5-2017

@ctress to @ctivist: Sophia Bush's Activism & Self-Branding Through Twitter

Katie Persechino

Salve Regina University, katie.persechino@salve.edu

@ctress to @ctivist:
Sophia Bush's Activism & Self-Branding Through Twitter

By
Katie Persechino

Prepared for
Dr. Madeleine Esch
English Department
Salve Regina University

May 8, 2017

Abstract

This study analyzes actress Sophia Bush's Twitter account in terms of activism and self-branding, as she tweets out daily to millions of followers. While scholars have studied social media use for other celebrities in terms of self-branding, none have looked at the celebrity use of social media for activism. One hundred tweets from Bush's Twitter page are randomly selected and categorized in order to determine what kind of social media presence Bush creates. It is concluded that Bush's brand goes beyond her profession of an actress and includes her activist Twitter presence to where her title becomes actress-activist, and her self-branding is through both her television/film work and activism.

Introduction

Imagine the opportunity of having your voice heard by millions of voluntarily, attentive strangers in the matter of a few keystrokes. Celebrities have that possibility every single day due to the rise of social media platforms. Though, do they really put them to good use? The effect of celebrity platforms is generally not that striking unless voices are being used in an influential, relevant manner. Though for some people in the public eye, creating talk is the sole reason for having online platforms.

Sophia Bush is a 34-year-old actress who is most known for her character portrayal of Brooke Davis in The WB/The CW's television series *One Tree Hill* (2003-2012), and her current portrayal of Detective Erin Lindsay on NBC's *Chicago P.D.* (2014-Present). In both of these roles, her character goes through massive personal development that is undeniably empowering. As Brooke Davis, Bush goes from a promiscuous high school party girl to a mother and very successful businesswoman throughout the nine seasons. More recently, as Erin Lindsay, Bush plays a gender stereotype-crushing detective with the haunting past of drugs and a broken home. While these two personas are not real, of course, they are mirrors of the messages Bush herself broadcasts to her fans in real life, as we will see.

Aside from her acting roles, she has also become increasingly recognized for her strong, opinionated voice through her personal social media on various topics including politics, human rights, and environmental issues. Bush is heavily involved in charity work, only some of which include groups F*** Cancer, I Am That Girl, a women's empowerment organization, and Pencils of Promise, which provides children in third world countries with the opportunity of education by building and funding schools.

She considers herself a feminist and activist, and has publicly vocalized that she doesn't see what the shame and taboo of being considered a feminist is about. In fact, in a 2016 interview for *The Huffington Post*, Bush had this to say: "I'm a woman. I would like to be judged on the quality of my work, I would like to be compensated fairly for my work. I would like to have just as much access to healthcare as any man. Yeah, that's pretty much it. I don't know what the big fight is all about," (Gebreyes).

While I follow Sophia Bush and her film work, I have noticed that I tend share some of the same views and values that she advocates for through her social media. Especially today, in a time where almost everything is considered news worthy, from the latest 2016 United States presidential election to where a public figure had lunch, there is so much talk. While social media is flooded everyday with people's opinions on each subject, it's equally as refreshing to have a celebrity broadcast something more than "selfies" and self-promotion through social media; I personally think Bush is a great example of someone young girls – and boys – can look up to.

Because she is so open in expressing her views in many world issues, I explore Bush's use of the popular social media platform Twitter, which allows up to 140 character tweets to be sent out to the world. Because she has over 1.3 million followers, I

work to explore how Sophia Bush uses her Twitter account – either for self-branding or online activism - leading me to identify principal social media practices for other celebrities. While this study is narrowly focused on a single person's online presence, it's just as much about the importance of sharing your voice and standing up for issues that realistically don't affect you, revealing the importance of being an activist of any sort.

For the purpose of this research, I use the term feminist as someone who believes in gender equality; "examples of such statements include 'supporter of women's rights,' 'someone who believes in equality in the workforce,' and 'male/female who believes that women should be equal socially with men'" (Houvouras & Carter 246). Activism, in this study, is along the same terms, except covering more affairs: "working on gender, children, self-determination, health, climate, poverty, labor, and race" (Ackerly 221).

