020). Previous research has analysed the social networking sites as a phenomenon. See, for instance, the self-representation through avatars in digital environments (Zimmermann et al., 2023); redefining social networks in civil global civil society (Ockbum and Wotten, 2022); and the role of privacy, trust and security (Tseng et al., 2023).

Communication scholars find these emerging topics on social networking sites crucial since our modern society revolves around them as a central aspect of communication. The concept of #BlackGirlMagic has garnered considerable attention in recent years, emerging as a powerful cultural movement that celebrates the resilience, achievements, and beauty of Black women and girls (Paris, 2020). Within the realm of SNS, #BlackGirlMagic serves as a platform for Black women to assert their identities, challenge societal stereotypes, and foster a sense of community and empowerment (Paris, 2020). This chapter aims to explore several key themes within the landscape of SNS, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of #BlackGirlMagic. By delving into topics such as online representation, digital activism, and the utilisation of hashtags, it seeks to understand the multifaceted dynamics at play within the #BlackGirlMagic movement. Additionally, it explored the existing body of research surrounding #BlackGirlMagic, highlighting its significance and the roles it occupies within both the broader context of digital activism and the specific focus of this study.

2.2. #BlackGirlMagic

In 2013, the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic gained popularity on social media, celebrating the accomplishments of Black women. Even though the hashtag promotes Black women's empowerment, there are limitations, and those limitations are based on featurism, colourism, texturism, body types, and nationalities (Sinon; 2020). This research analyses the hashtag by exploring what type of Black women is most associated with the hashtag, and how Black women students at Rhodes University make use of and interpret it in their own lives.

#BlackGirlMagic is a social and cultural movement that celebrates the achievements and resilience of Black women and girls (Thompson, 2020). The movement emerged on social media platforms with the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic becoming a popular way to uplift and

empower Black women and girls (Thompson, 2020). The movement has since grown into a broader cultural phenomenon, with Black women and girls using the hashtag to celebrate their achievements and challenge stereotypes and societal barriers. An examination of online forums making use of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag provides insight into the daily racial and gendered experiences of Black women (Hawkins, 2020).

Since the hashtag's inception in 2013, over a million tweets containing it have been shared on X/Twitter, celebrating the successes of Black women (Irgens, 2022). This reflects the desire of Black women academics, writers, poets, and intellectuals to change prevailing narratives and challenge the negative representations of Black women in the media (Irgens, 2022). The use of the term 'magic' to describe the achievements of Black women is rooted in the idea that these accomplishments are often overlooked or undervalued, and thus deserving of special recognition (Thompson, 2020).

Similarly, while Africa lags behind in smartphone ownership and internet connectivity, online movements have still significantly transformed political engagement on the continent, offering platforms that amplify voices and highlight issues that were once ignored or underrepresented. Social media movements across Africa have tackled issues like corruption, feminism, and education, with campaigns such as #CatchKony (Uganda), #MenAreTrash (South Africa), #BringBackMutharika (Malawi), and #BringBackOurGirls (Nigeria). The latter, for example, gained global attention, including from Michelle Obama. While hashtag activism has grown in Africa, its impact on resistance remains unclear (Sebeelo, 2021).

In 2016, Zimbabwean pastor Evans Mawarire posted a viral video on Twitter with the hashtag #ThisFlag, expressing his disillusionment with the national flag, which he felt no longer symbolised pride (Sebeelo, 2021). His message resonated with many Zimbabweans suffering from the country's economic collapse since the early 2000s. The #ThisFlag movement quickly gained traction both domestically and among the Zimbabwean diaspora, estimated at up to 3 million in South Africa, 500,000 in the UK, and 400,000 in Botswana (Sebeelo, 2021). This emigration surge followed Zimbabwe's severe economic and political crisis after 2000. The #ThisFlag movement protested Zimbabwe's worsening economy and the 35-year rule of Robert Mugabe, organizing a successful, non-violent one-day stay-away from work.

On March 9, 2015, Chumani Maxwele, a Black political science student at UCT, threw a bucket of faeces at a statue of Cecil Rhodes, sparking the #RhodesMustFall movement. Maxwele's act, protesting racism and the need for higher education transformation, gained national attention. While the defacement of the statue was not new, it highlighted the statue's symbolism of white supremacy for Black South Africans (Sebeelo,2021). The use of excrement in the protest also represented broader social issues, particularly the living conditions of those in impoverished areas like Khayelitsha (Sebeelo,2021). The #RhodesMustFall campaign, like the #ThisFlag movement, should be seen as a pivotal sign of deeper social issues affecting South Africa.

The #RhodesMustFall and #ThisFlag movements in South Africa and Zimbabwe are key examples of how online platforms serve as powerful tools for resistance in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa (Sebeelo,2021). Although these movements were based in different countries and occurred at different times, they shared similar goals, aiming to address structural issues and drive meaningful change. Both began as individual expressions that evolved into organised social movements through social media. These movements also inspired others, such as #FeesMustFall in South Africa and #Sokwanele (We've had enough) in Zimbabwe, which adopted similar strategies (Sebeelo,2021).

The #RhodesMustFall, #ThisFlag, #FeesMustFall, and #Sokwanele movements share a common thread of challenging systemic injustices and amplifying marginalised voices through online activism (Sebeelo,2021). These movements, much like #BlackGirlMagic, use social media to empower individuals and communities to resist oppression, celebrate identity, and demand social change. #BlackGirlMagic, specifically, highlights the strength and achievements of Black women, drawing parallels with these movements' focus on addressing historical inequalities. Both focus on the power of digital platforms to unite people, create global solidarity, and push for societal transformation, transcending geographical and social boundaries to challenge entrenched power structures.

The #BlackGirlMagic movement has been found to play a crucial role in the identity development of Black first-generation college women in the United States, providing them with a means to resist negative stereotypes and social pressures and develop a positive sense of self and community (Williams *et al.*, 2022). Through the celebration of their uniqueness, resilience, and accomplishments, Black first-generation college women are empowered to

cultivate a positive sense of self and foster a strong sense of belonging within their community. This movement not only uplifts and validates their experiences but also provides them with a platform to connect with others who share similar struggles and triumphs, thereby forging bonds of solidarity and support. In navigating the complexities of higher education as both Black and first-generation students, the #BlackGirlMagic movement offers them a source of inspiration, affirmation, and empowerment, ultimately contributing to their holistic growth and development (Williams et al., 2022).

The #BlackGirlMagic movement, originally popularised by African Americans, gained significant traction in South Africa, in part due to the global influence of Shonda Rhimes and her ground-breaking television shows featuring Black women in leading roles. Rhimes' portrayal of complex, powerful Black female characters in shows like *Scandal* and *How to Get Away with Murder* resonated with audiences worldwide, sparking conversations about representation and empowerment (Mbinjama-Gamatham, 2021). In South Africa, social media platforms amplified this discourse, with fans and followers drawing connections between Rhimes' work and the #BlackGirlMagic movement. This cross-cultural exchange highlights the global reach of the movement and its relevance to Black women in South Africa, where issues of race, gender, and representation continue to shape societal experiences. By contextualising #BlackGirlMagic within South Africa, the influence of Rhimes' media presence becomes crucial to understanding how the movement transcended national borders and empowered Black women globally to embrace their unique identities (Mbinjama-Gamatham, 2021). The movement's widespread adoption in South Africa is a testament to the power of social media in connecting global narratives and fostering solidarity among Black women across cultures.

The movement has played an important role in empowering and uplifting Black women and girls, catalysing the growth of Black women-centred collectives and communities in South Africa (Mahali, 2017). Since 2013, the hashtag has evolved from a digital expression to a broader socio-cultural movement. It has transitioned from a mere social media trend to a symbol of empowerment and resistance against ingrained biases. The evolution of #BlackGirlMagic mirrors the changing dynamics of cultural conversations, adapting to address new challenges and aspirations faced by Black women in various fields (Ramnund-Mansingh, 2022). An essential facet of #BlackGirlMagic's continued relevance lies in its embrace of intersectionality. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality acknowledges the

interconnectedness of social categories like race, gender, and class, recognising that individuals may experience overlapping systems of discrimination. #BlackGirlMagic, by celebrating the achievements and experiences of Black women from diverse backgrounds and identities, embodies the principles of intersectionality.

The hashtag's inclusive nature counters the historical erasure of certain narratives within the Black women experience (Hawkins, 2020). It emphasises that Black women's magic exists across various domains, including academia, arts, activism, and beyond. The power of #BlackGirlMagic lies in its ability to amplify voices that have been marginalised, fostering a sense of community and solidarity among Black women facing different intersections of discrimination (Thompson, 2020). One of the persistent challenges addressed by #BlackGirlMagic is the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Black women in mainstream media. Studies have consistently highlighted the detrimental impact of media portrayal on the self-esteem and identity formation of young Black girls (Brooks and Hébert, 2006; Gammage, 2015).

The hashtag serves as a response to this by providing a platform for Black women to control and shape their own narratives. Through social media platforms, particularly X/Twitter and Instagram, Black women actively contribute to the narratives surrounding #BlackGirlMagic. The sharing of images, personal stories, and accomplishments becomes a form of self-expression, challenging conventional beauty standards and affirming the diverse ways Black women define their magic. This self-driven representation not only confronts harmful stereotypes perpetuated by traditional media but also fosters a sense of pride and agency among Black women (Brooke and Hébert, 2006; Gammage, 2015).

The #BlackGirlMagic hashtag exemplifies how digital activism can transform representation and self-expression online. By leveraging platforms like X/Twitter and Instagram, Black women have taken control of their narratives, using the hashtag to showcase their achievements, share personal stories, and challenge conventional beauty standards. This active participation allows Black women to redefine and affirm their identities on their own terms, pushing back against harmful stereotypes and celebrating their unique contributions. The movement's emphasis on self-driven representation not only counters the limited portrayals often seen in traditional media but also enhances pride and agency within the community. As digital platforms continue to influence how identities are constructed and perceived, the role of

online representation becomes increasingly significant. The upcoming discussion will examine the concept of online representation and its significance in the digital landscape.

2.3. Representation Online

Representation online through social media platforms is a powerful force in shaping personal identities (Zhang et al., 2020). These platforms provide individuals with the opportunity to curate and present their lives, interests, and values to a wide audience. By sharing content such as photos, videos, posts, and stories, and hashtags people can create a digital representation of themselves that reflects their desired image (Linke, 2020). Through the content they choose to share, individuals can express their unique experiences, perspectives, and identities. They can highlight aspects of their lives that are important to them, such as cultural heritage, hobbies, activism, or personal achievements (Linke, 2020). This representation online allows individuals to showcase their authentic selves and connect with others who share similar interests and experiences (Linke, 2020).

Digital technologies offer various avenues for self-representation. The prevalence of smartphones, in particular, has made images a central aspect of social media platforms (Rettberg, 2017). This shift is due to the fact that smartphones have simplified the process of taking and sharing photos, making them globally accessible on various devices at any time (Rettberg, 2017). Consequently, this contributes to the highly visual nature of self-expression and self-identity in our contemporary society (Cruz and Thornham, 2015). The advent of the digital age has revolutionised the way people interact with the world, reshaping communication, access to information, and the dynamics of social and political discourse (Taylor and Gibson, 2017).

One profound transformation has been the empowerment of marginalised communities through online representation. Marginalised communities, which include racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and many others, have long struggled for visibility, understanding, and social justice (Taylor and Gibson, 2017). One of the most direct and immediate benefits of online representation is visibility (Linke, 2020). Historically, marginalised communities have been underrepresented or entirely excluded from mainstream media, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions (Linke, 2020).

The internet provides a platform for members of these communities to represent themselves authentically and challenge the dominant narratives that have long defined them. Through social media profiles, blogs, and personal websites, individuals can showcase their achievements, talents, and contributions (Taylor and Gibson, 2017). Online representation allows individuals to share their personal stories and experiences (Sobande et al., 2020; McLean and Mugo 2015). The power of storytelling cannot be underestimated; it humanises members of marginalised communities and allows for a nuanced understanding of their challenges and triumphs (Sobande et al., 2020).

These stories help others empathise, and they foster a deeper connection between people of different backgrounds. Online platforms become a means to break down barriers and shatter preconceived stereotypes (Sobande et al., 2020). By representing themselves online, marginalised communities create counter-narratives to challenge the narratives imposed upon them by mainstream media (Sobande et al., 2020). Digital spaces have enabled people who were not heard to gain visibility in public discourse (McLean and Mugo, 2015). These groups, who often face discrimination and exclusion, find it crucial to connect with others and form identities (McLean, 2020; McLean, 2018). McLean (2018) argues that digital platforms have facilitated the amplification of the voices of marginalised communities. The oppression and marginalisation experienced by these groups highlights their necessity for identity formation, which helps them form online communities (McLean, 2018).

Moreover, marginalised groups, who have historically been underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream media, can use social media as a platform to share their stories and perspectives (Sobande et al., 2020). By doing so, they can challenge dominant narratives, break down stereotypes, and promote greater understanding and acceptance (Ghaffari, 2022). Representation online also has the potential to empower individuals and foster a sense of belonging. By finding like-minded individuals and communities online, people can form connections and build support networks. This can be especially beneficial for marginalised groups who may face isolation or limited representation in their offline communities (Ghaffari, 2022). Through online representation, individuals can find validation, support, and a sense of community that contributes to their identity formation and overall well-being (Ghaffari, 2022). They may also be motivated to organise online around matters critical to their identity and well-being.

Social media platforms, blogs, and personal websites offer individuals the opportunity to authentically represent themselves, challenge dominant narratives, and highlight their achievements and contributions (Taylor and Gibson, 2017). By sharing personal stories and experiences, marginalised communities can present a nuanced view of their lives, fostering greater empathy and understanding (Sobande et al., 2020; McLean and Mugo, 2015). This form of representation humanises individuals, countering stereotypes and broadening public perception. Digital activism, which encompasses the use of digital tools and platforms to advocate for various causes, builds on this foundation of representation (Ozkula, 2021). Social media platforms such as X/Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, along with hashtags and podcasts, enable activists to amplify their voices and drive global conversations (George and Leidner, 2019). The ability to represent oneself authentically online not only challenges traditional media portrayals but also facilitates organised advocacy efforts. As digital activism relies on these platforms to mobilise support and effect change, The next discussion will explore how digital activism harnesses online representation to promote social change.

2.4. Digital Activism

Digital activism refers to the use of digital tools and technology to advocate for social, political, or environmental causes (Ozkula, 2021). These tools include: social media platforms, such as X/Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as hashtags and podcasts. In the era of digitalisation and the internet, digital activism has become an increasingly important form of activism, allowing people to raise their voices and make their opinions heard on a global scale (George and Leidner; 2019). One of the key benefits of digital activism is its reach and the absence of gatekeeping as found with mainstream media. Through social media, online petitions, and other digital platforms, activists can spread their message to a vast and diverse audience, including people from all over the world who may not have otherwise been exposed to their cause (Suwana, 2020). More than half of Black individuals in the United States who regularly use social media platforms believe it's crucial for them to be able to voice their perspectives and opinions on social injustices within these digital arenas (Shealey, 2021).

In contrast, white respondents displayed a lower percentage, with 39 percent expressing similar sentiments. This circumstance may arise due to the influence of social and political factors on the adoption of digital activism (Shealey, 2021). Reflecting this notion and pushing it to a greater extent, Aisha Durham (2017: 208) argues that contemporary digital media is rooted in

communication patterns and modes often associated with Black Americans, encompassing aspects like phonetics and a shared sense of connection through lived experiences. Nevertheless, criticisms have emerged in response to digital activism. However, it is important to note that these perspectives and experiences are not reflective of all Black people globally, as digital activism and its impact can vary significantly across different cultural and regional contexts.

This is important to the study because it highlights the role of digital media and activism as key tools through which Black women express and negotiate their identities. Durham's (2017) assertion that contemporary digital media reflects communication patterns rooted in Black American culture emphasises the importance of understanding the racial and cultural contexts that influence the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic. The increasing percentage of Black women online is crucial because their active participation in digital spaces allows for a richer and more diverse representation of their experiences. Given that more than half of Black individuals view social media as a vital space to voice their perspectives on social injustices (Shealey, 2021), it follows that Black woman who often face intersectional forms of discrimination based on both race and gender are likely leveraging these platforms not only to resist marginalization but also to reshape narratives surrounding their identity. The hashtag #BlackGirlMagic exemplifies this trend, as it allows Black women to celebrate their uniqueness and resilience while challenging stereotypical representations (Black, 2021).

Mora (2014) argues that this form of activism amounts to nothing more than 'slacktivism' - a term used to describe online posts and comments made for internet attention, often seen as lacking real-world impact or genuine effort in activism (see also, Roberts, 2018). Another criticism is that participants engage in a non-threatening online environment, while some frontline activists face real threats and dangers (Mora, 2014; Roberts, 2018). Digital activism comprises a unique culture that encompasses a wide array of diverse subcultures. Individuals within these digital activist communities establish distinct identities that exist beyond their conventional lives, coming together with like-minded individuals to confront and combat injustices and oppressions (Shealey, 2021).

Risam (2015) similarly emphasises the significance of intersectionality within the realm of digital activism. This enables activism to be more inclusive and to have a greater impact than traditional forms of activism, such as protests and demonstrations. The #FeesMustFall

movement in South Africa is used as an example of how technology and online spaces have amplified the voices and demands of marginalised groups, particularly in the context of education justice (Hussen and Shefer, 2023). Hussen posits that digital activism has the potential to challenge dominant power structures and create more inclusive and equitable futures (Hussen and Shefer, 2023). Moreover, digital activism plays a crucial role in identity construction by providing a platform for individuals to express their beliefs, values, and opinions, and to engage in causes that are important to them (Suwana, 2020).

Through digital activism, individuals can assert their identity and engage in movements that align with their values, shaping the way they are perceived by others and building their online brand. The #BlackGirlMagic movement and hashtag are examples of digital activism because it challenges harmful stereotypes and representations of Black women. It also provides a platform for community building, amplifying Black women's voices and experiences, and advocating for social and political change (Erigha and Crooks, 2020). Hence digital activism is crucial in providing a platform for marginalised voices to be heard, and contribute to a larger movement for change.

Digital activism leverages online platforms to assert identities, challenge injustices, and mobilize collective action, with hashtags playing a crucial role in this process. By enabling individuals to connect their personal experiences to broader social movements, hashtags serve as a powerful tool for organising and amplifying voices within digital spaces. For example, the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag exemplifies how digital activism can disrupt harmful stereotypes and promote positive representations of Black women. It facilitates the creation of a digital community that supports and amplifies marginalised voices, while also advocating for social and political change (Erigha and Crooks, 2020). This dynamic is indicative of how hashtags function as vehicles for social commentary and mobilisation across various platforms, including X/Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Duarte and Vigil-Hayes, 2017; Scott, 2015). Hashtags not only categorise and organise content but also foster engagement and solidarity among users, making them indispensable in digital activism. The subsequent discussion will delve into the specific role of hashtags in digital activism, examining how they enhance visibility, facilitate discourse, and drive collective action within online communities.

2.5. Hashtags

Hashtags are a powerful tool in digital activism and the broader the digital world, providing a way for people to categorise, organise, and follow conversations on social media (Duarte and Vigil-Hayes, 2017). The rise of hashtags can be traced back to the early days of X/Twitter, where they were first introduced to categorise tweets and make them more easily searchable (Scott, 2015). Burgess and Baym explain that hashtags on Twitter came from how users started using them, not from the platform's design. Users created hashtags to group posts by topic, making it easier to find and follow certain discussions. The use of the hashtag symbol (#) was already common on other platforms before Twitter. As people on Twitter began using hashtags, they became a key way to organise content and build online communities. This shows how users, not just the platform creators, can shape how social media works (Burgess & Baym, 22).

Today, hashtags are used across multiple social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, and have become an integral part of online communication and activism (Duarte and Vigil-Hayes, 2017). This is particularly important for marginalised communities, who can use hashtags as a way to connect with others who share their experiences and perspectives, and to raise awareness about important social and political issues (Ta'amneh and Ghazo, 2021).

Another reason for the rise of hashtags is their ability to increase visibility and reach. Hashtags make it easier for content to be discovered by a wider audience, and they can be used to bring attention to a particular issue or cause (Ta'amneh and Ghazo, 2021). Hashtags are also important for business and marketing purposes. Brands and businesses use hashtags to reach their target audience, increase visibility and engagement, and build a strong online presence (Ta'amneh and Ghazo, 2021). Hashtags can be used to promote products, events, and campaigns, and to engage with customers and followers in real-time. By using relevant and trending hashtags, businesses can connect with their target audience, increase brand awareness, and drive sales (Black, 2016).

