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Dissertation Title: 'Slactivism' or Real Social Change? The Role of the Hashtag in the Repeal the 8th Movement in Ireland

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Abstract

Social media infiltrates modern life in many facets. The realm of activism is one of them. With the influence of new media technologies becoming more and more apparent the question is whether this online influence is having real world impact on activist movements and voter outcomes. The use of the Twitter hashtag as a signifier was examined in the course of this study and evaluated in the context of the Repeal movement - the pro-choice movement to legalise abortion in Ireland.

A review of movements in which social media activism was a relevant factor was carried out. The various viewpoints on what constitutes 'slactivist' versus activist behaviour in the literature was examined. A survey of those who engaged with the Repeal the 8th movement was conducted, and analysis carried out to identify the common themes that emerged in relation to the use of Twitter hashtags in the context of this particular movement.

A data mining exercise was also carried out whereby data was extracted from the Twitter platform in order to analyse tweets containing the #repealthe8th hashtag in the lead up the referendum whereby the Irish people would vote on whether or not to Repeal the 8th Amendment on the 25th May 2018. The tweets were subject to text analysis identifying sentiment and regularity of terms used.

This dissertation seeks to identify the perceptions around Twitter activism and how it is used in the context of achieving social change. It concludes that the contribution of Twitter to the Repeal movement was a positive one. Themes identified included the use of social media as a means to organise, communicate and share personal narratives.

It was also identified that further work is required in the area with regards evaluating sentiment of text in relation to political movements, with interesting results to be generated from future research undertaking a broader scope encompassing both sides of the abortion debate in Ireland to evaluate social media usage and impact on political outcomes.