Literature Review

A majority of my preliminary research focused on celebrities and their use of social media platforms, primarily Twitter, in creating an online brand and expanding communication within online audiences. Research uncovered the social media use for celebrities Tyra Banks and Katie Price, connecting them to their "true self" and authenticity. Other evident topics were the display of both feminism and self-branding through various media platforms, reflecting on verbal communication and performed beliefs within the female binary.

In an analysis of Tyra Banks and her reality television show *America's Next Top Model*, Dara Persis Murray pays close attention to "immaterial labor" and the changes the female contestants on the show make to conform to social and cultural norms through

fashion and beauty standards. Banks was somehow applauded for altering the girls' original image; in terms of the show, the bettering of women through appearance in result empowered them. This contradicts the idea of self-acceptance that Banks shares through online platforms such as her website typeF.com. Either way, the overall takeaway through this research is the self-branding of Banks through her personal empowerment towards the women and the actions taken to help them find their worth and "fierceness" on the show; Banks plays a role of a mother figure to the contestants and her online audience through advice and emotional engagement, ultimately building a relationship with her consumers. This is relevant in comparison to Bush's use of social media in terms of progressive and positive female norms/societal expectations since Bush also is trying to empower women, though through different approaches outside of appearance.

Further research about self-branding and celebrity feminism also turned up contradictory issues about Banks' views. Similar to Murray, Jessalynn Marie Keller also discusses Tyra Banks in terms of displaying post-feminist ideals and body image. Keller centers her argument toward the authenticity of Banks and female celebrity through a textual analysis of her multiple media outlets (Twitter, Facebook, Tyra.com, and typeF.com). The theme of Banks challenging everyday womanly norms was highly evident, such as telling her online audience to quit trying to please everyone through appearance and to stop "being a slave to lots of make-up" (Keller 155). Though, on the contradictory side, Banks reinforces the tropes of women conforming to feminine norms, such as makeup. At one point, she encourages her audience to feel beautiful in their natural skin, while saying "of course" she herself uses a hair relaxer and "of course" she has a full face of makeup (since that is what makes her feel more beautiful/confident).

While this study also explored feminist views in terms of women's physical appearance, rather than their equality in society and in the workforce, I was able to compare my findings of Sophia Bush's Twitter account in terms of feminist attitudes and social media use.

The theme of self-branding and authenticity was continually present in my research, specifically through a study that analyzed the media presence of British model and reality star Katie Price in terms of public perception versus self-authenticity and how she reinforces femininity while contradicting feminist norms. The study found that Price is often times criticized in the media for her importance and success in ultimately "nothing," along with her many plastic surgeries and body alterations. However, this source also made the point that Price, even with all the judgment from outsiders, embraces her body and loves herself, with no shame of her voluntary changes. The points evident in this study tell how social media is a valid way to "get to know" a public figure through a form of direct communication. Compared to alternate forms of media, such as an edited television program where the celebrity themself is not directly speaking to their audience, social media is a firsthand connection/source to the person. In connection, Bush's social media matters in discovering whether her Twitter account is a reflection of her as an authentic person or one of a mere celebrity (that is, if she is using her social media for self-branding purposes).

Both Banks and Price use their personal social media platforms and online websites to connect to their audiences and share their beliefs, which is exactly what Bush does also. While none of these sources were completely valid in answering any questions directly about activist and feminist advocacy parallel to Bush's use of social media, they

provided a basis of celebrity perception and use of their voices online with a significant

following. Although Bush does not tweet as heavily about body issues and feminine

norms in terms of beauty, these issues and women's rights are ones she does discuss,

nonetheless.

Audience reactions and relationship building as a product of social media

engagement were other themes present throughout the course of my research. Scholars

Kim and Song analyzed the social presence and self-disclosure of celebrities on Twitter

in relation to the Social Penetration Theory, or the development of relationships "through

revealing the self" and "the voluntary sharing of personally relevant information" (Kim

and Song 571). According to Kim and Song, because Twitter is designed to encourage

and produce human relations, it's relevant to have an online persona that is easy to relate

to and interact with. Celebrity self-disclosure is important in order to form bonds with

fans. Kim and Song focused more on the analyzation of celebrity Twitter accounts

through studying specific tweets. One purpose of the study was to see whether the self-

disclosure displayed on the selected Twitter accounts helped form a bond for fans and

allowed a more realistic relationship to be developed. Findings implied that the more self-

disclosure demonstrated on Twitter by a celebrity, the more a fan felt a social presence.