One of the reasons for the rise of hashtags is their ability to create community and bring people together. Hashtags allow individuals to join conversations and engage with others who have similar interests, helping to build a sense of community and connection (Duarte and Vigil-Hayes, 2017). This is particularly important for marginalised communities, who can use hashtags to connect with others who share their experiences and perspectives, and to raise awareness about important social and political issues. For example, during social and political movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter or #MeToo, hashtags have been used to amplify voices

and bring attention to important causes, leading to greater visibility and impact (Green et al, 2019). It is evident that, hashtags play a crucial role in identity construction online in helping individuals to define and express their identity online, connecting them with others, and amplifying their voice in the digital world (Black, 2016).

The use of hashtags also contributes to the visual culture of social media. Hashtags have developed from simple social communication into a popular cultural phenomenon in a very short time (Stokes and Prince, 2017). When a hashtag is used on social media it is often accompanied by a picture or a video to convey a message about something. Furthermore, it also allows people to engage in conversations about popular and critical topics, for example, #BlackGirlMagic (Stokes and Prince, 2017).

When #BlackGirlMagic is used on social media (X/Twitter) the pictures and videos that come up when using this hashtag are pictures and videos of Black women embracing their hair, bodies, and skin, and so forth, it includes poems and literature about Black women and their struggles (Stokes and Prince, 2017). Social media has provided Black women with a platform to genuinely express their viewpoints, establishing a space where their thoughts, actions, and physical attributes are acknowledged and appreciated (Aboderin, 2019). Through social media, Black women have harnessed the ability to shape their destinies and foster self-empowerment (Aboderin, 2019).

Hashtags serve to link an image or message with a shared theme, typically concise and attention-grabbing (Aboderin, 2019). In the instance of #BlackGirlMagic, Black women have effectively employed this hashtag to unite all the positive images, messages, and achievements related to Black women. It has gained significant popularity in recent years and has become a symbol of pride and unity within the Black community and beyond (Aboderin, 2019). This hashtag is often used in conjunction with posts featuring Black women who have achieved success in various fields, from entertainment and sports to business and activism. It highlights their resilience, creativity, and the positive impact they make on society (Hobson, 2016).

The hashtag serves as a means to counter negative stereotypes and biases that have historically marginalised Black women. Furthermore, the practice of the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic on social media serves as a vibrant and uplifting movement that encourages empowerment, self-

love, and the celebration of Black womanhood (Hobson; 2016) while also challenging societal norms and promoting a more inclusive and equitable future.

2.6. Conclusion

The evolution of communication technologies, particularly the rise of social networking sites (SNS), has altered the way people connect and express ourselves. Previous research such as Zimmermann et al., (2023); redefining social networks in civil global civil society (Ockbum and Wotten, 2022); and the role of privacy, trust and security (Tseng et al., 2023). Has extensively explored the dynamics of SNS, focusing on major platforms like Instagram and Facebook (Thompson, 2020). However, this chapter delved into the multifaceted phenomenon of #BlackGirlMagic, emphasising its impact, significance, and interconnection with online representation, digital activism, hashtags. The #BlackGirlMagic movement stands as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of digital spaces.

Its inception, global resonance, and specific impact in South Africa highlight its role in celebrating and elevating the contributions of Black women worldwide. The exploration of online representation within this context goes beyond visual dissection to interrogate the textual narratives accompanying these representations, providing insights into the negotiation of identities and the construction of narratives within the digital sphere. Therefore, the comprehensive analysis of online representation, digital activism, hashtags influence within the #BlackGirlMagic movement provides a holistic framework for understanding its dynamics, impact, and transformative capacity.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the theories of Hall (1997), Connell (1987), and Crenshaw (1989), which inform the theoretical framework of this study. Hall's theory of representation (1997) explores how meanings are created and portrayed in society, shedding light on the construction of identities and experiences. Connell's gender order theory (1987) delves into the dynamics of power and norms that shape gender relations, offering insight into how societal expectations influence the portrayal of Black women. While, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1989) emphasises the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression, highlighting how race, gender, and other factors intersect to shape individuals' experiences. These theories provide a lens through which to analyse how Black women are represented in media and society, particularly on social media platforms. By understanding how these representations are constructed and reinforced, it is possible to comprehend the impact of societal norms and power structures on the portrayal of Black women. Moreover, these theories offer insight into how these representations can either perpetuate existing stereotypes and discrimination or challenge them.

In discussing these theories, a deeper understanding of the role of #BlackGirlMagic in reshaping representations of Black women is gained. #BlackGirlMagic serves as a platform for celebrating the strength, intelligence, and beauty of Black women, countering negative stereotypes and discrimination. Through an understanding of Representation (Hall 1997), Gender Order (Connell 1987) and Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), it is possible to explore how #BlackGirlMagic challenges societal norms and power structures, offering a positive and empowering narrative for Black women. These theories provide a framework for understanding the complexities of representation and identity, shedding light on the ways in which #BlackGirlMagic disrupts and challenges dominant narratives. Through this analysis, the transformative power of #BlackGirlMagic in reshaping societal perceptions of Black women can be appreciated.

3.2. Representation Theory

Representation is a production of meaning (Hall, 1997). Language is one of the most vital tools in representation; it is through language that thoughts, ideas, and feelings are represented and reproduced in culture. At the heart of Hall's representation theory is the concept that representation is not a passive reflection of reality but an active process of creating meaning. Representation involves the use of language, signs, and images to convey ideas and messages about the world (Hall, 1997). Hall emphasises that meaning is produced through a complex interplay between these elements and the cultural and social contexts in which they are embedded.

This perspective challenges the notion of a straightforward, unmediated correspondence between language and the world, highlighting instead the constructed and contested nature of meaning (Hall, 1997). According to Hall (1997), representation is not merely a reflection of reality but an active process of meaning-making. This perspective is crucial for understanding #BlackGirlMagic, which counters the negative and stereotypical portrayals of Black women by promoting positive images and narratives. These representations are encoded with specific meanings that celebrate Black womanhood's strength, intelligence, and creativity. By reclaiming and redefining their identities, Black women actively resist and subvert the dominant hegemonic representations that have historically marginalised them (Steele, 2021).

One of Hall's key contributions is his encoding/decoding model of communication. This model highlights that media messages are encoded by producers with particular meanings and intended effects (Hall, 1997). However, these messages are not passively received; instead, audiences decode them in various ways based on their own cultural backgrounds, experiences, and social positions. Hall identifies three primary decoding positions: the dominant-hegemonic position, where the audience fully accepts the intended message; the negotiated position, where the audience accepts the message but also resists or modifies it based on personal experiences; and the oppositional position, where the audience completely rejects the intended message and interprets it in an alternative way (Hall, 1997). Using Hall's encoding/decoding model allows for the exploration of the dynamics between media producers and audiences.

The encoding/decoding model of Hall's representation theory is particularly useful in analysing how #BlackGirlMagic operates. The movement's creators and proponents encode messages of empowerment and positivity, which audiences decode in various ways depending on their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. For many Black women,

#BlackGirlMagic is decoded as a validation of their experiences and a celebration of their identities, fostering a sense of community and pride. However, those outside this community might decode the message differently, perhaps failing to fully grasp its significance or misinterpreting its intent due to their lack of shared cultural experiences (Mims et al, 2023).

Hall's theory also emphasises the relationship between representation and power. He argues that cultural representations are not neutral but rather have power that can either support or challenge how society is organised. (Hall, 1997). Through representation, certain groups can assert dominance by defining what is considered normal or natural, while marginalised groups are often misrepresented or excluded. This power to represent is a crucial aspect of cultural hegemony, where dominant ideologies are maintained through consent rather than coercion (Hall, 1997).

Hall's emphasis on the relationship between representation and power can highlight how #BlackGirlMagic challenges existing power structures. Cultural hegemony traditionally portrays Black women through a narrow and often negative lens, perpetuating stereotypes that serve to marginalise and oppress. #BlackGirlMagic disrupts this power dynamic by producing alternative representations that celebrate Black women's multifaceted identities (Black, 2021). This act of reclaiming representation is a form of resistance against cultural dominance, asserting the right of Black women to define themselves on their own terms.

Furthermore, Hall's representation theory focuses on the construction of identity. Hall contends that identities are not fixed or inherent but are constructed through cultural practices and representations (Hall, 1997). The way individuals and groups are represented in media and cultural texts plays a significant role in shaping their identities and how they are perceived by others. This process of identity construction is dynamic and ongoing, influenced by historical, social, and political contexts (Hall, 1997). By focusing on the construction of identity, researchers can reveal the fluid and contested nature of identity formation and the role of representation in this process.

Hall's theory also draws on semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, to explain how representation works. According to semiotic theory, signs consist of a signifier (the form of the sign, such as a word or image) and a signified (the concept or meaning associated with the sign) (Hall, 1997). The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary and culturally determined, meaning that the same sign can have different meanings in different contexts. Hall emphasises that meaning is not inherent in objects or events themselves but is constructed

through the systems of representation used to describe and interpret them (Hall, 1997). Hall's idea that meaning is constructed through systems of representation directly relates to #BlackGirlMagic by highlighting how this hashtag functions as a symbolic space where the meaning of Black womanhood is continuously created and negotiated. The hashtag doesn't merely describe Black women or their achievements; instead, it plays a key role in shaping and redefining how Black women are perceived in society (Black, 2021).

Additionally, Hall's insights into the construction of identity are pivotal for understanding the impact of #BlackGirlMagic. Identity, according to Hall, is constructed through cultural practices and representations (Mason, 2021). #BlackGirlMagic plays a critical role in shaping the identities of Black women and girls, offering them a narrative that affirms their worth and potential. This movement not only influences how Black women see themselves but also challenges societal perceptions, promoting a more inclusive and diverse understanding of Black womanhood (Mason, 2021).

To further deepen this analysis, it is essential to explore how #BlackGirlMagic interacts with broader structures of gender inequality. While the hashtag empowers Black women by affirming their identities, it must also be understood within the context of the existing gender order. Raewyn Connell's (1987) concept of gender order provides a critical framework for examining how movements like #BlackGirlMagic operates within and sometimes challenges the systemic structures and norms that govern gender relations in society.

3.3. Gender Order

Raewyn Connell's (1987) concept of gender order is critical for understanding the systemic structures and dynamics that shape gender relations in society. In her seminal work *Gender and Power*, Connell (1987) argues that gender order encompasses the practices, institutions, and social norms that govern the relationships between different genders. This framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining how gender inequalities are produced, maintained, and contested (Connell, 1987). Integrating Connell's gender order theory into this thesis offers a robust foundation for analysing gender relations across various contexts, highlighting the interplay of power, culture, and identity.

At the core of Connell's framework is the notion that gender is not a fixed attribute but a set of practices embedded in social structures. This perspective shifts the focus from individual

behaviours to the broader social systems that perpetuate gender norms and hierarchies. Connell identifies three main structures within the gender order: labour, power, and cathexis (emotional attachments). These structures intersect to shape the experiences and opportunities of different genders (Connell, 1987). Firstly, the structure of labour refers to the gendered division of work both in public and private spheres. This division often relegates women to unpaid domestic labour and lower-paid, lower-status jobs, while men dominate higher-paid, higher-status occupations (Connell, 1987). By analysing labour practices through the lens of the gender order, one can explore how economic systems and policies reinforce gender inequalities. For instance, examining the impact of neoliberal economic reforms on women's employment can reveal how changes in labour markets perpetuate or challenge existing gender norms (Coltrane; 2000).

The structure of power involves the distribution of authority and influence in various institutions, such as the state, the family, and the workplace. The movement of #BlackGirlMagic can be effectively incorporated into Connell's gender order framework by examining how it challenges and redefines traditional gender structures, particularly those intersecting with race. In the realm of labour, #BlackGirlMagic challenges the traditional gendered division of labour that often relegates Black women to low-status, underpaid work (Nardi, 2021). By celebrating the professional achievements of Black women, the movement pushes back against systemic barriers and promotes economic empowerment. For instance, highlighting successful Black female entrepreneurs and professionals undermines the historical narrative that confines Black women to domestic and subordinate roles. This celebration of Black women's labour contributions encourages a re-evaluation of economic systems that perpetuate gender and racial inequalities (Nardi, 2021).

Secondly, Connell emphasises that power is not only exercised through direct control but also through the cultural hegemony of certain gender norms (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity, for example, sets the standard for male behaviour and marginalises alternative masculinities and femininities. Using Connell's framework, it is possible to explore how power dynamics manifest in specific settings, such as political institutions or educational systems, and how they shape gender identities and relations. Regarding power, #BlackGirlMagic confronts the marginalisation of Black women in positions of authority and influence (Clarke, 2018). Connell's framework emphasises the role of hegemonic masculinity and the marginalisation of femininities. #BlackGirlMagic directly challenges these power structures by elevating Black women's voices and leadership. It asserts Black women's right to occupy spaces of power and

influence, whether in politics, academia, or media. By doing so, it disrupts the normative gender order that privileges white, male authority and promotes a more inclusive vision of power (Darvis, 2016).

Thirdly, the structure of cathexis pertains to the emotional and sexual relationships between individuals (Connell, 1987). Gender order influences these relationships by dictating acceptable forms of intimacy and desire. This aspect of Connell's framework is crucial for understanding how societal norms around sexuality and emotions contribute to the regulation of gender identities (Connell, 1987). Topics such as the social construction of heterosexuality or the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ relationships, demonstrating how emotional bonds are influenced by broader gendered expectations. In terms of cathexis, #BlackGirlMagic redefines emotional and sexual relationships by celebrating Black women's beauty and worth, which are often devalued in mainstream culture. This movement creates a space where Black women can express their identities and desires outside the constraints of dominant racial and gender norms (Jackson et al, 2020).

Moreover, Connell's concept of gender order is dynamic, acknowledging that gender relations are subject to change and resistance. Social movements, policy reforms, and cultural shifts can alter the existing gender order, creating opportunities for more egalitarian gender relations (Connell, 1987). #BlackGirlMagic exemplifies this dynamic aspect by actively resisting and reshaping the gender order. It not only contests existing stereotypes and inequalities but also proposes new, affirmative narratives for Black women. This movement demonstrates how gender and racial identities can be renegotiated, leading to more equitable social structures (Black, 2021).

Incorporating #BlackGirlMagic into Connell's gender order framework illuminates how social movements can disrupt and transform gender relations. It highlights the intersectionality of race and gender and the potential for movements like #BlackGirlMagic to create more inclusive and empowering social narratives. This integration highlights the importance of considering intersecting identities in any analysis of gender structures and demonstrates the transformative power of grassroots activism in reshaping the gender order. For this reason, it is also critical that this theoretical framework draws on Crenshaw's (1989) critical work regarding intersectionality.

By integrating Connell's gender order with Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, a more nuanced understanding of how systems of oppression interact becomes possible. Just as

Connell's framework explains the structural dynamics of gender relations, Crenshaw's intersectionality highlights how race, gender, and other social identities intersect, compounding the effects of inequality. This combined approach is essential for analysing movements like #BlackGirlMagic, which not only confront gendered power structures but also address the complex, layered experiences of Black women at the intersections of race and gender.

3.4. Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality examines the intersections of race, gender, and class, and how they shape experiences of oppression and privilege. This theory challenges the traditional, one-dimensional approaches to social issues by recognising that individuals can experience multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination simultaneously. Intersectionality enables an analysis of the complex and multifaceted nature of identity and power relations, offering a more nuanced understanding of social inequalities. Intersectionality emerged from the critiques of second-wave feminism, which often overlooked the experiences of women of colour, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and others whose identities did not fit neatly into a single category of oppression (Gordan, 2016).

Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term to highlight how Black women, in particular, faced unique challenges that were not adequately addressed by either the feminist or civil rights movements. Crenshaw (1989) introduced intersectionality in her seminal paper, *"Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"*, which critiqued the inadequacy of both feminist and antiracist policies in addressing the specific experiences of Black women. She argued that these movements often overlooked the compounded nature of oppressions faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups. For instance, Black women's experiences of discrimination cannot be fully understood by examining racism or sexism alone; instead, these oppressions intersect in unique ways, creating distinct experiences and challenges (Crenshaw, 1989).

Crenshaw highlights three core concepts of intersectionality. Firstly, she looks at the multiplicity of identities, here she argues that intersectionality asserts that individuals possess multiple, intersecting identities that influence their experiences and social positioning. These identities include, but are not limited to, race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and age.

Rather than viewing these identities as separate, intersectionality emphasises their interconnected nature, acknowledging that they can amplify or mitigate each other's effects (Crenshaw, 1989).

#BlackGirlMagic embodies this concept by highlighting the diverse and multifaceted nature of Black womanhood. Black women navigate their lives at the intersections of race, gender, and often other identities such as class, sexuality, and nationality. #BlackGirlMagic celebrates these intersections, recognising that the strength and magic of Black women come from the convergence of these identities. This movement acknowledges that Black women are not a monolithic group but have varied experiences and perspectives that enrich their communities and contributions (Williams et al., 2022).

Secondly, she looks at the interlocking systems of oppression, she emphasises that intersectionality highlights those various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism, are not independent but are interrelated and mutually reinforcing (Crenshaw, 1989). This interconnectedness means that systems of oppression cannot be effectively addressed in isolation; instead, they must be understood and tackled as part of a broader, integrated structure of inequality (Crenshaw, 1989). #BlackGirlMagic addresses this by challenging the stereotypes and systemic barriers that Black women face. By promoting positive representations and narratives, #BlackGirlMagic works against the negative portrayals in media and society that reinforce these intersecting oppressions (Adamas, 2021).

The movement asserts that Black women's contributions are valuable and deserving of recognition, thus opposing the systems that have historically marginalised them (Adamas, 2021). For example, in the workforce, Black women may encounter racial discrimination from colleagues and gender bias in promotions and pay. #BlackGirlMagic counters these negative experiences by creating a supportive community that celebrates Black women's professional achievements and encourages others to pursue their goals despite systemic obstacles. This community-building aspect helps to dismantle the isolation that interlocking oppressions can create (Adamas and Lott, 2021).

Thirdly she talks about contextual and relational analysis. She highlights that intersectionality advocates for analysing identities and oppressions within their specific historical, social, and cultural contexts (Crenshaw, 1989). This approach recognises that the meanings and impacts

of intersecting identities can vary widely across different settings and periods. It also underscores the importance of exploring power relations and social dynamics in a relational manner, understanding how different groups and individuals are positioned relative to one another (Crenshaw, 1989).

#BlackGirlMagic operates within a cultural and historical context where Black women's contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued. By situating Black women's achievements within this context, the movement highlights the resilience and brilliance of Black women despite societal challenges. It also fosters a relational understanding of identity, showing how Black women's experiences are shaped by their interactions with broader social structures and with each other (Aboderin, 2019).

#BlackGirlMagic's emphasis on storytelling and visibility is a practical application of contextual and relational analysis. By sharing personal narratives and celebrating individual achievements, the movement provides a more nuanced and complete picture of Black womanhood. This approach not only empowers Black women but also educates broader audiences about the specific contexts and challenges that shape their lives (Aboderin, 2019).

Reading #BlackGirlMagic with intersectionality accentuates the importance of recognising and celebrating the complex identities and experiences of Black women. By addressing the multiplicity of identities, interlocking systems of oppression, and the contextual nature of these experiences, #BlackGirlMagic provides a powerful counter-narrative to dominant societal stereotypes and fosters a community of support and empowerment. This integration demonstrates how intersectionality can be applied to understand and enhance social movements, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

3.5. Conclusion

The theoretical framework anchored in Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Raewyn Connell's (1987) gender order theory, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) Black feminist concept of intersectionality forms a robust foundation for understanding the intricacies of identity construction, representation, and reinforcement within the digital sphere. These theories offer valuable insights into the complex ways in which societal norms and power structures shape the representation of Black women on social media, unveiling the potential for these

representations to either perpetuate existing stereotypes and discrimination or challenge and reshape prevailing narratives. Drawing on Hall's (1997) perspective on representation as an active process of meaning-making is crucial for understanding how #BlackGirlMagic counters negative stereotypes by promoting positive images that celebrate Black womanhood's strength, intelligence, and creativity.

#BlackGirlMagic's reclamation and redefinition of identity actively resists and subverts dominant hegemonic representations, challenging historical marginalisation. Connell's (1987) gender order framework further illuminates how social movements can disrupt and transform gender relations. The movement's grassroots activism exemplifies the power of collective action in reshaping societal norms and the gender order, demonstrating that change is possible through community efforts and solidarity.