This ultimately uncovered that retweeting is a way for audiences to show that they relate

to the certain messages and feelings being relayed in a tweet. One of the most important

findings in the study was that social media is a "cost-effective marketing tool." Instead of

spending money on promoting the celebrity's work (such as movies or concerts), social

media is a free way to get the message out to audiences who are more likely to take

action and be interested about the content being promoted (since it involves the celebrity they chose to follow.)

The types of communication normally affiliated with Twitter were also discussed throughout my research. In one study, government uses of Twitter were explored through various verified political accounts in terms of the four models of public relations: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical communication, and two-way symmetrical communication (Waters and Williams 356). Press agentry and public information are both examples of one-way communication, meaning there is a message being relayed to audiences with no direct feedback from them; the "conversation" is simply one-sided. However, press agentry works on emotion and the use of public relations, while public information is focused more on getting a message/idea directly to people in order to spread awareness. Both forms of two-way communication, asymmetrical and symmetrical, are especially important in study Bush's use of Twitter, as it can be seen as a way of enhancing her brand through relationship building. Asymmetrical communication thrives with consumer and audience feedback as it "seeks to have questions answered," while symmetrical communication is a balance of the two and is more conversation based. Findings implied that while public information was the most used of the four models, two-way symmetrical was the "excellence model" for the best efforts of communication and engagement. Waters and Williams ultimately found that Twitter was used as an informal platform for politicians and government groups to respond and connect to their audiences in a way that is still formal and relevant. This was helpful in comparing how Bush uses her Twitter account, making me question which type of communication is most prevalent (two-way or one-way).

In order to find out how and for what purposes celebrities were using their social media, Stever and Lawson studied 12 celebrity Twitter accounts with which they were familiar, and categorized their tweets. Categories included "original tweet," "reply tweet," "to celeb," "to public," "serious," and "funny." The study revealed that Twitter was an innocent way for two-way communication between celebrity and fan, a way for celebrities to communicate without a marketing intent and to show a more personal side to their online following. Stever and Lawson also came to the conclusion that Twitter is the most intimate form of social media in terms of communication, as it allows the celebrity to speak directly to audiences in multiple ways, about multiple topics – both formal and informal, important or not. The celebrities that were included in the study tweeted out about serious topics, such as gay marriage and world tragedies. In addition, Stever and Lawson realized that many of the celebrities tweeted mostly about their work of some form, whether it was a new movie or an album release. It was discovered that the younger stars studied tweeted more about topics and hobbies they enjoyed, similar to non-celebrity users, but still talked about their work; "Twitter appears to be a multiple use tool for celebrities. First of all, it is used for social communication, just as it is used by non-celebrities" (Stever and Lawson 349).

After conducting all of the above research, I became most interested in how Bush, an actress, uses her Twitter account to actively be known as an overall rights activist, and how that helps build her brand, in connection to my sources about Banks and Price, and celebrity Twitter use. Unlike the conclusions drawn from the study of Banks, at first glance Bush speaking out about her feminist views is not strictly in benefit of creating herself as a brand/benefiting her image, and instead is more organic and targeted directly

to change in humanity. Therefore, I chose to focus on answering the following questions: How does actress Sophia Bush use her Twitter account to express her activist views? What does her Twitter account do in terms of building her brand and is she more vocal about her professional work or about activism? In result of this, does Sophia Bush's brand/title become actress-activist?

Method

Sophia Bush Bush's Twitter account has a following of over 1.3 million people, and while her Instagram has more than double that number (2.9 million followers), it is on her Twitter account where she has the most activity and interaction. Currently she follows roughly 1,300 accounts, with over 35,000 tweets in total. While she has significantly fewer Instagram posts (about 2,500 in total), I felt that studying her Instagram account would include a lot of extra outside content, such as outfit photos and shout-outs to friends, which wouldn't focus my research in terms of her as a celebrity activist. She has the least activity on her official Facebook page, as she posts roughly once or twice a month to an audience of less than one million people. For this reason, I did not analyze her Facebook account.