Applying Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory to #BlackGirlMagic emphasises the importance of acknowledging and celebrating the diverse and multifaceted experiences of Black women. By addressing the multiplicity of identities, interlocking systems of oppression, and the contextual nature of these experiences, #BlackGirlMagic offers a powerful counter-narrative to dominant societal stereotypes. It fosters a supportive and empowering community, emphasising the significance of intersectional analysis in understanding and enhancing social movements.

Overall, the integration of these theoretical frameworks with #BlackGirlMagic not only enriches our understanding of representation, gender order and relations, and intersectionality but also highlights the transformative power of movements that embrace and celebrate the diversity and complexity of marginalised identities.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodologies and research design employed for data collection and the approach used for data analysis. This study is a qualitative feminist internet research study. The feminist internet research methodological framework this study draws on is that of McLean (2022). This framework developed through a meta-research analysis of feminist internet research projects in the global South is underpinned by four core pillars: standpoint theory;

intersectionality; reflexivity and ethics of care (McLean, 2022). This is an appropriate framework for this study because it supports the exploration into the dynamics of how Black women and girls employ the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag and how this digital movement contributes to the formation of their identity.

The significance of such an investigation lies in the broader context of societal narratives and representations, particularly within the digital landscape, and the empowerment that hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic might bring marginalised voices. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and social media analytics, further analysed through thematic analysis to identify the core themes that exist in Black women's experiences of #BlackGirlMagic. Additionally, this research employed snowball and convenient sampling techniques, which are further explained in detail in this chapter. The significance of ethics, particularly focusing on the ethics of care from a feminist perspective is also discussed. From this viewpoint, the ethics of care involves acknowledging and prioritising marginalised voices and experiences while questioning traditional power structures. Additionally, emphasis is placed on the importance of privacy.

4.2. Research Methodology

This research paper employed a qualitative feminist internet research methodology (McLean 2022). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the qualitative approach is designed for investigating various aspects of people's lives, including lived experiences and behaviours. Furthermore, it emphasises understanding how individuals interpret their realities (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Qualitative researchers emphasise the importance of participant observation to grasp the subjective dimensions of the phenomena under study (Babbie and Mutton, 2001). This approach prioritises the insider's perspective, fostering a unique sensitivity, empathy, and understanding that may elude an outsider (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative research provides an in-depth and nuanced description of experiences and events (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). This significance is evident in studies such as Drouin et al.'s (2016), where a detailed exploration of the representation of young adults' on chat rooms and platforms was achieved through qualitative comments. Similarly, this research sought to gather in-depth insights into how Black women students at Rhodes University employ the hashtag to shape their identities. Qualitative research is necessary in a study centred on #BlackGirlMagic

because it enables an exploration of the subjective dimensions of the phenomena, gaining insights into the lived experiences, behaviours, and interpretations of Black women (Creswell, 2009). In essence, qualitative research, with its emphasis on detailed exploration and understanding of subjective experiences, is crucial for studying the nuances of the #BlackGirlMagic movement (Creswell, 2009; Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

Qualitative research holds paramount importance in this study because it seeks to question and challenge prevailing narratives within the hashtag, requiring a deep understanding of the diverse and context-specific experiences of Black women. Qualitative research is also instrumental for unveiling the intersectionality of race and gender in shaping the specific type of Black women celebrated within the hashtag. Qualitative methods enable a holistic exploration of these identity-forming processes, capturing the emotions, motivations, and intricate social dynamics that quantitative data might overlook (Christensen and Jensen, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative research is well suited for uncovering recurring patterns in the representation of Black women. Through analysis methods like thematic analysis, the study identified and interpreted these patterns, providing a deeper understanding of the significance and implications of these representations within the #BlackGirlMagic movement.

4.2.1. Feminist Internet Research Methodology

The 21st-century digital environment has revolutionised research methodology, with the internet emerging as a crucial resource for academics from a variety of disciplines (Corple and Linabary, 2020). A feminist approach to the internet is based on a consciousness that the inequalities in our world, including the internet and other technologies, are rooted in structures and systems of power such as patriarchy, racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, authoritarianism, ethno-religion, nationalism, and macroeconomic policies and business models based on neoliberal capitalism (McLean 2022; Perera, 2022).

A feminist internet approach promotes the empowerment of women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ people by enabling them to use the internet freely, cheerfully, and in a liberating way (McLean 2022; Perera 2022). The methodology prioritises individuals' desires and objectives, placing autonomy and empowerment at the forefront. This approach underscores the importance of providing them with the flexibility, capability, and resources to influence the creation and progression of the internet (Perera, 2022).

Since the internet's creation, feminists have been involved with it, and this involvement goes farther into the history of feminist technology use. A landscape dominated by a small number of firms and enclosed digital spaces arose with the introduction of platform capitalism and Web 2.0 in the early 1990s. From this arose, a strong feminist awareness about our use, creation, analysis, research, and communication with the internet became imperative (Perera, 2022). Research consistently shows a connection between the increase in online violence against women and girls and their increased internet access (Perera, 2022). Perera highlights how A gender-based violence (GBV), both online and offline, can be worsened by factors such as class, caste, sexuality, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and poverty, as well as the power dynamics associated with these factors (Perera, 2022).

A critical feminist viewpoint is applied by feminist internet research (FIR) to all aspects of research, including techniques, substantive analysis, information dissemination, and referencing and building upon each other's discoveries. By acknowledging and addressing the numerous intersecting power structures that exist both online and offline, it places an importance on knowledge building as an essential feminist intervention (McLean 2022). The aim of FIR is to acknowledge and elevate communities, experiences, and needs that are often overlooked in discussions and decision-making regarding online regulations. It makes an effort to guarantee that these communities are at the centre of how the internet is shaped, experienced, and governed (McLean 2022). Additionally, FIR addresses the advantages and power dynamics that researchers carry into the process of creating information about these communities and working with them (McLean 2022).

The questioning of social norms and power structures is one of the main goals of FIR. According to McLean, (2022), a growing number of qualitative researchers are using the internet to gather data, which enables them to document people's actual experiences interacting with digital environments (McLean, 2022). A feminist approach to internet research informs activism and policy-making (McLean, 2022). It seeks to challenge gendered power structures both online and offline by focusing on issues such as access to the internet, the impact of big data on vulnerable populations, online gender-based violence, and gendered labour in the digital economy, it aims to challenge gendered power systems both online and offline (McLean, 2022).

Furthermore, FIR aims to anticipate and implement revolutionary change. In an effort to promote better inclusivity and gender justice in digital spaces, academics from the global south,

in particular, concentrate on analysing differences in online participation and cases of online gender-based violence, for instance (McLean, 2022). Feminist academics challenge dominant narratives and highlight alternative perspectives that are frequently marginalised in popular discourse by elevating the voices of marginalised communities (Perera, 2022). The dedication of FIR to reflexivity and accountability is a crucial component. Feminist scholars need to be aware of the power dynamics that are present in research, especially those that exist between participants and researchers (McLean, 2022; Perera, 2022). Being reflexive means realising that the researcher's values and worldview affect the research as well as its ethical procedures, and this can entail FIR embracing uncomfortable situations (McLean, 2022).

McLean's (2022) framework attempts to address the need for reflexivity regarding feminist perspectives on power dynamics, location politics, participant relationships, and digital data access that are present in current internet methodologies. It also creates a feminist space for dialogue to explore the complexities of conducting internet research (McLean, 2022). Feminist online research is important because it can help with activism and advocacy initiatives in addition to its academic value. This approach is particularly relevant to the study because it contributes to giving Black women a voice and a platform to fight cultural expectations by giving them an opportunity to share their narratives and opinions.

FIR recognises the importance of acknowledging one's positionality. McLean (2022) emphasises that a crucial aspect of FIR involves researchers embracing their own positionality throughout the research endeavour. This entails critiquing the research process and reflecting on their personal journey within the research domain (McLean, 2022). Positionality refers to the social, cultural, and personal factors that shape a researcher's identity, convictions, and points of view (Bourke, 2014). These components include aspects like social class, gender, race, ethnicity, and other related identities which can influence how researchers view and analyse the information they collect (Bourke, 2014). Additionally, practicing reflexivity requires researchers to consciously consider their own positionality and how it might affect their work. They examine their presumptions, biases, and advantages that may affect how well they understand the material or whose viewpoints they value most (Misra and Curington, 2021). By means of this procedure, researchers aim to foster a consciousness of their own subjectivity and avoid imposing their judgments on the study's methodology and outcomes (Misra and Curington, 2021).

4.3. Research Design

The primary aim of this research was to explore the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag by examining the particular representations of Black women that it includes and those it may omit. Additionally, the study sought to understand how young Black women students at Rhodes University engage with, interpret, and integrate this hashtag into their own processes of identity formation. To achieve this goal, in-depth interview and social media analytics techniques were employed, focusing on Black women students at Rhodes University and how the hashtag has influenced and shaped their identities. The primary site for analysing this hashtag is X/Twitter, as it is the platform where it is predominantly utilised.

Tweets were gathered from 2022 and 2023 to explore how today's Black women are using the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic to shape their identity.

The hashtag gained popularity in 2013, creating a significant time gap between then and now. For analysis, three tweets were selected per participant. This approach allows for a balanced analysis, this approach ensures that the tweets from the same participants interviewed can be systematically analysed, providing continuity between the interview data and social media content. By selecting three tweets per participant, the analysis gains depth and consistency, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how the participants' views expressed in interviews align with or differ from their online tweets. This method also helps to enhance the verification of the findings, as themes emerging from the interviews can be directly compared with the language, tone, and themes present in their tweets, leading to a richer and more nuanced interpretation of how these individuals engage with the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic. The data was collected prior to Elon Musk's implementation of the new Twitter/X policies.

To gather data for analysis, tweets mentioning the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag from 2022 and 2023 were collected. The significant time gap between the hashtag's rise in 2013 and the data collection period (2022–2023) is noteworthy. The decision to use data from 2022 and 2023, despite the hashtag's initial surge in popularity around 2013, was based on the ongoing cultural relevance of the hashtag in the years following its creation. The hashtag's continued usage suggests that it has become a long-lasting symbol of empowerment and solidarity for Black women, even as social media trends evolve. Given the context of shifting societal discourses

on race, gender, and identity, this research aimed to capture how the hashtag has maintained its significance and how it continues to be reinterpreted by young Black women today.

By focusing on this more recent period, the study aims to understand the contemporary resonance of #BlackGirlMagic and its role in shaping Black women's identities in a post-2013 landscape, where social media continues to be a powerful space for self-expression and identity negotiation. This timeframe also allows for the inclusion of evolving themes and patterns that may not have been as prominent during the hashtag's early days, thus providing a more current view of how the hashtag functions as part of ongoing cultural and social conversations.

The data collection was conducted using Appify, a social media scraping tool that was selected for its ability to gather tweets from X (Twitter). The version of Appify used for this research was Apify X/Twitter scraper, which was the most current at the time of data collection. This tool allows for efficient scraping of publicly available tweets containing the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag during the specified timeframe (2022–2023). It is important to note that only publicly available tweets were included in the dataset; tweets from private accounts or those with restricted visibility were not captured. Additionally, tweets were collected without focusing on geotagging, as this research is more concerned with thematic analysis rather than location-based trends.

In total, 35 tweets were scraped, and from these, three tweets per participant were selected for analysis. This selection method allowed for a balanced approach by providing a manageable number of data points that could be directly compared with the interview data. By limiting the selection to three tweets per participant, this approach ensured both depth and consistency, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of how participants use and engage with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. This also enabled the analysis to directly compare the themes, language, and tone of the tweets with the views expressed by participants in their interviews, ensuring a more nuanced interpretation of how their online expressions align with or diverge from their personal identities.

To gather tweets, the app Apify was used. By entering the X/Twitter handles of participants and the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic into the search box, the app automatically searches for relevant posts and tweets. The selected tweets were then carefully reviewed, with attention given to the text, keywords, and hashtags related to #BlackGirlMagic. These tweets were

downloaded for further analysis. The analysis involved examining the keywords, key phrases, and hashtags used in the tweets, and relating them to the discussed themes. For the interviews, a phone recorder captured the conversations, which were then transcribed after multiple listens. Both the transcripts and the tweets were read several times to identify common themes or ideas. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and recurring themes in both the interview data and social media analytics.

4.3.1. Sample

The selection of study participants is a critical aspect that shapes the quality and relevance of research findings (Campbell et al, 2020). In this study, a combination of snowball and convenience sampling methods were employed to identify and recruit participants. Snowball sampling is a non-probability technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances or networks, creating a chain-like effect (Suen, Huang and Lee, 2014: 90). Convenience sampling, on the other hand, involves selecting subjects based on their accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Suen, Huang and Lee, 2014: 95). This approach was chosen due to its suitability for exploring connections between various phenomena.

Participant recruitment began by reaching out to friends and acquaintances, inviting them to participate in the study, with encouragement to extend the invitation to interested peers within their networks. This approach leveraged existing connections to reach individuals relevant to the study. Utilising personal and professional networks in the initial recruitment stages aligns with the principles of snowball sampling, where relationships within immediate circles are used to identify potential participants (Suen, Huang and Lee, 2014: 103). To expand the participant pool, various recruitment methods were employed, including telephone calls, emails, and in-person interactions.

These diverse approaches aimed to maximise outreach and engage individuals through channels they find most convenient. The combination of these methods increased the chances of reaching a diverse group of individuals, enriching the study with varied perspectives. The use of snowball sampling is particularly relevant when exploring phenomena within specific communities or networks, such as the engagement with a hashtag movement within a university setting (Suen, Huang and Lee, 2014: 100). By relying on existing connections, research can tap

into the social dynamics and intricacies of the community, uncovering insights that might not be apparent through other sampling approaches.

To ensure the sample remained diverse despite using snowball and convenience sampling, several measures were taken. First, a broad range of initial participants from different backgrounds, experiences, and social identities within the Black women community at Rhodes University was selected. This helped to capture varied perspectives. Additionally, the recruitment process actively sought out participants from different academic disciplines, socio-economic statuses, and cultural backgrounds to avoid homogeneity. The researcher also encouraged participants to refer others who may offer different viewpoints, helping to widen the diversity of the sample. These steps were taken to mitigate the risk of a non-representative or narrow sample, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black women at Rhodes University.

The research sample consisted of six participants, and the data collection methods employed in this study involved in-depth interviews and social media analysis. Given the study's specific focus on how Black women shape their identities using the hashtag, it was crucial that the participants self-identified as Black women and were affiliated with Rhodes University. All six participants in this research identified as Black women. Pseudonyms were used for the participants to protect their privacy and uphold ethical standards. The participants eagerly volunteered for this research, expressing a desire to contribute their perspectives and opinions to the ongoing discussions surrounding #BlackGirlMagic. Although they shared the commonality of being Black, each participant was unique in their own right. Their distinctions ranged from diverse cultural experiences, languages, sexual orientations, ages, and fields of expertise, showcasing the richness and diversity within the participant group.

Research participants' identities were anonymised and pseudonyms were employed to refer to them:

Participant 1 : Mia

Participant 2: Ruth

Participant 3 : Keisha

Participant 4 : Dora

Participant 5 : Sarah

Participant 6 : Mary

4.3.2. Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews and social media analytics to explore participants' personal perspectives, motivations, and experiences through in-depth interviews, while social media analytics provided insight into their online behaviour and engagement with the hashtag over time. Integrating these methods enabled an understanding of how these women express and shape their identities both in their personal narratives and within the digital space.

4.3.2.1. Interviews

This study made use of interviews for the purposes of data collection. Interviews are a particular form of interaction where a researcher typically asks questions about a person's life experiences, opinions, dreams, fears, and hopes, and the interviewee responds to these questions (Knott et al., 2022). The intention of interviews is to access quality and in-depth data (Knott et al., 2022).

The study included face-to-face interviews with five Black women and one additional interview online via FaceTime on WhatsApp. During these interviews, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions aimed at exploring their backgrounds, university experiences as Black women, and the factors influencing their identities. Individual interviews allowed for diverse perspectives and spontaneous responses. The study primarily employed open-ended questions to gather comprehensive and detailed data. Participants were encouraged to freely express themselves and answer questions using their knowledge.

Interviews were scheduled at times that accommodated participants' availability, typically in the afternoon during the week. The interviews took place in one of the library's study rooms due to convenience and proximity to the participants. This location was chosen for its low noise level, providing a comfortable and convenient space that allowed for open communication. Participants found these locations comfortable for speaking freely and openly. Participants

engaged in interviews that lasted approximately two hours and thirty minutes. These interviews were conducted both in person and via FaceTime. No financial compensation was provided to the participants. Throughout the study audio recordings of the interviews were securely stored on password-protected personal devices.

Face to face interviews, sometimes known as the “gold standard” in qualitative research, are recognised as the gold standard because they enable researchers to extract information from symbolic cues like body language and facial expressions (Gerson and Damaske, 2020). In their work, “*The Science and Art of Interviewing*,” Kathleen Gerson and Sarah Damaske highlight that although convenient, phone interviews and internet interviews cannot match the level of intimacy attained in in-person meetings (Gerson and Damaske, 2020). They contend that being physically present helps researchers build stronger relationships with subjects and get deeper insights.

Nevertheless, this perspective assumes that face-to-face interviews are automatically more intimate than those conducted remotely, ignoring the chance that participants can favour other interview forms, each of which has a different capacity to build intimacy and trust (Owens, 2022). However, despite having pros and cons of their own, phone and internet interviews are becoming more widely accepted as legitimate research methods (Averett, 2022). Researchers can interact with people across geographic borders and minimise losses from cancelled or rescheduled interviews by conducting interviews remotely, which offers advantages in terms of time and resource efficiency (Arnell, 2022).

However, there are drawbacks as well, such as the possibility of cultural norms in international research being overlooked and accessibility issues resulting from poor phone or internet connectivity (Cin et al., 2021). While some studies, such as, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found no clear difference between the quality of face-to face and remote interviews, Arnell (2022) contends that because phone interviews are perceived as providing anonymity, they may encourage more disclosure, especially when it comes to sensitive subjects. However, different forms of distant communication phone, video, or written have different benefits and drawbacks (Thunberg and Arnell, 2022).

In the course of gathering data, participants discussed their experiences with Black Girl Magic in greater detail in face-to-face interviews. Their body language and facial expressions made it clear that they were extremely enthusiastic about the subject, giving it emotional weight. On the other hand, when conducting interviews from a distance, participants showed a tendency to

adhere to the questions posed while yet demonstrating an audible emotional connection. One participant's phone disconnecting every five minutes created a barrier during the online interview process. The participant also had occasional internet connection troubles.

Remote interview methods expand the innovative strategies of feminist researchers, allowing for virtual home visits and amplifying the voices of marginalised groups. This aligns with feminist epistemologies' focus on facilitating systemic change through research (DeVault and Gross, 2012; Collins, 2000). Acknowledging participants' wishes regarding and/or worries about privacy is one way that researchers put their subjects' well-being first. The safety and well-being of participants are closely linked to privacy. Of course, this involves protecting confidentiality making sure that no details exist that may allow participants in the study to be identified, but feminists have also shown that participants manage privacy within the interview process (Gonzalez and Deckard, 2022). For instance, Gonzalez and Deckard (2022) discovered that participants managed privacy during interviews by asking the interviewer to turn off the audio recorder when discussing specific material in their interviews with Black women regarding police assault.

Feminist researchers have made it a priority to heed to their participants' privacy demands when they discuss touchy and/or stigmatised subjects like sexuality, abortion, and violence, racism (Jones, 2019). A primary priority for this research project was privacy. One interviewee expressed uneasiness and asked not to be recorded at a certain part of the interview. This was respected in order to protect her privacy and comfort. Valuing participants' privacy establishes trust between researchers and participants, indicating the researchers' consideration for their mental and emotional welfare.

4.3.2.2. Social Media Analytics

A second method employed in data collection was that of social media analytics. Social media and big data have become integral parts of our society, exerting a profound influence on various aspects of modern life (Ferretti, 2022). They play a pivotal role in shaping communication, information dissemination, and social interactions. In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as significant tools in academic research, offering researchers unprecedented access to vast pools of data and opportunities for exploration. The integration of social media into research methodologies has become increasingly prevalent across diverse fields. Scholars like

Martin and Schuurman (2020) highlight its utility as a data collection method, emphasising its effectiveness in capturing real-time insights and trends.

Qualitative researchers have leveraged social media platforms to access rich sources of data, such as photos and hashtags, for analysis in their studies (Welford et al., 2022). The advent of smartphone technology has further expanded the possibilities for data collection, with researchers utilising smartphone apps as tools to gather data remotely, even across vast geographical areas (Welford et al., 2022). This approach not only enables the collection of large quantities of data but also offers the flexibility to capture insights in real-world settings. The use of smartphone apps in qualitative research has gained traction due to its ability to provide immediate data and capture changes over time, thereby enriching the depth of research findings (Welford et al., 2022).

This dynamic approach to data collection enhances the research process for both researchers and participants, fostering greater engagement and yielding more nuanced insights. Additionally, the integration of smartphones into qualitative research methodologies opens up avenues for innovative data collection techniques and enhances the overall research experience. Tweets on X/Twitter were selected through a systematic process that involved identifying relevant posts from participants who actively engaged with the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic.

This selection was carried out using the app Apify Twitter scraper, which automatically searched for tweets by entering the participants' X/Twitter handles and the hashtag into the search box.

In this study, several key analytics were considered to understand how participants engage with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. First, the frequency of tweets was analysed to assess how often participants used the hashtag, providing insight into the level of engagement. Next, the content of the tweets was examined for patterns in language, emotions, and themes, which helped identify how participants construct and celebrate their identities online. Interactions with the tweets, such as likes, retweets, and replies, were also assessed to understand the reach and impact of posts within the wider community. Finally, the timing of the tweets was considered to contextualize their relevance to current events or specific moments in the #BlackGirlMagic movement. These analytics offered a comprehensive view of how participants engage with and contribute to the hashtag, providing valuable insights into online identities and activism.

To refine the focus of the study, the scope was narrowed to South Africa, specifically to Makhanda and Rhodes University. Participants were asked for their X/Twitter accounts and handles, along with permission to extract any posts containing the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic. Upon receiving their consent, the research commenced. The app Apify was utilised to extract tweets, starting with those from 2023 and 2023. These years were chosen because the hashtag has evolved over the past few years, and the goal was to observe its current usage patterns. Tweets from the most recent period were selected to capture the here and now, ensuring that the study remained relevant and applicable to the participants. This focus on the current year also aligned with the convenience and preferences of the participants, enhancing the study's relevance.

4.3.3. Data Analysis

The research data was analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research technique that allows researchers to examine intricate phenomena by finding, examining, and interpreting themes or patterns in a dataset (Braune and Clarke, 2006). In order to find recurrent themes of meaning and acquire a deeper comprehension of the underlying ideas or experiences under study, it entails methodically organising and classifying qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Becoming acquainted with the data usually comes first, then comes creating preliminary codes, looking for themes, evaluating and clarifying themes, and creating an extensive report. The versatility of thematic analysis makes it a great tool for researchers in a variety of fields, including psychology, sociology, and healthcare, as they may tailor the method to different study topics and circumstances (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

One of the key benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt the method to suit their specific research questions and contexts. Whether studying individuals' experiences, societal attitudes, or organisational dynamics, thematic analysis can be tailored to meet the needs of diverse research projects. Researchers can employ different approaches within thematic analysis, such as inductive or deductive coding, depending on the nature of the data and the research objectives. By systematically analysing qualitative data, thematic analysis enables researchers to uncover rich insights and contribute to a deeper understanding of complex phenomena (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The capacity of thematic analysis to offer deep and nuanced insights into complicated events is one of its main advantages. Researchers can

find underlying meanings, relationships, and experiences in qualitative data by methodically looking for patterns that may not be seen when using only quantitative methods (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Additionally, thematic analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of various viewpoints and experiences by allowing the investigation of alternative perspectives and interpretations within a dataset (Nowell et al., 2017). Additionally transparent and rigorous, this approach enables researchers to document their analytical methodology, which permits other experts in the field to replicate and validate their findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All things considered, thematic analysis is a useful method for investigating and comprehending the complexity of human experience, behaviour, and occurrences. This analysis method was applied to the interview data and social media analytics in this study, analysing and finding recurring themes in the Tweets and interview transcript.

From the thematic analysis, four core themes emerged: 1) Empowerment and upliftment; 2) identity and representation; 3) challenges and evolving the hashtag; and 4) inclusivity and intersectionality. These themes are discussed further in chapter five.

4.4. Ethics

Ethics of care, based on the concepts of empathy, compassion, and interconnectivity, promote putting people's health and well-being first while creating caring connections guided this study (Gilligan, 1982). From a feminist standpoint, ethics of care highlights the importance of recognising and prioritising marginalised voices and experiences while challenging conventional hierarchical power structures (Tronto, 2020; McLean 2022). This framework acknowledges the innate disparities and injustices present in societal frameworks and endeavours to mitigate them via compassionate, relational decision-making and action. Feminists want to establish more inclusive and egalitarian environments by emphasising compassion and empathy in ethical issues (Held, 2006). This viewpoint emphasises how social issues are interconnected and how crucial it is for everyone to take responsibility for one another in order to create a society that is more compassionate and just.

In this case, the practice of obtaining informed consent from participants aligns closely with both the ethics of care from a feminist perspective and a personal standpoint. From a feminist perspective, care ethics emphasise empathy, compassion, and interconnectivity, all of which are reflected in the conscientious effort to prioritise participants' well-being and ensure their

autonomy throughout the research process (Gilligan, 1982). Furthermore, by providing clear and comprehensive documentation, researchers demonstrate a commitment to transparency and respect for participants' agency, which are fundamental principles within care ethics (Tronto, 2020). Moreover, the opportunity for participants to review the information, ask questions, and make informed decisions about their involvement stresses a commitment to upholding ethical standards and fostering a caring connection with participants, ensuring that their voices and concerns are valued and respected.

To protect the identities of the participants and ensure their privacy, deliberate measures were taken to use pseudonyms as a precautionary measure. Identifying information such as usernames or handles were cropped from the tweets while retaining the content for analysis purposes. The decision to anonymise the data was motivated by ethical considerations and a commitment to protecting the privacy rights of the individuals involved. By removing identifying details from the tweets, the risk of disclosing personal information was mitigated against. This approach aligns with ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, which emphasise the importance of obtaining informed consent and protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality (Davidson et al, 2010). Furthermore, safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of participants is vital for maintaining their trust and well-being during the research process. Adhering to these ethical guidelines enables researchers to conduct studies responsibly, contributing to the integrity and reliability of their findings.

Anonymising the data also serves to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research findings. By dissociating the content from specific individuals, the analysis focuses solely on the themes, patterns, and insights derived from the data itself, rather than on individual characteristics or identities. This helps to ensure that the research remains objective and impartial, free from any potential biases or preconceptions associated with specific individuals or groups. In addition to protecting the participants' identities, care was taken to adhere to X/Twitter's terms of service and guidelines for data usage. This included obtaining permission to download and analyse the tweets for research purposes and complying with any restrictions or limitations imposed by the platform. By adhering to these guidelines, the research was conducted in a responsible and ethical manner, respecting the rights of both the participants and the platform itself. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the integrity and confidentiality of the data was maintained.

This involved securely storing the anonymised data and ensuring that only authorised individuals had access to it. Steps were also taken to protect against potential data breaches or unauthorised disclosures, such as encrypting the data and implementing appropriate security measures. By carefully protecting the identities of the participants and adhering to ethical guidelines, the research was conducted in a manner that upholds the highest standards of integrity, credibility, and respect for the individuals involved.

4.5. Limitations

In this research, one of the primary limitations in this analysis lies in the sampling size. This study involved six participants from Rhodes University who were interviewed and analysed their tweets on X/Twitter. Which can be perceived as a limitation. According to Boddy (2016) When it comes to qualitative research, reviewers often wonder how many people need to be in the study for the findings to be believable. They might bring up this question in their reviews. A small sample size can limit the ability of researchers to draw accurate conclusions and make meaningful inferences about the broader population under study (McDermott, 2023). In this scenario, having just six participants in the study from a vast population of active Black women on social media can impact the research. According to McDermott, this limitation can weaken the external validity of the research findings, making it challenging to apply the results to larger populations or draw dependable conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships (McDermott, 2023). Furthermore, when sample sizes are small, there's a higher chance of sampling bias. This means certain groups or characteristics in the population might be overrepresented or underrepresented in the sample (Simundic, 2013: 13). As a result, the findings may be skewed and lead to invalid conclusions because the sample might not truly reflect the entire population (Simundic, 2013). In the study, friends and acquaintances were asked to participate and encouraged them to invite others they knew who might be interested. While helping to expand the participant pool, it also introduced the potential for bias because participants were mainly recruited through personal networks. This means the sample may not represent the wider population accurately, limiting the study's ability to draw valid conclusions that apply broadly. However, this approach has the advantage of fostering trust and rapport between the researcher and participants, which can lead to more open and honest responses. The familiarity within these networks may have encouraged participants to share more in-depth and nuanced insights, ultimately enriching the quality of the data collected.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter qualitative feminist internet research was discussed as the methodology employed to delve into the intricate dynamics of the #BlackGirlMagic movement and its impact on the identity formation of young Black women students at Rhodes University. Through an exploration of lived experiences, behaviours, and interpretations, this study aimed to uncover the nuanced representations within the hashtag, as well as the voices it may omit. The qualitative approach, as advocated by Babbie and Mouton (2001), provided a framework for delving into the subjective dimensions of the phenomena under study, emphasising participant observation and insider perspectives. Moreover, the feminist internet research methodology (McLean 2022) brought attention to the power structures embedded within digital environments, aiming to empower marginalised communities and challenge dominant narratives.

The research design, including participant selection through snowball and convenience sampling, ensured a diverse and representative sample of Black women affiliated with Rhodes University. By combining in-depth interviews with social media analytics, this study captured both offline and online experiences, providing a holistic understanding of how the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag influences identity formation. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and social media data revealed common themes and patterns, shedding light on the intersectionality of race and gender within the movement. Through reflexivity and awareness of positionality, researchers navigated power dynamics and biases, enhancing the credibility and integrity of the study.

Furthermore, the integration of interviews, social media analytics, and thematic analysis in this study provided a comprehensive understanding of the #BlackGirlMagic movement and its impact on the identity formation of young Black women students at Rhodes University. Through in-depth interviews conducted both in person and remotely, participants shared their experiences, opinions, and insights, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of their engagement with the hashtag.

The choice to conduct face-to-face interviews, despite the challenges, allowed for a deeper level of intimacy and connection between researchers and participants. Participants' body language and facial expressions provided valuable cues that enriched the qualitative data gathered. However, remote interviews via platforms like Facetime also offered unique advantages, such as convenience and accessibility, allowing for broader participation and inclusivity.

Moreover, the use of social media analytics through platforms like Apify enabled access a vast pool of data from X/Twitter, offering real-time insights into the evolving usage patterns of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. Thematic analysis of both interview transcripts and social media data revealed recurring themes such as empowerment, identity, challenges, and inclusivity, providing a nuanced understanding of the movement's dynamics. Ethical considerations, guided by feminist principles such as the ethics of care, were paramount throughout the research process (McLean 2022). Measures to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, including anonymising data and obtaining informed consent, upheld the ethical integrity of the study and ensured the well-being of participants.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research data analysis to show how Black women students utilise the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag on social media platforms like X/Twitter to express their identities and share personal narratives. In this chapter the themes identified through the thematic analysis of data collected through in-depth interviews and social media analysis will be discussed (Braun and Clarke 2006). The following four themes emerged: 1) empowerment and upliftment; 2) identity and representation; 3) challenges and evolving the hashtag; and 4) inclusivity and intersectionality.

In exploring the themes of empowerment and upliftment, identity and representation, challenges and evolving the hashtag, and inclusivity and intersectionality within the context of #BlackGirlMagic, it became evident how these elements interlock and connect to create a multifaceted narrative of young Black women's experiences, and how young Black women students at Rhodes University engage with #BlackGirlMagic. Empowerment and upliftment through shared narratives of success and resilience intersect with challenges of representation

and evolving dynamics within social media activism. Inclusivity serves as a unifying force, fostering a sense of community that celebrates diversity and challenges societal norms. Together, these themes illustrate the transformative power of hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic in shaping personal identities and collective narratives among young Black women, they are discussed in greater detail below.

5.2. Theme One: Empowerment and Upliftment

In this study, the participants all echoed the same sentiment of empowerment and upliftment they drew from #BlackGirlMagic. These women emphasised how the movement liberates Black women from societal limitations, enabling them to embrace their ambitions, assertiveness, and authentic selves. Connell (1987) argues that power is not only exercised through direct control but also through the cultural hegemony of certain gender norms. Hegemonic masculinity, for instance, sets the standard for male behaviour and marginalises alternative masculinities and femininities. Regarding power, #BlackGirlMagic confronts the marginalisation of Black women in positions of authority and influence and directly challenges these power structures by elevating Black women's voices and leadership (Boron, 2020). It asserts Black women's right to occupy spaces of power and influence, whether in politics, academia, or media. By doing so, it disrupts the normative gender order that privileges white, male authority and promotes a more inclusive vision of power (Cooper and Wolfe, 2020). A participant, Mia, reflecting on the movement, captures this sentiment:

“Black Girl Magic is typically linked with the empowerment and encouragement of women. It recognises the success of Black women. Black women weren't acknowledged, considering the historical oppression they faced. However, currently, this term signifies upliftment for me, a phrase that I use to support and uplift my fellow Black women.”

Here, Mia is speaking to the concept of Black Girl Magic and its evolution in representing empowerment and encouragement for Black women. Historically, “Black women faced systemic oppression and were often overlooked” (Boron, 2020: 420), their achievements and successes marginalised or ignored. This emphasises the longstanding pattern of systemic oppression experienced by Black women throughout history. However, Mia observes a shift in the meaning of Black Girl Magic in contemporary times. Instead of solely acknowledging success, it now serves as a symbol of upliftment and support within the Black community. In her perspective, Mia emphasises the importance of using the phrase to uplift and empower

fellow Black women. By reclaiming and redefining the narrative surrounding Black womanhood, Black Girl Magic becomes a tool for solidarity and resilience. This movement challenges the long-standing systemic oppression against Black women “by empowering and uplifting them, rewriting their stories” (Aboderin, 2019: 5). Through this movement, Black women reclaim their narratives, finding strength and solidarity in shared experiences. It serves as a powerful platform for recognising and amplifying the voices of Black women, fostering a sense of pride and self-worth within the community (Erigha and Allen, 2020). Ruth supports this in the following statement:

“I would define it or let’s say my understanding of the #BlackGirlMagic is essentially a trend or a social movement that seeks to empower the lives of a Black girls and women especially in a world where we are constantly oppressed”.

What Ruth is implying here is that #BlackGirlMagic highlights its significance as a movement for social change that seeks to strengthen Black women and girls, particularly in a world where they encounter continuous injustice. Empowerment is crucial within a world where systemic injustices persistently marginalised and diminish the experiences of Black women (Collins, 2022: 378). Furthermore, in Ruth’s understanding, #BlackGirlMagic serves as a rallying cry for empowerment, offering Black girls and women a platform to celebrate their resilience, accomplishments, and inherent worth. Ruth’s portrayal of the movement suggests that it not only acknowledges the challenges faced by Black women but also seeks to counteract them by fostering a sense of agency, pride, and solidarity within the community. Ruth highlights the transformative potential of framing #BlackGirlMagic as a response to systemic oppression, highlighting its role in reshaping societal narratives and advocating for the empowerment and liberation of Black girls and women (Drumond, 2020). Through the amplification of their voices and experiences, #BlackGirlMagic challenges societal perceptions and advocates for the recognition and empowerment of Black women (Drumond, 2020). Keisha supports this by saying:

“Black Girl Magic... exists to encourage Black women to be themselves, to show up, take up spaces in society confidently, and walk fully in their purpose. It reminds them that they are valuable, seen, and powerful. It empowers and uplift, let me say this it basically encourages them to do anything that they put their mind to”

Here Keisha delves into the essence of Black Girl Magic, which serves as a powerful encouragement for Black women to embrace themselves confidently and assertively claim their

rightful places in society. Keisha also emphasises the importance of recognising the inherent value and power within Black women, affirming their worth and visibility. Social media platforms enable Black women to amplify their voices, share their experiences, and increase “their visibility in ways that were previously unimaginable” (Showunmi, 2023: 5). By celebrating their uniqueness and potential, Black Girl Magic serves as a catalyst for Black women to pursue their goals and aspirations with determination and resilience. For Kesha, Black Girl Magic is not merely a phrase, but a mindset that instils confidence and self-belief, empowering Black women to pursue their dreams and fulfil their purpose. It serves as a reminder of their strength and capabilities, urging them to overcome obstacles and achieve success in any endeavour they choose to pursue. Through this lens, Black Girl Magic becomes a source of inspiration and encouragement, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment among Black women as they navigate their journeys in life (Shelton, 2017).

Empowerment and upliftment are fundamental aspects of the #BlackGirlMagic movement on social media platforms. Social media is essential for empowering Black women, this is because social media platforms are utilised to reshape and retell stories of Black women and other marginalised individuals (Mason, 2021). Black Girl Magic empowers and uplifts by affirming the beauty, strength, and resilience of Black women in a world that often seeks to diminish their worth (Aboderin, 2019: 6). Social media platforms provide spaces for individuals to express their thoughts and share their experiences using tools like hashtags and posts. These platforms have played a crucial role in reshaping and retelling the stories of marginalised groups, including Black women (Chen and Wang, 2021). For instance, the #TheBlackLivesMatter movement originated on social media, enabling people to discuss issues of unfair treatment and advocate for change. By using hashtags and sharing personal narratives, individuals contribute to a broader conversation about social justice and equity, amplifying their voices and challenging dominant narratives that may marginalise their experiences. Moreover, social media fosters connections among individuals with similar experiences, creating communities of support and understanding (Chen and Wang, 2021). The global networking of social media allows marginalised groups to unite and discuss important issues, such as gender inequality and racial discrimination. For example, the #MeToo movement demonstrated how social media platforms can empower individuals to speak out against harassment and advocate for change on a widespread scale (Jones, 2021). Social media serves as a powerful tool for marginalised groups to reclaim their narratives, connect with others, and ensure their voices are heard in public discourse.

Empowerment and upliftment include various dimensions, such as self-confidence, self-determination, and collective support, aimed at fostering positive change and resilience. Empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals to recognise and harness their own strengths, abilities, and potential (Mills, 2020). Within the context of #BlackGirlMagic empowerment involves encouraging Black women and girls to embrace their unique identities, talents, and experiences, despite societal barriers and stereotypes (Hawkins, 2020). This empowerment is not only about individual self-actualisation but also about challenging systemic injustices and advocating for broader social change (Simmons-Horton et al., 2023).

Upliftment, on the other hand, focuses on the collective effort to uplift and support one another within the Black community (Rogers et al., 2021). This concept emphasises the importance of solidarity, mentorship, and community building in overcoming shared challenges and achieving common goals (McMillan Cottom, 2020). Through acts of upliftment, individuals within the #The BlackGirlMagic movement supports one another by celebrating successes, providing encouragement during difficult times, and offering resources and opportunities for growth and development (Huff, 2019). Together, empowerment and upliftment serve as pillars of strength and resilience within the #BlackGirlMagic movement, empowering Black women and girls to defy stereotypes, pursue their aspirations, and create meaningful change in their lives and communities (Huff, 2019). This empowerment is further exemplified on social media platforms, where participants showed how the hashtag uplifts and celebrates Black women.

A participant, Mary embodied this spirit by sharing a selfie of herself wearing a black t-shirt, with a comb stylishly placed in her afro. Her tweet read: “All natural. Love this hair. Tough, you soft. #Kinkycurly hair #BlackGirlMagic #selflove #Rhodes #SouthAfrica. Sunday #Beyonce.”

#Tweet

Full_text

All natural. Love this hair. Tough, you soft. #Kinkycurlyhair
#BlackGirlMagic#selflove#Rhodes#SouthAfrica. Sunday #Beyonce

This tweet, posted by Mary in May 2023, on a weekend when she finished undoing their hair. She wanted to show that she felt strong and confident. The tweet was picked because it has special meaning to Mary. The participant explained that for a long time, she didn't wear her natural hair. She always used chemicals to make it straight because she was taught that Black women should have straight hair to look neat. But when she posted this tweet showing her natural, kinky hair for the first time, she felt powerful. In addition, the phrase "Love this hair" suggests appreciation and admiration for natural hair. Embracing natural hair is a form of self-love and empowerment for many Black women, challenging societal beauty standards and celebrating their unique features (Drammeh, 2021). The phrase #kinkyhair specifically references a texture of natural hair commonly associated with Black women. Embracing and celebrating kinky hair is an important aspect of the #BlackGirlMagic movement, as it challenges Eurocentric beauty standards and promotes self-acceptance and pride in one's natural hair texture.