To start my research, I took a sample of 100 tweets from Sophia Bush's Twitter account. To gather all of the tweets, I took a sample of three random tweets per day for 34 days (one day only had one tweet posted, bringing me to an even 100 tweets). I counted the number of total tweets Bush posted on each day, starting with January 29th, 2017. I then generated a list of ten random numbers ranging from 1 to 100 from the site random.org, using the first three applicable numbers to choose specific tweets from each

day. For example, on February 12th, Bush posted 26 times in total. The first number on my random number generated list was 29, which was not applicable; therefore, I moved on to the next number on the list, which was four, and took the fourth tweet from that day. I did this until I gathered three tweets per day, a total of 100 tweets. If there was a day that didn't have any tweets, I simply skipped it and moved on to the next day.

I chose to not include her personal @reply tweets, even though her @replies also play roles in her Twitter presence as far as studying her use of two-way communication. This was solely for the purpose and timeliness of this research; I felt as though including @replies would lead me to analyze the outside tweets/conversation threads that may not solely be directed or connected to Bush. It would provide a lot of superfluous information that may not necessarily have to do with my focus.

Next, I counted up how many tweets were from the handle @SophiaBush (meaning it is an original tweet from Bush herself), how many were quote tweets (meaning she added a comment on a tweet before retweeting it), and how many were retweets. I then categorized each tweet into groups/subgroups according to the overall message/purpose. With categorizing all selected tweets into further groupings, I was able to see whether the tweets have a more activist message – either political, having to do with human equality, animal rights, environmental issues, or feminist views – or whether they promote something, such as one of her television shows/projects or a sponsorship.

A tweet was categorized as being political when it was from, directed towards or mentioned the President of the United States (Donald Trump), a political figure, a policy or law, or included any other terms that are in general political by nature. Terms included some of the following: Foreign Policy, Republican, White House, election, campaign,

and America. When a tweet mentioned women's equality/rights directly, it was categorized as feminist (for example, the hashtag #DressLikeAWoman.) A tweet was placed in the environment category when it mentioned a certain environmental issue, such as the Dakota Access Pipeline. A tweet mentioning Bush's current television show, *Chicago P.D.*, or having to do with characters/actors, scripts, or fan responses, was placed under the promotion category. When a tweet didn't fall under any of the set categories, it was placed as other. There were many instances where tweets would overlap, mentioning both a political figure and a human rights and equality or a global issue. Distinctions are made to signify that in the final analysis, but ultimately the tweets were categorized in both groupings.

It is important to note that certain tweets randomly selected and studied included direct links back to certain Instagram posts, which had to be included for the purpose of following the system of randomly selecting tweets. Therefore, a few Instagram posts were studied, simply because they were a part of Bush's original tweets.