#Selflove highlights the importance of self-love and acceptance, particularly within the context of embracing one's natural hair and Black identity. Self-love is a central theme of the #BlackGirlMagic movement, encouraging Black women to embrace and celebrate all aspects of themselves unapologetically. The use of #Blackgirlmagic directly ties the tweet to the broader movement of celebrating the achievements, resilience, and beauty of Black women (Aboderin, 2019). As highlighted by Abdoring (2019: 7) "Black Girl Magic celebrates the beauty of self-love." It also emphasises the inherent magic and power within Black women, reaffirming their worth and visibility in society (Nguyen, 2024).

Another participant, Mia expressed the celebration of empowerment and upliftment through achievement. Sharing a photo from her graduation last year, she wore a gown and hood in a picture with the tweet "A whole graduate #Graduate #BlackGirlMagic #RhodesGraduate. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE WE did it!"

#Tweet

Full_text

A whole graduate#Graduate#blackgirlmagic
#rhodesGraduate. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
We did it 😊

In this tweet, Mia talks about her feelings at her graduation ceremony. She also talks about the difficulties she faced as a young Black woman on her journey. This tweet was chosen because it demonstrates how education has the power to empower and uplift individuals. The keyword #Graduate denotes the successful completion of academic studies, symbolising hard work, dedication, and perseverance. When coupled with #BlackGirlMagic, it emphasises the significance of Black women's achievements in higher education, countering stereotypes and showcasing their intellectual prowess. Furthermore, the keyphrase #RhodesGraduate specifically links the achievement to Rhodes University, highlighting the educational institution where the graduation took place. By associating this accomplishment with #BlackGirlMagic, it underscores the representation of black women in academia and their contributions to scholarly pursuits. #Academic excellence this phrase highlights the quality and proficiency demonstrated in academic endeavours. When aligned with #BlackGirlMagic reinforces the message that Black women excel academically despite facing systemic barriers and discrimination, thereby challenging societal perceptions and promoting positive representation.

The phrase 'we did it' implies collective achievement and solidarity within the Black community. The tweet fosters a sense of empowerment and upliftment among black women, emphasising that their successes are shared victories that inspire and motivate others to strive for excellence (Lorde, 1984). The tweet celebrates the academic success of a Black woman while aligning it with the principles of #BlackGirlMagic, highlighting empowerment, resilience, and the collective strength of Black women in overcoming obstacles and achieving greatness.

Another participant, Ruth shared a photo of herself wearing a Ghanaian attire at a Western African event held at Rhodes University, captioning it: “Celebrate your heritage #BlackGirlMagic Black Power.” This act resonated with the notion of empowerment and upliftment.

#Tweet

Full_text

Celebrate your heritage

#BlackGirlMagic

Black Power!!! 

Ruth posted this tweet during heritage month. She explained that for a long time, she wasn’t proud of being from Uganda because of her dark skin. She used to say she was from another country. But when she saw people using the hashtag to celebrate their heritage, she started to do the same. It was during heritage month, and she felt empowered and uplifted by it. This tweet was selected because it shows how being proud of your background can make you feel strong and happy. “Celebrate”, this keyword suggests a joyous recognition and acknowledgment of something positive. In the context of #BlackGirlMagic, it implies recognising and honouring the achievements, resilience, and beauty of Black women. The term heritage refers to one’s background, culture, and traditions passed down through generations. When paired with #BlackGirlMagic, it stresses the significance of celebrating and embracing the unique heritage and cultural identity of black women, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. Black Power this phrase is associated with the empowerment, liberation, and assertion of rights and equality for black people. In the context of #BlackGirlMagic signifies the strength, agency, and self-determination of Black women in asserting their identities and advocating for social justice and equality. This tweet serves as a rallying cry to uplift and empower black women, highlighting their achievements and contributions while challenging stereotypes and systemic barriers. Further, it encourages the celebration and affirmation of Black women’s heritage and identity, promoting empowerment and upliftment within the

context of #BlackGirlMagic and affirming the power and resilience of black women in shaping their own narratives and advocating for social change.

Although for some, the hashtag represents empowerment, for others, it does not necessarily promote upliftment and empowerment due to various critiques and arguments (Hersey, 2020). Some critics argue that while the hashtag may celebrate certain aspects of Black womanhood, “it can also inadvertently reinforce narrow beauty standards and overlook the diverse experiences of Black women” (Johnson, 2018: 45). Additionally, there are concerns that the emphasis on individual success within the #BlackGirlMagic movement may overshadow the need for collective action and systemic change to address broader issues of racism, sexism, and inequality (Harris, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of representation within the hashtag is another significant concern, as it may fail to include the experiences and perspectives of Black women who do not fit into conventional ideals of beauty or success (Johnson, 2018; Hersey 2020; Smith 2021).

The discussion around #BlackGirlMagic reveals both its empowering potential and its limitations. While many view the hashtag as a celebration of Black womanhood, critics argue that it can perpetuate narrow beauty standards and fail to account for the diverse experiences of Black women. By emphasising individual success, the movement may inadvertently overshadow the need for collective action and systemic reform to address deeper issues of racism, sexism, and inequality. Furthermore, concerns about representation highlight that the hashtag often excludes women who do not conform to mainstream ideals of beauty or achievement, potentially reinforcing exclusion rather than inclusivity (Johnson, 2018; Hersey, 2020; Harris, 2015). The next theme will explore how the evolution of identity and representation has shifted into the digital age, where social media platforms have become essential spaces for amplifying the voices and experiences of Black women.

5.3. Theme Two: Identity and Representation

In the digital age, identity and representation have found new battlegrounds on social media platforms like X/Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Hawkins, 2020). These vibrant spaces have become powerful amplifiers for the voices and experiences of Black women, transforming hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic, #SayHerName, and #BlackWomenLead into rallying cries for solidarity, empowerment, and visibility (Hawkins, 2020). Participant responses illustrated

how Black women actively navigate and negotiate their identities online. Furthermore, the responses highlight how the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag contributes to the representation and identity of Black women by providing a platform for showcasing their diverse identities and experiences, ultimately fostering a sense of pride and empowerment within the community. This aligns with Stuart Hall's argument on "positive representation" (Hall, 1997: p20), which involves challenging negative stereotypes by presenting marginalised groups in a more positive light.

By portraying Black women within the movement in a multifaceted and empowering manner, Dora's response resonates strongly with Hall's (1997) theory of positive representation.

"When I see a picture of a Black woman on social media, I feel happy to see a woman that looks like me. You know we talk about how growing [up] there wasn't a lot of representation of Black women in the media. Now, with the #BlackGirlMagic, we see a diverse representation of black women from everywhere and different background and different fields of work which is good."

Here, Dora is speaking about the importance of amplified representation of Black women on social media, particularly through the #BlackGirlMagic movement. Adams- Bass and Bentley highlights that the #BlackGirlMagic movement amplifies the voices of Black women, "providing a platform for representation that celebrates their diversity, resilience, and power" (Adams-Bass and Bentley-Edwards, 2020: 4). This is important because it recognises the diverse experiences and contributions of Black women, challenges harmful stereotypes, and promotes positive representations. Dora remembers how there were not many different types of Black women shown in the media when she was young. As Kassava (2022: 78) writes "Black women have long been excluded and underrepresented in the media, their stories marginalised and their voices silenced." But now, with #BlackGirlMagic, Dora sees a positive change. She notices that Black women from different backgrounds and jobs are being shown more on social media. This made Dora feel good because she sees people who are like her, which makes her feel connected and proud. Research by Boyce et al., (2023) and Smith (2019) shows that when people see others like themselves in the media, it can help them feel like they belong and feel better about themselves. Social media has become a place for different people to share their stories.

Scholars like Gill (2020) have looked at how social media lets groups who aren't shown much in traditional media tell their own stories. The #BlackGirlMagic movement is a good example

of this. It helps Black women share their experiences and be heard (Drumond, 2020). Overall, Dora thinks it's important to see more Black women on social media. It helps her and others like her feel connected and proud. Sarah also expresses her thoughts on representation, which she shared below:

“Representation matters and the hashtag demonstrates just that, it shows that a black woman is worthy to be recognised. For us Black women who we are often also represented or identified as loud, stupid ratchet and it still happening today and the American Black women and their weird shows makes it worse not all Black women are like that you know. Imagine little Black girls who will grow up to think that they have to be loud, ratchet or stupid it is such a shame. This is why we are here at this university to change the narrative of the representation of Black girls and women. That black women can be educated, smart, beautiful, polite, we are so many things that the media has failed to represent us and with the hashtag it even represents us in a positive way and I love it”

Sarah highlights the importance of representation, especially for Black women, as discussed through the #BlackGirlMagic movement. Sarah expresses concern about negative stereotypes often associated with Black women, such as being loud, stupid, or “ratchet.” Sarah believes these stereotypes are perpetuated by certain portrayals in American media, which she feels are inaccurate and harmful. She worries about the impact these stereotypes might have on young Black girls, who may grow up believing they need to conform to these negative images. Sarah emphasises the significance of changing this narrative, particularly within academic spaces like the University she attends.

She asserts that Black women can be educated, intelligent, beautiful, and polite, contrary to the stereotypes perpetuated by the media. Sarah praises the #BlackGirlMagic movement for representing Black women in a positive light, showcasing their diverse talents, achievements, and contributions. Scholarly literature supports Sarah's concerns regarding the negative stereotypes and lack of representation faced by Black women in the media. Research by Johnson (2019) and Hall (2020) examines how media representations can reinforce harmful stereotypes and impact individuals' perceptions of themselves and others. According to Aboderin “the importance of representation in the Black Girl Magic movement cannot be overstated; it serves as a powerful affirmation of Black women's existence, worth, and humanity” (Aboderin, 2019: 30).

Furthermore, studies by Nelson (2018) and Smith (2021) highlight the importance of positive representation in promoting self-esteem and challenging societal norms. Sarah's sentiments echo the broader conversation surrounding representation and its impact on identity formation and societal perceptions. Her support for the #BlackGirlMagic movement reflects a desire to challenge stereotypes and promote positive representations of Black women in media and society. Sarah's remarks underscore the significance of representation for Black women and the role of movements like #BlackGirlMagic in reshaping narratives and promoting positive images of Black womanhood. Through her advocacy for change, Sarah aims to empower Black girls and women to embrace their multifaceted identities and defy limiting stereotypes perpetuated by the media.

Hall's (1997) theory of representation, provides a framework for understanding how the representation of Black women on social media platforms contributes to their identity formation and influences broader societal perceptions. Through this lens, the significance of hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic extends beyond mere online trends, serving as powerful tools for challenging stereotypes, empowering marginalised communities, and reshaping cultural narratives surrounding Black womanhood.

Through these digital spaces, Black women shared their stories, celebrated their achievements, and called attention to the unique challenges they face due to intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, gender, and class (Erigha and Crooks, 2020). Furthermore, the #TheBlackGirlMagic movement emphasised the importance of representation in media, entertainment, and leadership positions. As Clemons (2023: 48) writes, "in #BlackGirlMagic, representation is empowerment, identity is celebration, and visibility is liberation."

A participant, Keisha echoed this sentiment by posting a picture of herself in her geography lecture/seminar, dressed stylishly in a suit. Her tweet read: "Beauty and BRAINS #RhodesGraduate #blackgirlmagic women in Geography #Blackexcellence," showcasing a positive representation of Black women on X/Twitter.

#Tweet

Full_text

Beauty and brains #Rhodes Graduate

#Blackgirlmagic women in Geography

#Blackexcellence 

In discussing this tweet, Keisha said that it's about showing Black women in a good light, not always in a bad way. This tweet is important because it talks about how people see themselves and how others see them. She spoke about how Black women are shown in the media, even though they are visible, it's usually in a bad way because of stereotypes. The #RhodesGraduate hashtag specifically links the achievement to Rhodes University, highlighting the educational institution where the graduation took place. By associating this accomplishment with #BlackGirlMagic, it emphasises the representation of Black women in academia and their contributions to scholarly pursuits. It promotes the visibility of Black women's achievements in higher education, fostering a sense of pride and empowerment within the Black community. #BlackExcellence this hashtag celebrates the excellence and achievements of Black individuals. In the context of the tweet, it emphasises the academic success of the Black woman in Geography, highlighting her intellectual abilities and scholarly accomplishments.

Further, the phrase 'Beauty and Brains' emphasises the combination of intelligence and attractiveness, challenging the stereotype that intelligence and beauty are mutually exclusive (Morrison 1993). By highlighting both aspects, the tweet promotes a holistic view of Black women, celebrating their intellect, academic achievements, and physical beauty (Smith 2017). It counters narrow standards of beauty and intelligence, empowering Black women to embrace their multifaceted identities and talents. The tweet celebrates the academic success of a Black woman graduating from Rhodes University while aligning it with the principles of #BlackGirlMagic, #RhodesGraduate, and #BlackExcellence. It emphasises empowerment and

upliftment by showcasing the achievements and resilience of Black women in academia, challenging stereotypes, and promoting positive representations of Black womanhood.

The discussions about representation of Black women on social media, particularly through the #BlackGirlMagic movement, shed light on important themes surrounding identity and visibility. Dora and Sarah both highlighted the significance of increased representation of Black women in media, emphasising how it positively impacts individuals' sense of belonging and self-esteem. Dora reflected on her experiences growing up with limited representation of Black women in the media, but acknowledges the positive change brought about by #BlackGirlMagic, which showcases diverse representations of Black women from various backgrounds and professions.

Sarah echoed Dora's sentiments, emphasising the harmful effects of negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media and the importance of challenging these narratives. She stressed the need for more accurate and positive representations of Black women, particularly in academic spaces, to empower future generations and combat harmful stereotypes. The scholarly literature, like Hall's (1997) representation theory, provided support for by highlighting the importance of representation in shaping individuals' perceptions of themselves and others. The tweets analysed further exemplified the celebration of Black women's achievements and contributions, particularly in academia, through hashtags such as #RhodesGraduate and #BlackExcellence. These hashtags align with the principles of #BlackGirlMagic, emphasising empowerment and upliftment by showcasing the achievements and resilience of Black women in various fields.

The theme of identity and representation highlights how the #BlackGirlMagic movement plays a vital role in fostering pride and empowerment among Black women by showcasing their diverse identities and experiences. Through social media platforms, Black women like Dora and Sarah find positive representation that challenges negative stereotypes and promotes a sense of belonging. This aligns with Hall's (1997) theory of positive representation, which emphasises the importance of challenging harmful stereotypes by presenting marginalised groups in empowering ways. The movement not only amplifies the voices of Black women but also provides them with a space to share their stories, successes, and resilience, particularly in areas like academia and leadership roles. As seen in tweets such as Keisha's, these platforms allow Black women to proudly assert their intellect, beauty, and accomplishments, reshaping how they are perceived both within and outside their communities. Overall, the

#BlackGirlMagic hashtag has transformed identity and representation for Black women in the digital age, offering them a powerful means of self-expression and visibility. Transitioning from this theme, the third theme will explore how the celebration of individual accomplishments within the #BlackGirlMagic movement may unintentionally downplay systemic challenges faced by Black women, potentially reinforcing existing hierarchies within the community.

5.4. Theme Three: Challenging the Hashtag

Challenging the hashtag emerged as another theme, in particular with regards to how #BlackGirlMagic highlighting of individual accomplishments may inadvertently downplay the systemic challenges and barriers that many Black women face. The celebration of Black Girl Magic might unintentionally strengthen pre-existing hierarchies within the Black community, giving preference to specific identities or experiences (Adams-Bass and Bentley-Edwards, 2020). Consequently, this could intensify feelings of exclusion among individuals whose experiences diverge from the prevailing narratives promoted by the movement. These dynamics illustrate Connell's (1987) theory in action, as societal structures and cultural norms influence and shape gender relations within specific communities (Connell's, 1987).

In the context of #BlackGirlMagic, the movement's emphasis on individual achievement reflects broader gender dynamics, where certain identities or experiences are prioritised while others are marginalised. Recognising and challenging these dynamics is essential for fostering inclusivity and empowering all members of the Black community. Participants point out that while the hashtag brings attention to positive things, it also has negative effects. It can divide the Black community and make some people feel excluded. This might make other Black women feel like they do not fit in. Mary shared how for her

“Like any movement, the hashtag may have limitations, for me I think that it pushes more dark skin Black women compare to other types of Black women, usually it's dark skin women with curly hair you know the light skin Black women are there but not as much as the dark skin women maybe it just me but for me that what I see on my timeline when I search the hashtag.”

Mary's response highlights an important limitation of the #BlackGirlMagic movement, specifically regarding its representation of different shades of Black women. She notes that the movement tends to predominantly feature dark-skinned Black women with curly hair, while lighter-skinned Black women are less visible. Another limitation lies in the lack of inclusivity within the hashtag itself. Despite its intention to celebrate the diversity of Black womanhood, #BlackGirlMagic has been critiqued for promoting a narrow representation that aligns with mainstream beauty standards and privileges (Rowe, 2022).

This exclusionary tendency can alienate Black women and girls who do not fit into the dominant narrative of success and beauty, perpetuating feelings of invisibility. Rogers echoes this by saying that "the movement can be exclusionary within the Black community" (Rogers et al, 2021: 1290). Mary's observation raises concerns about colourism within the movement, where certain skin tones are prioritised over others, perpetuating biases and hierarchies based on skin colour. Furthermore, Mary's mention of her personal experience with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag underscores the importance of acknowledging individual perspectives within discussions on representation and empowerment. While the movement aims to celebrate the diversity of Black womanhood, Mary's observation suggests that there may still be gaps in inclusive representation. Her response draws attention to the limitations of the #BlackGirlMagic movement in representing different shades of Black women. Mary's observation highlights the need for greater awareness of colourism within the movement and a more inclusive approach to representation and empowerment. By addressing these concerns, the movement can better reflect the diversity and complexity of Black womanhood.

Keisha challenges the use of 'magic,' stating that

"The challenges this movement brings, well there's a lot, yes it empowers us but why are we magic you know. I have a problem with it, it kind of looks like we have super powers. You know which kind of links to the fact that because we have super powers, we are stronger than every other human being. Therefore, we are treated different people think that Black women do not feel any pains, they are strong very strong you know the word magic is very problematic but I like what the movement stands for, I just

want to say we are not magic we are human we feel pains, we cry, we break down even Tinkerbell cried at some point you know the word magic doesn't sit well with me"

Keisha's response raises important points about the negative aspects of the term magic within the #BlackGirlMagic movement. She expresses concern that the term implies Black women possess superhuman abilities or strength, which can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and unrealistic expectations. While the hashtag aims to empower, it may unintentionally contribute to unrealistic standards, overlooking the vulnerability and well-being of Black women and girls (Walters, 2020). This perpetuation of the strong Black woman stereotype can overshadow the complexities of individual experiences and detract from the importance of acknowledging and addressing struggles (Stephanie, 2019). Moreover, #BlackGirlMagic often emphasises individual success stories, which can perpetuate the notion of the exceptional "Black woman who overcomes obstacles solely through her determination" (Roberts, 2018: 67).

Keisha argues that labelling Black women as magic may lead to the misconception that they do not experience pain or vulnerability, reinforcing the harmful stereotype of the strong Black woman. Keisha's concerns align with scholarly discussions on the stereotype of the strong Black woman and its impact on Black women. Collins (2000) discusses how the strong Black woman stereotype can prevent Black women from seeking help or expressing vulnerability, leading to adverse mental health outcomes. Furthermore, Keisha's reference to Tinkerbell and the acknowledgment of vulnerability challenges the notion of invincibility associated with the term magic. Her assertion that Black women are human beings who experience pain and struggle emphasises the importance of acknowledging and validating their humanity. Keisha's response highlights the complexities and nuances surrounding the #BlackGirlMagic movement. While she appreciates the movement's objectives, she raises valid concerns about the implications of labelling Black women as magic and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes.

In a tweet, Sarah shared a photo of herself with short, coarse natural hair, accompanied by the caption: "Having short hair is Black Girl Magic too. Many people believe that Black Girl Magic is only represented by dark-skinned individuals with afros or light-skinned with curly hair we all have that #BLACKGIRLMAGIC."

#Tweet

Full_text

Having short hair is black girl magic too

A lot of people think that having Black Girl Magic

Means being dark-skinned with an afro, or light skinned with

Curly hair we all have that #BlackGirlMAGIC 😊

Here Sarah is highlighting how the hashtag is criticised because some people say even those with short hair belong to the hashtag. Sarah noticed that when she looked through the hashtag on X/Twitter, she mainly saw Black women with afros and curly hair. There were not many women with short hair like hers. As a result, she wrote this tweet to challenge the hashtag. This is the reason why this tweet was selected. This tweet emphasises the diversity within the #BlackGirlMagic movement and challenges narrow perceptions of what it means to embody Black girl magic. Having short hair is black girl magic too, this phrase highlights the importance of embracing diverse expressions of Black girl magic, including different hairstyles.

By affirming that short hair can also be a manifestation of Black Girl Magic, the tweet challenges traditional beauty standards and celebrates individuality within the Black community. As Rowe (2022: 252) writes, “a lot of people think that having Black Girl Magic means being dark-skinned with an afro or light skinned with curly hair.” This phrase addresses common misconceptions about Black Girl Magic, particularly regarding physical appearance. It acknowledges the tendency for society to associate Black Girl Magic with specific skin tones and hair textures, highlighting the need to broaden the definition to be more inclusive. Chavers (2016) argues that “Implying that we are superhuman is just as harmful as suggesting we are animals, as it insinuates that we are fundamentally different.” This aligns with a tweet from Mary, where she posted a photo of herself wearing a vibrant yellow dress, joyfully laughing,

alongside the following tweet: “Dear black women yourself to be Human #BlackGirlMagic! Feel it! Cry, be angry, fall in love, experiment#Blackwomen” challenging the harmful implications of portraying Black women as either superhuman or subhuman

#Tweet

Full_text

Dear black women allow yourself to be Human

#BlackGirlMagic! Feel it, cry, laugh, be angry, fall

In love, experiment #Black women ❤️

For Mary the hashtag suggests that Black women are not seen as fully human. She believes that Black women should be allowed to express their emotions just like everyone else. “Dear black women,” this phrase establishes the audience of the message, addressing black women specifically. It indicates that the following message is directed towards them. The phrase “allow yourself to be a HUMAN” suggests that there may be societal or internal pressures that prevent Black women from fully expressing their humanity. It encourages them to embrace their full range of emotions, experiences, and vulnerabilities without fear or hesitation. “Feel it!” urges Black women to fully experience their emotions, whether positive or negative, without suppressing or denying them.

It encourages emotional authenticity and vulnerability. “Cry, laugh, be angry, fall in love” these are examples of the range of emotions that Black women are encouraged to embrace. Each emotion represents a different aspect of the human experience, and the phrase suggests that all of these emotions are valid and worthy of expression. This tweet reflects hooks’ (1992) assertion that Black women must reclaim the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences. It underscores the significance of emotional liberation and self-expression, echoing the themes of resistance and resilience discussed in Davis’ (1982) exploration of Black women’s activism.

“Experiment,” suggests a sense of exploration and discovery. It encourages Black women to try new things, take risks, and step outside of their comfort zones in order to fully explore and

understand themselves. Overall, the tweet encourages Black women to embrace their emotions authentically, echoing the sentiments expressed in Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework, which emphasises the importance of recognising and validating the diverse experiences of Black women. By urging black women to "feel it!" The tweet aligns with Collins' (2000) call for Black feminist thought that values emotional authenticity and acknowledges the complexity of black women's experiences.

The #BlackGirlMagic movement, often celebrated as a symbol of empowerment and resilience within the Black community, has faced criticism and challenges that warrant careful consideration. Critics argue that while the movement aims to uplift Black women and celebrate their achievements, it may inadvertently reinforce narrow beauty standards and perpetuate internal issues within the Black community, such as colourism and texturism. Additionally, some express concern that the term magic within the hashtag implies superhuman abilities, reinforcing harmful stereotypes of the strong Black woman and overlooking the vulnerabilities and struggles that Black women face. Furthermore, there are concerns about the lack of inclusivity within the movement, as it tends to prioritise certain shades of Black women over others, perpetuating biases and hierarchies based on skin colour. Dora, Mary, and Keisha each raise valid concerns about the limitations and potential drawbacks of the #BlackGirlMagic movement.

Dora highlighted how the hashtag may reinforce specific beauty standards and perpetuate internal issues within the Black community, such as texturism and colourism. Mary observed that the movement tends to predominantly feature dark-skinned Black women with curly hair, potentially marginalising lighter-skinned Black women. Mary's observation provided a nuanced perspective on representation within the #BlackGirlMagic movement. Traditionally, darker-skinned Black women have often been marginalised and underrepresented in mainstream media and societal beauty standards.

However, within the context of the #BlackGirlMagic movement, there appears to be a predominant focus on celebrating dark-skinned Black women with curly hair. These unique dynamic challenges the conventional narrative by placing darker-skinned Black women at the forefront of the movement, celebrating their beauty, resilience, and achievements. In doing so, the movement empowers darker-skinned Black women who have historically faced exclusion and marginalisation (Hossan, 2018).

Keisha questioned the use of the term magic, arguing that it may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and unrealistic expectations of Black women. These critiques underscore the complexities of representation and empowerment within marginalised communities. While the #BlackGirlMagic movement aims to celebrate the diversity and achievements of Black women, it must also address internalised biases and promote inclusivity. Scholars emphasise the need for critical self-reflection within marginalised communities to address internalised biases and promote inclusivity.

These critiques highlight the complexities of representation and empowerment within marginalised communities. While the #BlackGirlMagic movement aims to celebrate the diversity and achievements of Black women, it must also navigate the challenge of addressing internalised biases and promoting inclusivity (Chowdhury, 2021). By solely focusing on portraying Black women as inherently magical or exceptional, the movement may inadvertently reinforce notions of inherent superiority or inferiority based on race (Chowdhury, 2021). Moreover, scholars such as Beverly Daniel Tatum (1993) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) emphasise the importance of critical self-reflection within marginalised communities to address internalised biases and promote inclusivity. This involves examining how societal norms and stereotypes may influence perceptions of oneself and others within the community. By acknowledging and challenging these internalised biases, marginalised communities can work towards fostering a more inclusive and empowering environment for all individuals, regardless of race or identity. The movement can thus strive for more inclusive and empowering representations of Black womanhood that honour the full range of human experiences and vulnerabilities.

The #BlackGirlMagic movement, while empowering, has been critiqued for reinforcing narrow beauty standards, internal biases such as colourism and texturism, and promoting unrealistic expectations through the use of the term "magic." Critics argue that it often centres dark-skinned women with curly hair, marginalising others, and perpetuates the strong Black woman stereotype, which overlooks vulnerabilities. Keisha and Mary challenge these implications, calling for more inclusive representations of Black womanhood. Scholars like Tatum (1993) and Collins (2020) advocate for critical self-reflection within marginalised communities to address these internalised biases and create an environment that embraces all expressions of Black identity. As the movement evolves, focusing on intersectionality will be key to addressing the complexities of Black womanhood and ensuring inclusivity, a theme explored in the next section.

5.5. Theme Four: Inclusivity and Intersectionality

During the interview, some participants emphasised the significant role of the hashtag in uniting various kinds of Black women. This includes bringing together Black women from diverse backgrounds and with different life experiences. This unity can be understood through Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory, which examines how the intersections of race, gender, and class shape experiences of oppression and privilege. By highlighting these intersections, the hashtag fosters solidarity and connection among Black women. Intersectionality is also key to the Black Girl Magic movement. While acknowledging both its benefits and drawbacks, all participants concurred that #BlackGirlMagic serves as a means to promote inclusivity among various types of Black women and intersectionality. Sarah shared how for her

“The hashtag really brings everyone together every Black woman from everywhere, who have different skin tones, Black women who are rich and poor which is very powerful”

Sarah's response highlights the unifying power of the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag in bringing together Black women from diverse backgrounds. By stating, “The hashtag really brings everyone together,” she emphasises the inclusive nature of the movement, which transcends geographical, socio-economic, and cultural boundaries. This sentiment aligns with the broader goals of the #BlackGirlMagic movement, which aims to celebrate and uplift Black women regardless of their differences (Kelly, 2021). Geography, socio-economic status, and culture shape Black women's participation in the #BlackGirlMagic movement and their campus experiences. These factors influence how women engage with the hashtag, access technology, and express their identities. Despite these differences, the inclusive nature of the movement unites them, fostering empowerment and solidarity. On campus, these factors affect their social interactions and the challenges they face in predominantly non-Black spaces. The movement provides a platform for connection and support, helping women navigate both academic and personal life.

Sarah's mention of “every Black woman from everywhere, who have different skin tones” emphasises the diversity within the movement and acknowledges the varying experiences of Black women worldwide (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality recognises that individuals

occupy multiple social identities that intersect and interact to shape their experiences of power and marginalisation (Crenshaw 1989). For Black women and girls, navigating intersecting forms of discrimination based on race and gender is a significant challenge. A key feature of the Black Girl Magic movement is its focus on promoting self-love, self-affirmation, and self-empowerment (Kelly, 2021).

Inclusivity in the Black Girl Magic movement is crucial to celebrate and empower all Black women, no matter their skin tone, hair texture, or other physical features, as well as other factors such as class, sexuality, and disability (McPherson, 2020). This recognition of diversity is crucial for promoting inclusivity and ensuring that all Black women feel seen and valued within the movement. Additionally, Sarah's inclusion of "Black women who are rich and poor" highlights the intersectional nature of the #BlackGirlMagic movement, acknowledging that Black women experience various forms of privilege and oppression based on factors such as class and socio-economic status (Collins, 2000).

By acknowledging the economic diversity within the movement, Sarah emphasises the importance of addressing issues of inequality and injustice that affect Black women across different socio-economic backgrounds. Sarah's response reflects an understanding of the power of the #BlackGirlMagic movement to unite and empower Black women from diverse backgrounds, while also acknowledging the importance of inclusivity and intersectionality within the movement.

Keisha highlights the significant impact of the #BlackGirlMagic movement in recognising and celebrating the achievements of Black women across various professions, particularly in the legal field:

"The hashtag has been instrumental in highlighting the incredible accomplishments of Black women lawyers, judges, and advocates of every field you know. I'm giving an example of the law field because it is something that I'm very familiar with. Basically, this movement has acknowledged Black women from different background, countries, cities, class, age and so on and that makes me feel special as a Black woman I feel like I am worthy and I belong somewhere."

By stating, "The hashtag has been instrumental in highlighting the incredible accomplishments of Black women lawyers, judges, and advocates of every field," Keisha emphasises the role of

the movement in amplifying the voices and contributions of Black women in traditionally underrepresented sectors (hooks, 2016). Keisha's choice to provide an example from the legal field reflects her personal familiarity and expertise in this area, demonstrating how the movement resonates with her on a professional level. This aligns with hooks' (1992) emphasis on the importance of acknowledging the diverse experiences and identities of Black women across different fields and professions.

Moreover, Keisha's mention of the movement acknowledging Black women from "different background, countries, cities, class, age and so on" highlights the inclusivity of the #BlackGirlMagic movement and its ability to unite Black women from diverse backgrounds (Kelly, 2021). Keisha's statement, "that makes me feel special as a Black woman I feel like I am worthy and I belong somewhere," speaks to the empowering impact of the movement on her sense of self-worth and belonging (Lorde, 1984). By celebrating the achievements and experiences of Black women, the movement affirms their value and importance within society, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive representations of Black womanhood (Collins, 2000). Keisha's response illustrates how the #BlackGirlMagic movement empowers Black women by recognising their accomplishments, fostering a sense of community and belonging, and affirming their worth and value in society.

Mia highlights the inclusivity of the #BlackGirlMagic movement by acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of Black women's identities and experiences:

"Black Girl Magic also recognised the Black girly girls, the Black women tomboys, the Black gays and lesbians basically the LGBTQ+ community, it acknowledges the strong girl the soft girls and many of us it really is a movement that has managed to include every Black girl and woman which I hope it will carry on doing that."

By stating, "Black Girl Magic also recognised the Black girly girls, the Black women tomboys, the Black gays and lesbians basically the LGBTQ+ community," Mia emphasises the importance of representation and visibility for all members of the Black community, regardless of gender expression or sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1989). Mia's mention of 'the strong girl the soft girls' acknowledges the complexity and diversity of Black women's personalities and strengths, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive representations of femininity (hooks, 2000). This recognition of different expressions of femininity within the Black community is

crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among Black women with diverse identities and experiences.

Furthermore, Mia's statement that the movement "has managed to include every Black girl and woman" underscores the movement's commitment to inclusivity and intersectionality. By recognising and affirming the experiences of Black women from all walks of life, the #BlackGirlMagic movement promotes unity and solidarity among Black women, "challenging divisions and fostering a sense of community and belonging" (Aboderin, 2019: p15). Mia's hope that the movement will continue to be inclusive and welcoming to all Black women reflects the ongoing efforts within the Black community to challenge discrimination and promote equality (Kelly, 2021). By advocating for the continued recognition and celebration of Black women's diverse identities and experiences, Mia highlights the importance of intersectional activism in addressing the unique challenges faced by Black women (Davis, 1981).

Mia's response draws attention to the transformative potential of the #BlackGirlMagic movement in empowering Black women by recognising and celebrating their diverse identities, experiences, and contributions to society. Through #BlackGirlMagic, Mia emphasises the importance of not only celebrating individual achievements but also recognising the collective strength that arises from embracing diversity within the Black female experience. This inclusivity extends beyond race to encompass various intersecting identities such as gender, sexuality, class, ability, and more.

The Black Girl Magic movement has emerged as a powerful cultural phenomenon, celebrating the resilience, beauty, and achievements of Black women and girls worldwide (Simmons-Horton et al., 2023). At its core, this movement represents a paradigm shift, challenging traditional notions of beauty, success, and identity. However, the true essence of Black Girl Magic lies in its commitment to inclusivity and intersectionality, recognising and celebrating the diverse experiences and identities within the Black female community (Mason, 2021). Inclusivity within the Black Girl Magic movement is about ensuring that all Black women and girls, regardless of their backgrounds, identities, or lived experiences, feel seen, valued, and empowered (Williams et al, 2023).

In a society that often seeks to diminish the worth and dignity of Black women and girls, the movement serves as a radical act of resistance, reclaiming narratives of beauty, intelligence,

and strength. By celebrating the unique qualities and contributions of Black women and girls, “the movement challenges harmful stereotypes and uplifts positive representations of Black womanhood” (Kelly, 2021: 69). Moreover, the Black Girl Magic movement extends beyond individual empowerment to collective action and solidarity. It fosters spaces for Black women and girls to come together, support one another, and advocate for social change (Rogers, 2022). Whether through grassroots organising, online activism, or artistic expression, Black women and girls are utilising the platform of Black Girl Magic to address issues such as racial injustice, gender-based violence, economic inequality, and more (Edwards, 2019).

While proponents highlight the movement’s ability to challenge harmful stereotypes and uplift positive representations of Black womanhood, critics contend that it may overlook the complexities and diversity within the Black female experience (Hassan, 2018). They argue that by promoting a singular image of Black womanhood, the movement risks erasing the experiences and identities of those who do not conform to these ideals (Blay, 2021). This was supported by Sara’s photo, by sharing a photo of herself and her friends, showcasing a diverse group of individuals from various nationalities, backgrounds, and skin tones. Accompanied by the tweet: “#differentnationalities#lightkinbrownskin we all have that black girl magic#my girls#Rhodes #Gtown” promoting diversity within her friendship group. Adams-Bass and Bentley-Edwards affirm this by stating, “Embracing the diversity of Black womanhood fuels our collective strength and resilience” (2020, 105). This emphasises the importance of inclusivity and diversity within the movement. Sarah’s tweet is shown below:

#Tweet

Full_text

#differentnationalities#lightskinbrownskin

We all have that black girl magic#mygirls #Rhodes

#Gtown

Here Sarah is talking to being with different kinds of Black girls at an event. They all came from different places but had something in common: they're all Black. They face similar struggles, which brought them together to talk and discuss these issues. For Sarah, Black Girl Magic is about bringing different Black women together who share similar issues, so they can talk about them and find solutions. This tweet highlights the universality of Black girl magic across different nationalities and skin tones. The hashtags #differentnationalities and #lightskinbrownskin suggest an acknowledgment of the diversity within the Black community, emphasising that Black girl magic transcends geographical and racial boundaries. This aligns with Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality, which recognises the interconnectedness of various social identities, including race and nationality. The phrase "we all have that black girl magic" reinforces the idea that Black Girl Magic is inherent to all Black women, regardless of their nationality or skin tone (hooks, 2016).

This assertion challenges stereotypes and promotes inclusivity within the #BlackGirlMagic movement, emphasising the importance of embracing and celebrating the diversity of Black womanhood. The hashtags #mygirls and #Rhodes suggests a sense of community and solidarity among Black women, highlighting the bonds of sisterhood and support that exist within the Black community (Collins, 2000). By using these hashtags, the tweet not only celebrates Black Girl Magic but also fosters a sense of belonging and unity among Black women from different backgrounds. Dora's tweet reflects this sentiment as she shares a photo with her friends from diverse backgrounds, each engaged in different activities. Accompanied by the following hashtags: #Rhodesstudents #zambia #malawi #southafrica #ghana #uganda #journalists #politicians #economists #pharmacists #writers #blackgirlmagic #blackexcellence.

#Tweet

Full_text

#Rhodesstudents#zambia#malawi#southafrica#ghana
#uganda#journalists#politicians#econmists#pharmacists
#writers#blackgirlmagic 🥰 #blackexcellence

Here Dora is speaking about her friends who are Black and come from different parts of the country. They are all studying different things, and for her that is Black Girl Magic. This tweet celebrates the achievements and diversity of Black individuals, particularly those associated with Rhodes University and various African countries. The inclusion of hashtags such as #Rhodesstudents, #zambia, #malawi, #southafrica, and #uganda suggests a recognition of the geographical and cultural diversity represented within the Black community.

Furthermore, the tweet mentions various professions and fields of expertise, including journalists, politicians, economists, pharmacists, and writers. This highlights the breadth of accomplishments and contributions made by Black individuals across different sectors and industries. By showcasing the achievements of Black professionals in diverse fields, the tweet challenges stereotypes and promotes the idea of Black excellence (hooks, 2016). The hashtags #BlackGirlMagic and #blackexcellence serve to uplift and empower Black women and men, respectively, recognising their achievements and contributions to society (Collins, 2000). By emphasising the magic and excellence inherent in Black individuals, the tweet reinforces positive representations of Black identity and counters negative stereotypes.

It further celebrates the diversity and achievements of Black individuals from Rhodes University and various African countries, highlighting their contributions to different fields and industries. It underscores the importance of recognising and celebrating Black excellence across different contexts and regions. The #BlackGirlMagic movement has emerged as a powerful force for celebrating the resilience, beauty, and achievements of Black women and girls worldwide. Rooted in the principles of inclusivity and intersectionality, this movement challenges traditional notions of beauty, success, and identity. While #BlackGirlMagic aims to recognise and celebrate the diverse experiences and identities within the Black female community, some argue that it may perpetuate certain stereotypes or overlook certain marginalised voices. For instance, despite its commitment to inclusivity, there may still be instances where certain groups of Black women feel excluded or underrepresented within the movement.

Adams-Bass and Bentley Edwards (2020) contend that the movement's emphasis on celebrating individual achievements may overshadow systemic issues facing Black women as a collective, such as systemic racism, economic disparities, and healthcare inequalities. Furthermore, while the movement emphasises inclusivity and intersectionality, there may be instances where certain intersecting identities, such as LGBTQ+ Black women or disabled

Black women, feel marginalised or overlooked within the broader narrative of #BlackGirlMagic. In order to truly embody its principles of inclusivity and intersectionality, the movement must actively work to amplify the voices and experiences of all Black women, regardless of their background or identity.

Inclusivity and intersectionality, examines how the #BlackGirlMagic movement unites Black women from diverse backgrounds while emphasising both its strengths and limitations. Interviews reveal that the hashtag fosters solidarity among Black women by recognising various intersecting identities, such as race, class, and socio-economic status (Crenshaw, 1989). Participants highlight its role in celebrating a wide range of experiences, from different skin tones and socio-economic backgrounds to varying gender expressions and sexual orientations (Kelly, 2021; hooks, 2016). However, while the movement promotes inclusivity, it also faces critiques for potentially reinforcing narrow beauty standards and overlooking some marginalised voices, including LGBTQ+ and disabled Black women (Blay, 2019; Hassan, 2018). The emphasis on individual achievements may overshadow broader systemic issues affecting Black women collectively (Adams-Bass and Bentley-Edwards, 2020). To truly uphold its principles of inclusivity and intersectionality, the movement must continue to address these gaps and ensure that all Black women feel represented and valued.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter showcased how individuals used the hashtag as a means to explore their identities on X/Twitter through a discussion of the four key themes of: 1) empowerment and upliftment; 2) identity and representation; 3) challenges and evolving the hashtag; and 4) inclusivity and intersectionality.

Participants used #BlackGirlMagic to talk about being Black women students and share their stories. They spoke about things like feeling supported and empowered while using the hashtag. It is a significant part of how they see themselves and how they tell their stories online. The concepts of empowerment and upliftment served as pillars of strength and resilience within the #BlackGirlMagic movement. Through self-love, solidarity, and collective action, Black women and girls are inspired to thrive despite societal obstacles. Mia, Ruth, and Keisha's responses highlight a shared understanding that #BlackGirlMagic is more than just a social media trend; it is a call for empowerment and solidarity within the Black community.

The participants' tweets further demonstrated how the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag uplifts Black women. Tweets celebrating aspects of Black bodies, such as hair, skin, and clothing, reflect a prevalent theme of self-empowerment and mutual upliftment. Overall, the #BlackGirlMagic movement continues to empower and uplift Black women, encouraging them to embrace their uniqueness and resilience in the face of adversity.

Furthermore, the theme of identity and representation connects to bigger discussions about racism, sexism, and colourism. Black women face many different kinds of discrimination that affect how they see themselves and what opportunities they have. By sharing their voices and experiences, the Black Girl Magic movement aims to break down these unfair systems and create spaces where Black women can be celebrated and supported for who they are. The tweets shared by participants also show how the Black Girl Magic movement celebrates Black women's achievements and intelligence, challenging stereotypes and biases. By highlighting both their academic accomplishments and their physical attractiveness, these tweets present a more complete picture of Black women's lives.

The hashtag #BlackGirlMagic, often celebrated for its role in empowering Black women, also faces some challenges that need to be discussed, for instance the hashtag might not include everyone. While it aims to celebrate all kinds of Black women, it could end up favouring those who fit certain beauty standards or success stories. This might make some Black women feel left out or invisible. However, despite these challenges, the hashtag also serves as a platform for important discussions about racism and prejudice. In interviews, some participants pointed out these potential issues with the hashtag.

Participants mentioned how it might reinforce certain beauty standards or exclude certain groups of Black women. They also talked about the importance of making the hashtag more inclusive and addressing different kinds of experiences within the Black community. One participant even shared a tweet challenging the idea that only certain types of Black women have magic. They argued that all Black women, regardless of their appearance, have something special to offer. This shows the importance of recognising and celebrating diversity within the Black community, making sure everyone feels included and valued.

Inclusivity is a significant aspect of the Black Girl Magic movement. It is about making sure that all Black women and girls, no matter where they come from or what their lives are like, feel valued and empowered. This means understanding that Black women and girls have different experiences because of their race, gender, sexuality, class, and more. It's about

recognising that everyone's story is important and deserves to be heard. says that people have multiple social identities that interact to shape their experiences. For Black women and girls, this means facing discrimination because of their race, gender, and often other factors like class, sexuality, or disability.

One significant aspect of the Black Girl Magic movement is its focus on self-love, self-affirmation, and self-empowerment. In a world that often tries to put Black women and girls down, the movement is a way to fight back and reclaim their beauty, intelligence, and strength. It's about celebrating what makes each Black woman special and challenging stereotypes that hold them back. But the Black Girl Magic movement also has its critics. Harris (2021) argues that the movement focuses too much on individual success and not enough on bigger issues that affect all Black women. During interviews, some participants talked about how the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic brings together Black women from all different backgrounds. They said it is powerful because it includes Black women of all skin tones, socioeconomic statuses, and professions. It showed that no matter who you are or where you come from, you belong.

The tweets shared by participants also highlighted the importance of inclusivity and intersectionality. They celebrate the diversity of Black women and show that everyone has their own kind of magic, no matter what they look like or where they're from. Overall, the movement is about celebrating and uplifting Black women and girls in all their diversity. It's a way to show that every Black woman is special and deserves to be celebrated.

This chapter discussed how individuals utilise the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag to express their identities on social media platforms (X/Twitter), sharing personal stories as Black women students. Their narratives often centre around feelings of support and empowerment derived from engaging with the hashtag, reflecting its significance in shaping their online personas and storytelling. The concepts of empowerment and upliftment serve as foundational principles within the #BlackGirlMagic movement, inspiring resilience and strength among Black women and girls despite societal barriers.

Through sharing their voices and experiences, the #The BlackGirlMagic movement aims to dismantle these unjust systems and foster spaces where Black women are celebrated and supported authentically. However, while celebrated for its empowering role, the hashtag also faces challenges. It risks reinforcing certain beauty standards and excluding marginalised groups within the Black community. Participants raise awareness of these issues, advocating for inclusivity and broader representation within the movement. Despite criticisms, the

movement remains a platform for vital discussions on racism and prejudice, emphasising the importance of embracing diversity and ensuring all Black women feel valued and included. Inclusivity lies at the heart of the Black Girl Magic movement, aiming to empower all Black women and girls regardless of their backgrounds. Intersectionality plays a crucial role, acknowledging the multifaceted identities and experiences that shape Black women's lives. By focusing on self-love, affirmation, and empowerment, the movement challenges stereotypes and celebrates the uniqueness of every Black woman.

This study addresses issues in media studies by examining how the #BlackGirlMagic movement intersects with media representation, focusing on the portrayal of Black women in digital spaces. Additionally, it engages interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing from gender studies, social justice, and cultural studies to explore the movement's impact on inclusivity, intersectionality, and empowerment within broader societal discourses. Additionally, future research could focus on the long-term impact of the #BlackGirlMagic movement on real-world social and political change, particularly in terms of policy, representation in media industries, and the empowerment of Black women in various sectors.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The emergence of the Black Girl Magic hashtag in 2013 sparked a significant shift in social media dynamics, fuelling a movement that transcended digital boundaries. Initially gaining momentum on platforms like X/Twitter and Instagram, this hashtag became a symbol of celebration for the diverse achievements and resilience of Black women. This study explored how young Black women students at Rhodes University construct their identities using the hashtag. The findings highlighted the role of social media as a dynamic space for identity expression, empowerment, and advocacy.

This study specifically explored how young Black women students at Rhodes University in South Africa engage with and construct their identities using the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. Through this lens, the research delved into the ways in which social media serves as a dynamic space for identity expression, empowerment, and advocacy. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of these students' identities, revealing how the hashtag allowed them to both resist oppressive narratives and celebrate their individuality. This study underscored the importance of digital spaces in shaping modern identities, especially for marginalised groups like Black women. Through #BlackGirlMagic, participants were able to craft and curate their own narratives, challenging societal norms and building a sense of belonging and empowerment within a global community.

This research identified four themes through thematic analysis of tweets and interviews: empowerment and upliftment, identity and representation, challenges in evolving the hashtag, and inclusivity and intersectionality. The theme empowerment and upliftment in the #BlackGirlMagic movement is primarily recognised for its role in empowering Black women by celebrating their achievements and resilience. The hashtag has provided a vital platform for Black women to assert their successes, thereby fostering a sense of community and pride. This empowerment extends to various realms, including academic and leadership achievements. The theme identity and representation showed how #BlackGirlMagic played a crucial role in shaping positive representation for Black women, challenged harmful stereotypes, and showcased diverse identities. Social media platforms serve as spaces where Black women can

share their stories, successes, and resilience, thereby reshaping societal perceptions and enhancing a sense of belonging. Through this visibility, Black women can assert their intellect, beauty, and achievements, contributing to a more nuanced and empowering portrayal of Black womanhood.

Furthermore, the theme challenges in evolving the hashtag highlights how despite its empowering potential, the #BlackGirlMagic movement has faced critiques for reinforcing narrow beauty standards and perpetuating internal biases such as featurism and texturism. The hashtag often highlights dark-skinned women with curly hair, which can marginalise lighter-skinned women and those with different hair textures. This focus may also perpetuate the stereotype of the strong Black woman, potentially overlooking the vulnerabilities and diverse experiences within the community. Critics, including participants like Keisha and Mary, call for a more inclusive representation that embraces all expressions of Black womanhood. Scholars such as Collins (2000) and Tatum (1993) advocate for critical self-reflection within marginalised communities to address these internalized biases and foster a more inclusive environment. The theme of inclusivity and intersectionality emerged as another critical aspect of the #BlackGirlMagic movement. The research emphasised the importance of recognising and addressing the complexities of Black womanhood through an intersectional lens. As the hashtag evolves, it must ensure that it remains inclusive of all expressions of identity and experience. Scholars such as Crenshaw (1989) emphasise the need for critical self-reflection within marginalised communities to tackle internalised biases and promote a broader sense of inclusivity.

This research discussed how Black women at Rhodes University use the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag to articulate and celebrate their identities. It provided insights into the hashtag's role as a platform for expressing empowerment, self-love, and personal narratives, thereby shaping their online personas and storytelling. This research highlighted the hashtag's function as a source of empowerment and upliftment, showcasing how it fosters solidarity and collective strength among Black women despite societal challenges. However, the study also identified key challenges associated with the hashtag, such as the risk of reinforcing specific beauty standards and potentially excluding marginalised groups within the Black community. The findings illustrated that while #BlackGirlMagic is celebrated for its empowering role, it faces challenges related to inclusivity.

The hashtag sometimes appears to favour those who conform to certain beauty standards or success narratives, which can lead to feelings of exclusion among some Black women. According to participants' responses, some stated that the hashtag is commonly linked with darker-skinned Black women, while others argued that it tends to favour lighter-skinned Black women. Texturism, the preference for certain hair textures over others, and featurism, the preference for particular facial features, both play a role in shaping how Black women are represented and celebrated within the hashtag (Rowe, 2022). These biases can influence which contributions are highlighted and how individuals are perceived and valued within the movement. For instance, women with certain hair types or facial features that align more closely with Eurocentric beauty standards might receive more visibility and acclaim, while others may be overlooked or marginalised (Rowe, 2022).

Furthermore, the research indicates that significant achievements are more likely to be celebrated and recognised as #BlackGirlMagic. The research highlights that while #BlackGirlMagic is intended to uplift all Black women, these biases can lead to a narrower representation of what is considered "magical." This discrepancy can affect how inclusive and equitable the movement truly is, impacting the broader goal of embracing and uplifting the full spectrum of Black womanhood.

Participants in the study noted these issues, emphasising the need for the hashtag to encompass a broader range of experiences. One participant even shared a tweet challenging the idea that only certain types of Black women possess "magic," asserting that every Black woman, regardless of appearance, has unique qualities to offer. Inclusivity remains a central focus of the Black Girl Magic movement, aiming to ensure that all Black women and girls feel valued and empowered regardless of their backgrounds or life circumstances. By recognising and celebrating the diverse experiences shaped by factors such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and disability, the movement seeks to ensure that every Black woman's story is heard and appreciated.

Overall, the research provided an analysis of how the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag is used by Black women at Rhodes University to navigate their identities, address challenges, and promote a more inclusive and empowering representation of Black womanhood.

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Appendix 1: Tweets

Tweet 1: Mary

#Tweet

Full_text

All natural. Love this hair. Tough, you soft. #Kinkycurlyhair
#BlackGirlMagic#selflove#Rhodes#SouthAfrica. Sunday #Beyonce

Tweet 2: Mia

#Tweet

Full_text

A whole graduate#Graduate#blackgirlmagic
#rhodesGraduate. ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
We did it 😊

Tweet 3: Ruth

#Tweet

Full_text

Celebrate your heritage
#BlackGirlMagic
Black Power!!! 💪

Tweet 4: Keisha

#Tweet

Full_text

Beauty and brains #Rhodes Graduate

#Blackgirlmagic women in Geography

#Blackexcellence 🧑

Tweet 5: Sarah

#Tweet

Full_text

Having short hair is black girl magic too

A lot of people think that having Black Girl Magic

Means being dark-skinned with an afro, or light skinned with

Curly hair we all have that #BlackGirlMAGIC 🧐

Tweet 6: Mary

#Tweet

Full_text

Dear black women allow yourself to be Human

#BlackGirlMagic! Feel it, cry, laugh, be angry, fall

In love, experiment #Black women ❤️

Tweet 7: Sarah

#Tweet

Full_text

#differentnationalities#lightskinbrownskin

We all have that black girl magic#mygirls #Rhodes

#Gtown

Tweet 9: Dora

#Tweet

Full_text

#Rhodesstudents#zambia#malawi#southafrica#ghana

#uganda#journalists#politicians#econmists#pharmacists

#writers#blackgirlmagic 🥰 #blackexcellence

Appendix 2: Interview Data

Interview Questions

1. Are you familiar with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag?
2. How would you define your understanding of the term "Black Girl Magic"?
3. Have you ever used the hashtag? Why did you use it?
4. Which social media site did you use the hashtag on?
5. In what ways do you personally relate to or identify with the concept of #BlackGirlMagic?
6. Can you share any instances in which the hashtag made you feel acknowledged and empowered?
7. How does your personal identity shape your involvement with the hashtag?
8. How does the hashtag affect your identity? And how do you use it?
9. Do you think the hashtag reinforces specific beauty standards?
10. What kind of Black women do you think are included in this hashtag, i.e., who has "Black girl magic"?
11. Do you think the hashtag has limitations? What are they? How can it evolve?
12. What are your general perceptions and experiences regarding the representation of black women on social media?

Interview Responses

1. Are you familiar with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag?

Mia: Yes, I'm very familiar with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. It's all over my social media feeds.

Ruth: Yes, I'm familiar with the #BlackGirlMagic

Keisha: Yes, I am definitely family with the term Black Girl Magic.

Dora: Yes, I am familiar with the hashtag

Sarah: Yes, I am familiar with the hashtag Black Girl Magic

Mary: Yes, I'm familiar with the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag. It's a popular and empowering hashtag used on social media to celebrate and uplift the achievements and resilience of black women and girls.

2. How would you define your understanding of the term "Black Girl Magic?"

Mia: In my perspective, Black Girl Magic is typically linked with the empowerment and encouragement of women. It recognises the success of black women wasn't acknowledged, considering the historical oppression they faced. However, currently, this term signifies upliftment for me, a phrase that I use to support and uplift my fellow black women.

Ruth: I would define it or let's say my understanding of the #BlackGirlMagic is essentially a trend or a social movement that seeks to empower the lives of a Black girls and women especially in a world where we are constantly oppressed.

Keisha: My understanding of the term would be that it exists to encourage black women to be themselves, to show up, take up spaces in society confidently, and walk fully in their purpose. It reminds them that they are valuable, seen, and powerful. Black Girl Magic... exists to encourage Black women to be themselves, to show up, take up spaces in society confidently, and walk fully in their purpose. It reminds them that they are valuable, seen, and powerful. It empowers and uplift, let me say this it basically encourages them to do anything that they put their mind to.

Dora: My understanding of the term Black Girl Magic is any girls just black girls existing. Black girls do things in society that we won't be able to do or we shouldn't be doing because we exist in a space where it is sad but still black women are at the bottom of the pyramid in society wherever you go. So Black Girl Magic much like the uhm Black is beautiful movement in the sixties is about empowering black people more specifically black women.

Sarah: Black Girl Magic is like a movement to encourage black women to make themselves more visible in spaces that we use to be invisible in to also encourage black women to not play small, to also make other people feel comfortable with them but.... you know to be ambitious and not set limitations to their ambitions and work as hard as they can. You know to break those glass ceilings and open those doors which were previously closed to them. Just like women feeling comfortable in taking up space in the corporate world, in the fashion world wherever world that they're in. to be comfortable taking their place and not feel imposter syndrome to know that they are hard workers, time has limited them in whatever space they're in.

Mary: Black Girl Magic is a term that signifies the strength, beauty, and resilience of Black women and girls. It celebrates their achievements, confidence, and unique qualities that make them stand out in a world that often marginalizes or underrepresents them.

3. Have you ever used the hashtag? Why did you use it?

Mia: Absolutely, I've used the hashtag on a few occasions. One time, I used it in a tweet, and another time was when my cousin posted about her graduation on Instagram. She was getting her master's degree in psychology, and I shared messages like Black Girl Magic and Black Excellence to show support and pride. I was really proud of her because she was breaking the stereotype that suggests black women can't achieve much. I used the hashtag to encourage and celebrate Black excellence. I also used the hashtag in a post related to something Michelle Obama said, though I can't remember the details but yeah.

Ruth: no not really, to be honest I haven't really used it, I've just seen it on social media but I haven't really used it on a social media post or any form of social media engagement. Which leads to the second question I think I posted on my Instagram story reposting someone else's Black Girl Magic Post.

Keisha: No, I have actually never used it. I hope I'm not lying but I don't recall ever using the term.

Dora: I personally haven't used the hashtag but my friends, my sisters, my aunties have used the hashtag. and I think we use it especially on social media when we're taking sunset pictures because your black skin just glows in the sun. so, it more of an aesthetic and also empowerment whenever you see posts of a black girl doing something, a black woman who has just graduated from her masters, a black woman who has achieved this uhm who has achieved something in life that usually how the hashtag is used Black Girl Magic gain to empower the community of black women.

Sarah: I have used it the hashtag uhm Black Girl Magic uhm I used it just to kind of show that black women are intelligent because I feel like on social media uhm when people think about the whole thing of black girl it very synonymous with being ghetto you know being loud being aggressive it a lot of negative connotations on social media when we talk about black women. So, the hashtag Black Girl Magic I like the hashtag because it says we are something other than all those negative stereotypes we are also like whole people you know. Representation matters and the hashtag demonstrates just that, it shows that a black woman is worthy to be recognised. For us Black women who we are often also represented or identified as loud, stupid ratchet and it still happening today and the American Black women and their weird shows makes it worse not all Black women are like that you know. Imagine little Black girls who will grow up to think that they have to be loud, ratchet or stupid it a such a shame. This is why we are here at this university to change the narrative of the representation of Black girls and women. That black women can be educated, smart, beautiful, polite, we are so many things that the media has failed to represent us and with the hashtag it even represents us in a positive way and I love it

Mary: Absolutely, I've used the hashtag numerous times. I've used it to celebrate the achievements of black women in various fields, to express pride in our cultural heritage, and

to connect with a community that understands the challenges we face and the strength it takes to overcome them.

4. Which social media site did you use the hashtag on?

Mary: I've used the hashtag primarily on Twitter, Instagram, and occasionally on TikTok.

Ruth: like I said I don't really use it but I guess I used it on Instagram to repost someone else's story.

Dora: uhm mm because I haven't used it, I can't really say but I've seen it a lot on Instagram and Twitter.

Keisha: No, I have actually never used it. I hope I'm not lying but I don't recall ever using the it.

Sarah: I used the hashtag on Instagram and on WhatsApp

Mia: I mainly use it on Instagram and Twitter because those platforms have a strong community around this hashtag. I don't use it on WhatsApp because this is a very interpersonal social media platform uhm so I tend to use it on a more public social media platform.

5. In what ways do you personally relate to or identify with the concept of #BlackGirlMagic?

Keisha: I've not really engaged that much with it, especially on social media. Maybe in person when somebody says it to me, I will respond, and if I hear somebody else saying it to me or a friend, I will respond by either hyping them up or you know, that kind of thing. But I've never actually felt the need to use the term.

Mia: When it comes to my identity, I don't feel like I can connect with the term Black Girl Magic just yet. Personally, I don't think I've achieved enough to earn that label because, to me, it seems like something you earn by reaching a certain level. For me, it involves acts of generosity, giving back to the community, empowering and protecting women, and taking real actions to support these ideas, not just talking about them. In terms of my identity, I haven't quite reached the point where I can associate myself with this term. However, I believe that in the future, as I achieve bigger things which, for me, are closely related to education, success, perseverance, and humility I might start to relate to it. Education, prestige, and these kinds of accomplishments are often linked to Black Girl Magic. So, I think that once I graduate, find a job, and become a contributing member of society, I'll be closer to understanding and relating to this term, but for now, I feel like I've only done the basics and can't really connect with it.

Dora: I think I fully relate to it started off as well I believe it started off as an African American thing but it spread and it became global I think I relate to it in that I see myself in the women who are celebrated, I see myself achieving those things when I...like for example I'm finishing this degree when I finish that degree trust and believe I'm going to say Black Girl Magic on Twitter and Instagram because that what it is it about empowerment and empowering other black women and when my friends graduate it will be Black Girl Magic so that how I think relate to it in that I see myself in them and I use it to empower myself and to motivate myself.

Sarah: I would say I identify with the concept of Black Girl Magic because of what I am studying I am studying international relations and that's usually a space that taken mostly by white women or white European women and white men and you know in the world of international relation I felt that Africa has been left behind even though the world relies on Africa for so many things so I identify with the concept such as I like seeing women such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie the Nigerian writer I love black women taking up that space and actually speaking on the issues of black women especially the difference between western feminism and African feminism that's how I personally identify with Black Girl Magic because there is a difference in experiences not all women experience the same thing. Depending on where you live and where you are and especially depending on your race so personally Black Girl Magic for me, I look to black women who have broken those glass ceilings and have made it to where I want to be.

Ruth: I think I personally relate to it in terms of feeling comfortable in my own natural hair because there are times when most of the time during the year, I would have my hair in braids and I would feel insecure to have my natural hair out because it doesn't fit the standard also within the black community of good curly long natural hair so I think the Black Girl Magic is essentially feeling comfortable in my own space, in my own body and just accepting myself for who I am.

Mary: As a black woman pursuing a law degree, I personally relate to #BlackGirlMagic in several ways. It's a reminder that I, too, can achieve greatness in a profession where diversity is needed and sometimes lacking. It's a source of inspiration and motivation to overcome challenges and be unapologetically myself.

6. Can you share any instances in which the hashtag made you feel acknowledged and empowered?

Sarah: I guess this question also related to my previous answer that has made me feel acknowledged and empowered because you know when I see black women especially Chimamanda for me is an inspiration because she's a woman who wears her natural hair like proud and loud, she always says that it is not a political statement uhm she's not afraid to like express her opinions and in a honest way and in a way that she doesn't play small you know. So, yeah.

Ruth: I think in terms of the movie industry and how there was a whole issue of how a lot of the black beautiful girls were always specifically light skin girls with long hair or black girls with short hair. So, I think instances that sort of acknowledge the issue of the movie industry creating a narrative of what black girl beauty is with the use of Black Girl Magic to say the movie industry needs to stop pushing this narrative and actually accept all black girls in all forms, shapes and sizes and hair types for who they are.

Mary: The hashtag has been instrumental in highlighting the incredible accomplishments of black women lawyers, judges, and advocates. It has made me feel acknowledged and empowered by showcasing their success stories and demonstrating that we can thrive in the legal field despite historical and systemic barriers.

Keisha: Personally, I think this term serves as a reminder that despite the circumstances that Black women exist in, the pressures of poverty, marginalisation, and more, we have resilience and power, passed down through generations. It's a reminder that I've inherited the same Black Girl Magic that my grandmother had, even if it wasn't identified as such in her time. She persevered and overcame her circumstances, which has paved the way for a better future for me and my generation. I feel like I can do anything, overcome any challenges, whether they are financial, social, economic, or political, because of this term. It's an affirmation that I use to remind myself that being Black shouldn't hinder me. I see myself as a powerful human being with significant value to add to society. It's a source of inspiration and strength for me.

Dora: uhm I think when we finished high school it didn't make sense but we finished our matric but we were all so happy and we were a small group of black girls in my school in my high school. So, we were all like Black Girl Magic yeah, we did as if we were going to fail but we made it. So, I think that when I felt acknowledged and I felt empowered yeah.

Mia: As I mentioned earlier, no one has ever used that term to describe me, and I haven't really connected with it yet. But I would guess that it's like a symbol that signifies something important. It doesn't mean I've finally become successful in the sense that I've made it big, but rather, I've achieved recognition within my black community. Now, I'm seen as a leader, a hardworking individual, and a respected person in my community. It's important to understand that in many black communities, a majority of people still face challenges like lack of education, poverty, and various physical, mental, and psychological difficulties. Financial problems are common too. So, the term Black Girl Magic represents rising above these negative stereotypes associated with black people and black women in particular. It's a way of acknowledging your hard work and accomplishments. You've had to put in a lot of effort to earn respect because respect isn't given freely; you have to work for it. This term is like a badge of honour that you can proudly wear within the community. It signifies that you're associated with prestige, education, and other positive qualities.

7. How does your personal identity shape your involvement with the hashtag?

Mary: My identity as a black woman is at the core of my involvement with the hashtag. It's a means of expressing pride in my heritage, acknowledging the strength of black women, and advocating for the recognition and representation we deserve.

Mia: My personal identity as a black woman definitely plays a role in my involvement with the hashtag. It's a way for me to celebrate and uplift my community.

Keisha: While I haven't used the hashtag, I've observed how it has made many Black women feel acknowledged and empowered. It serves as a spotlight on our accomplishments and triumphs, demonstrating that we excel in various fields despite barriers created by society.

Ruth: I don't think it affects my identity I just think like I said earlier in the interview I think I just make me more comfortable.

Sarah: So, yeah, I am a black woman in South Africa I've grown up around the white people so you know you get told a lot you know

Dora: As a black woman naturally I'm going to look out for things that empower me, that makes me feel safe, make me feel seen, make me feel like I am worthy and I am good enough and acknowledging my achievement because black women have to work twice as hard to achieve the same thing that other people have to achieve so that's how my personal identity shapes my involvement with the hash stag. As a black woman again you are exposed to the right word? Well to all these other inequalities and discrimination actually so yeah that how my personal identity shapes my involvement with the hashtag.

8. How does the hashtag affect your identity? And how do you use it?

Dora: uhm affect my identity mmm isn't that the same question uhm Black Girl Magic honestly before I want to say around 2016 the hashtag was used to really empower women like black women, we see you know it about she looks good, her melanin is shiny so overtime the hashtag has not affected my identity. But I think at its peak it made me feel empowered again. It motivated me to do things because I saw other women doing it so I'm like yeah that could be me too.

Keisha: My personal identity as a black woman shapes my involvement with the hashtag. It's a source of pride and strength, reminding me of the importance of representation and amplifying our voices in a world that sometimes overlooks us. It's a movement that connects me to a supportive community of black women who understand the unique challenges we face.

Mia: The hashtag reinforces my sense of identity and self-worth. It reminds me that I am part of a larger movement of empowerment. Although I don't identify with it as of yet because I feel like I haven't achieved that standard of being called Black Girl Magic.

Mary: The hashtag strengthens my identity by reminding me of the importance of representation and the value of diverse voices in the legal field. I use it to connect with a supportive community and to promote the idea that black women can excel in any profession, including law.

Ruth: I think you're asking the same question; I might echo my previous answer. It doesn't really affect my identity; it just makes me more comfortable; I don't use it that often but I will make sure to use it next year.

Sarah: This feeds in perfectly to this question, if you grow up around white people you talk a certain way and they're like you're not like other black people that used to really kind of offend me. I used to be like how many black people do you know for you to actually say that I'm not like other black women you know so. I wanted to remove the negative connotations that most people have when they think about a black woman.

9. Do you think the hashtag reinforces specific beauty standards?

Mia: Alright, when it comes to the concept of Black Girl Magic in the context of beauty standards, we've already discussed how it earns respect and stands in the community. Now, let's talk about society as a whole, particularly from the perspective of girls. As we all know, blackness hasn't always been considered a beauty standard or something to admire. In fact, in many countries, fair skin has been preferred, and dark-skinned people have been associated with poverty. The term Black Girl Magic challenges this idea and reinforces the message that black is beautiful. It emphasizes that being black doesn't diminish one's beauty; it actually enhances it. This concept is often linked with very natural women. These are women who wear minimal makeup, have natural hair, and are deeply rooted in their cultural hair practices. Hairstyles have played a significant role in African and black history. Our ancestors used to braid their hair, and they even used their hair patterns to communicate with each other about escape plans during the time of slavery. So, Black Girl Magic has a strong historical significance for us. It's a way of celebrating and protecting our natural beauty, especially in the face of a history where slave owners would shave our hair and use it for various purposes. This celebration is a way of acknowledging the crucial role our natural beauty has played in our history and embracing it.

Keisha: The hashtag, while not directly affecting my identity, reinforces my sense of pride and resilience as a black woman. I use it to amplify the voices of black women and to promote the idea that we can thrive in any profession or situation. It's a tool for advocating for equal rights and opportunities.

Sarah: No, I don't think so the hashtag kind of lets black women be what they want to be in the way they want to be. If you want to wear your hair straight that's okay. But I think it has actually opened a big space for the natural hair movement and that is why Chimamanda always says that her hair is not a political statement but because you know for you to be deemed professional and stuff like that your hair has to be straight and to wear wigs and stuff like that. And we see that there's a lot of self-hate uhm in the black female community toward our natural hair and I feel like Black girl Magic has made black people feel more comfortable in wearing their natural hair and educating others over their natural hair. And actually, helping people seeing the beauty in their natural hair so I wouldn't say that it reinforces specific beauty standards I would say that it just allows and encourages black women to be...like yeah it allows the hashtag actually allows them to express themselves and their beauty uhm the way they want to be. I think even with fashion you know we see now movement of like African cloths and African prints spreading not just like Eurocentric clothes and stuff like that so you can also wear your chitenges and still be viewed as beautiful and as professional.

Ruth: I think it reinforces beauty standards but then again, I think beauty standards are a bit of a social construct. It's this whole thing of like you have to fit into a certain category for you to be declared or for society to say that you're essentially beautiful. From my point of view, I think we need to just deal with this beauty standard and just accept people for who they're and just let them be comfortable in their own space and create their own images instead of society telling them what to do, how to look or what hairstyle to do. Just let people be them at the end of the day.

Dora: Yes, when used in I want to say incorrectly but when used to uhm push certain narratives so black girls right in the black community there's also the issue of colourism and texturism. I think around 2016 with that peak that was a peak time of Black Girl Magic melanin etc you know empowering black women much like the sixties. I think, what is your question? I was just rambling yes; I think the hashtag reinforces specific beauty standard when used to push certain narratives for example if you see a thread on Instagram on Tik Tok or whatever platform its light skin girls with a with curly 3A hair and the post is black women are gorgeous and its Black Girl Magic Melanated sun kissed whatever but the whole thread is just black light skin women. So, what are you trying to say about dark skin women? What are you trying to say about brown skin women, are we not good enough? Are we not worthy? So, I think that the hashtag reinforces specific beauty standards because it is used in a way that makes one group seem better than the other. Yeah, I think it reinforces texturism, colourism and all issues within the black community.

Mary: The intention of the hashtag is not to reinforce beauty standards, but it's essential to be cautious about potential misinterpretations. It's primarily about celebrating inner strength and resilience, but it's important to ensure that discussions around beauty don't overshadow the broader message.

10. What kind of Black women do you think are included in this hashtag, i.e., who has Black Girl Magic?

Ruth: I think like I said the movie industry had this stigma or just sort of this narrative that Black Girl Magic or black girl beauty is a certain type of Black girl more specifically light skin black girl so I think it specifically pertains to African American women I don't think it really includes African women. I think for Black Girl Magic it was largely a narrative that started in America so I don't think it relates to African women because of the whole thing of afrocentric African beauty and this BLACK Girl Magic it seems there's a sort of a difference between them

Mary: The hashtag is inclusive of all black women and girls, regardless of their background, profession, or appearance. "Black Girl Magic" recognises the strength and resilience that every black woman possesses, and it's a reminder that we all have the potential for greatness.

Mia: I've already discussed the type of black women that this term is usually associated with. It typically refers to dark-skinned women who embrace their natural hair, their natural features, and their unaltered bodies. In other words, it's all about being natura

Dora: I think all black women again social media like to skew it and push a certain narrative that maybe light skin versus dark skin 4C versus 3A. But I don't think that is true. I think all black women are included in the hashtag because every black woman is worthy and every black woman should feel empowered. You know, yes. When I see a picture of a Black woman on social media, I feel happy to see a woman that looks like me. You know we talk about how growing [up] there wasn't a lot of representation of Black women in the media. Now, with the #BlackGirlMagic, we see a diverse representation of black women from everywhere and different background and different fields of work which is good.

Keisha: The hashtag's primary focus is on celebrating the inner strength and resilience of black women.

Sarah: I think anyone can have Black Girl Magic. It doesn't necessarily just have to be doctors, it can be doctors to writers to even the girl who has a spaza shop in the corner because if she's making it for herself, she's doing something for herself anyone can have Black Girl Magic. Anyone who you know pushing themselves and not relying on a man I would say has Black Girl Magic on top of that. I think anyone can have Black Girl Magic because I think the movement is supposed to be a community of black women uplifting each other so anyone can have Black Girl Magic.

11. Do you think the hashtag has limitations? What are they? How can it evolve?

Ruth: I think the movement itself is a limitation. I think it has its advantages and disadvantages. However, there is still a lot of work to be done within the movement itself. Inclusivity is one.

Mia: I believe that the concept of Black Girl Magic can be limiting when it's applied only to women who have a natural appearance. Nowadays, many women wear makeup, not necessarily to attract men, but because it holds personal significance for them. However, this can sometimes hinder their connection to the concept of "Black Girl Magic." When someone wears a lot of makeup, fake hair, weave, nails, and eyelashes, it may feel like they are distancing themselves from their natural beauty and the essence of Black Girl Magic. I haven't come across instances where women wearing weaves are referred to as embodying Black Girl Magic. They may be called pretty, but the term is often associated with women who embrace their natural, unaltered selves. In my opinion, this narrow definition of beauty can be constraining, as beauty should be celebrated in all its diverse forms. However, the Black Girl Magic also recognised the Black girly girls, the Black women tomboys, the Black gays and lesbians basically the LGBTQ+ community, it acknowledges the strong girl the soft girls and many of us it really is a movement that has managed to include every Black girl and woman which I hope it will carry on doing that.

Keisha: The hashtag includes all black women, regardless of their background, profession, or appearance. Every black woman has "Black Girl Magic" because it recognises the strength and resilience present in each of us, regardless of our individual circumstances.

Dora: I think if in terms of limitation maybe again just being more aware of how it is being used, is it being used to describe light skin women? Is it being used to describe women who have a certain body type? Is it being used, you know, to describe all women? Or is it being used to describe a specific type of black woman? I think that how the hashtag can evolve and those are also the limitations of the hashtag.

Mary: Like any movement, the hashtag may have limitations, the hashtag may have limitations, for me I think that it pushes more dark skin Black women compare to other types of Black women, usually it's dark skin women with curly hair you know the light skin Black women are there but not as much as the dark skin women maybe it just me but for me that what I see on my timeline when I search the hashtag. Also, it has the risk of it becoming performative without concrete action or potentially excluding certain experiences. To evolve, it should continue to push for real change, address intersectional issues, and focus on promoting diversity and inclusion. A few months ago, a fellow law student and I organised an event to discuss the experiences of Black women in the legal profession. We wanted to create a space for open and honest dialogue about the unique challenges we face. We decided to use the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag to promote the event and connect with a broader community. While we received significant engagement and support, there were comments and messages from some individuals who questioned whether our event was divisive or exclusionary because it focused specifically on Black women. This highlighted a limitation of the hashtag—it doesn't always fully address the nuanced and intersectional experiences of Black women in different fields. Our response

was to emphasize that our event was not about exclusion but about amplifying the voices that often go unheard. We explained that the #TheBlackGirlMagic movement is about celebrating our resilience and achievements, but it should also be a platform for addressing the unique obstacles we face. This experience reinforced the importance of evolving the hashtag and its associated movements to include discussions of intersectionality and to create space for conversations about how we can work towards true diversity and inclusion within various fields, including the legal profession. It's crucial to move beyond performative actions and engage in meaningful conversations that lead to real change and progress.

Sarah: Do I think it has limitations? What are they? uhm I guess it depends on how you define black I think you define black as people who are of African descent or someone who is mixed can be identified as black. Uhm in South African it not just blacks people who were previously disadvantaged but we have Coloured and Indian women too when they see Black Girl Magic it doesn't actually kick them out because they were also disadvantaged but obviously they won't share the same negative connotations in history as black women but that doesn't mean that they also shouldn't been embraced by the Black Girl Magic community so I would say yeah I think it can evolve including all women of colour but also recognising that by it be inclusive there can be different branches of Black Girl magic now. Like I said not everyone has shared experience.

12. What are your general perceptions and experiences regarding the representation of black women on social media?

Mary: The representation of black women on social media is a mixed bag. While there have been positive steps in promoting diverse and authentic portrayals, we still face challenges like stereotypes and underrepresentation. However, social media has become a powerful tool for black women to challenge these issues, tell our own stories, and uplift one another, which is a significant and empowering development. I don't see a lot of representation of black women in the medical field, in journalism and writing and just different fields about oh this woman did this. It only if you purposefully look for uhm you have to actually really try your best to look for those black women you know it is not easy to just find and see there is an inspiration to actually follow. So, I would say that the perceptions of the representations for black women on social media is very negative even in South Africa, a country that is majority black. People are always saying black girls are like this and that they're always represented in a very negative way which is why I think the Black Girl Magic is very important because it highlights the good in our community it highlights the positive it highlights inspirations that you can look up to and it does a lot of work to undo the negative connotations that comes with when people think about a Black woman or a Black girl.

Dora: I think I want to say 2016 because that is when I really started using social media and opening my eyes to it. I think the representation of black women on social media is again this from a western lens because media is western dominated black women are masculinised or is it masculinised? They are made out to be men, they are made out to be very masculine with the whole black women are aggressive with the whole femininity conversations. And it is always

targeted toward black women. So, what are we saying about black women? Are we not feminine? I think black women, well women in general also but specifically black women and young black girls that have a different conversation for another day have been sexualised to the point that you don't see yourself as a person. You see yourself as a sex object, as sex symbol before you see yourself as a person uhm I think black women on social media firstly this is all general but again black women exist in many different forms on social media so it just Black's women the BBL bodies there's also the hippies you know, the chakra huns, black women the skaters, black women academics we existing many different spaces in many different personas I want to say. But I think these past few years black women have been masculinised, mmm violent, the whole black women are violent black women are aggressive, we're oversexualised and also there's a last one that I'm thinking of I can't think about right now but yeah that is what I think.

Keisha: My general perceptions and experiences regarding the representation of black women on social media are mixed. While progress has been made in promoting diversity and authenticity, we still encounter challenges related to stereotypes and underrepresentation such as being loud, being too much. If you look at news anchors, we are still underrepresented. There is still a lot of work to be done. The hashtag has been instrumental in highlighting the incredible accomplishments of Black women lawyers, judges, and advocates of every field you know. I'm giving an example of the law field because it is something that I'm very familiar with. Basically, this movement has acknowledged Black women from different backgrounds, countries, cities, class, age and so on and that makes me feel special as a Black woman. I feel like I am worthy and I belong somewhere.

Sarah: The representation of black women on social media is very negative. The majority of representations of black women are very negative I think especially because social media is bombarded with a lot of influences from the United State of America. And you know whenever you hear people talk, be it black white, whatever race is talking about black women, it's always like black women are ghetto, they are aggressive, they are baby mamas, there's a lot of things. I feel like even the music in the industry from America has not really helped the perception of black women because you see people are dressing quiet people are allowed to express to express themselves the way they want to but it not uhm surprising women wearing short things, twerking and stuff like that and that is what black women are known for you know and what they are celebrated it for. The majority of black women on social media don't see a lot of representation of black women in the medical field, in journalism and writing and just different fields about oh this woman did this. It only if you purposefully look for uhm you have to actually really try your best to look for those black women you know it is not easy to just find and see there is an inspiration to actually follow. So, I would say that the perceptions of the representations for black women on social media is very negative even in South Africa, a country that is majority black. People are always saying black girls are like this and that they're always represented in a very negative way which is why I think the Black Girl Magic is very important because it highlights the good in our community it highlights the positive it highlights inspirations that you can look up to and it does a lot of work to undo the negative connotations that comes with when people think about a black woman or a black girl. The

hashtag really brings everyone together, every Black woman from everywhere, who has different skin tones, Black women who are rich and poor which is very powerful.

Ruth: I think until this day even though we are represented or we glorified or we sort of feel accepted I think we still need more representations in terms of we as black women giving ourselves spaces or being given spaces to represent ourselves and not a Vogue magazine or New York time representing another black girl so I think the whole think of black girl empowerment and us representing our own selves on our own terms so I think that essentially, I it relates to me in general. Yeah, I think that's all.

Mia: In my experience, social media can be a double-edged sword for the representation of black women. While it offers a platform to challenge stereotypes and showcase our achievements, it can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and colourism. We need to be critical consumers of the media.