Analysis

Of the 100 tweets collected and organized, a total of 76 of them were direct retweets posted to Bush's page. Therefore, it could be said that she is an active Twitter listener in addition to being an active user; she is active in reading and engaging with the people that she personally follows. The amount of tweets that Bush "quote tweets," meaning Bush added a comment to a post before retweeting, is still more than the amount of original tweets she conducts, as shown in *Figure 1*.
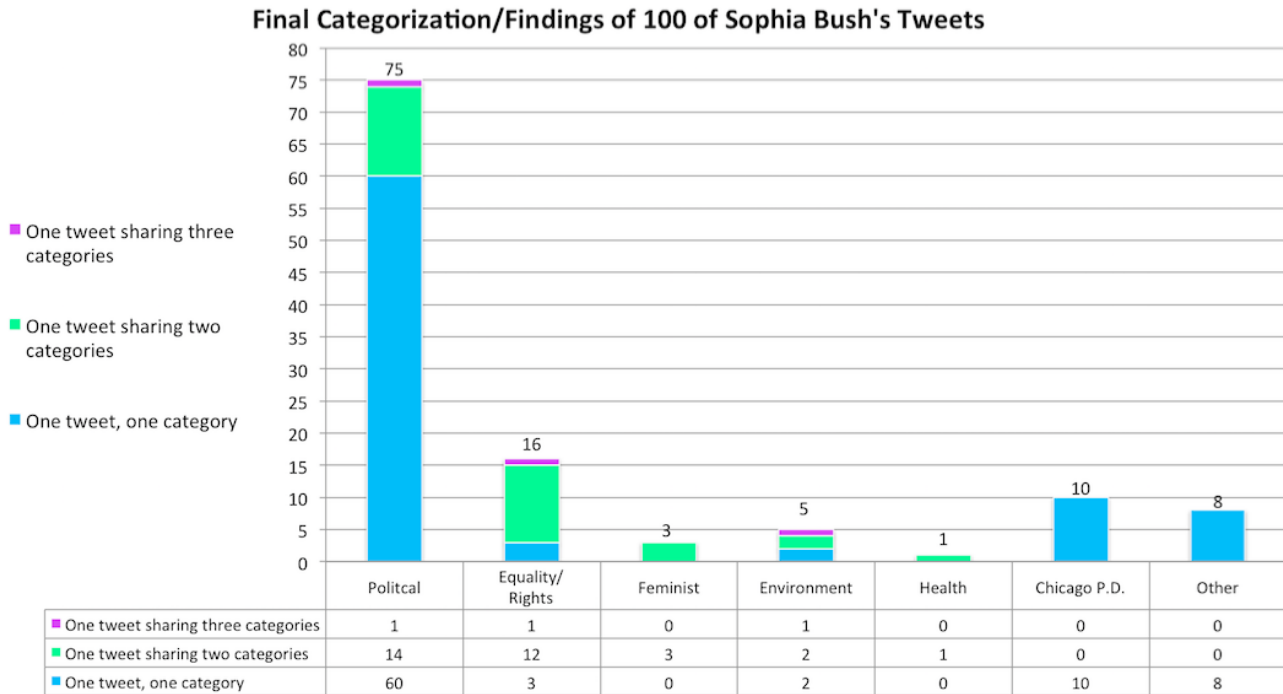
Bush uses her social media not only to help educate and encourage others, but also to educate and inform herself with other user's posts, news, and opinions. She then uses *that same* information to direct her audience. Ultimately, it is found that Bush expresses her power and the influence she holds in her social media through various tweets; she goes beyond to encourage others to take action instead of simply stating her own opinion. For example, on February 10th, Bush added a comment to a tweet regarding New York City Mayor, Bill De Blasio, severing ties to banks supporting the very controversial Dakota Access Pipeline: "Call De Blasio's office and let him know you support this push! #NoDAPL." With Bush telling her direct followers to take action and contact offices to express their views and use their voice could be seen as a result of what she hopes to happen due to her in fact using her own voice. Through with her direct word choice of starting the tweet with "call," this is not a passive suggestion but a push. This was apparent in two other tweets as well, both fitting under environmental issues, where Bush retweeted phone numbers to offices so the public could weigh in.

Like Kim and Song found in their study, the stronger the Twitter engagement, the more audiences feel a connection; Bush retweets a lot on her own Twitter page, which means she is connecting and feeling the same feelings as what the tweets express, ultimately making an effort to engage with fans through content she morally connects to.

Figure 1

	Original Tweets (From @SophiaBush)	Quote Tweets (@SophiaBush added a comment to a retweet)	Retweet
Total Number of Tweets	8	16	76

Figure 2

Final Categorization/Findings of 100 of Sophia Bush's Tweets

	Politcal	Equality/ Rights	Feminist	Environment	Health	Chicago P.D.	Other
One tweet sharing three categories	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
One tweet sharing two categories	14	12	3	2	1	0	0
One tweet, one category	60	3	0	2	0	10	8

Seventy-five of the tweets studied were grouped into the politics category; 51 of them mentioned President Donald Trump's name, none of which were positive. The tweets, again most of which were retweets by Bush, criticized or mocked the president, calling him out on various occasions. A tweet by Daniel Dale (@ddale8) on February 7th read: "Another lie. Trump is bringing back some of his greatest campaign hits." This was a referral to another tweet about Trump stating that the murder rate is at the highest it's been in 47 years. The blunt language of labeling President Trump's words as "another lie" and associating such "lies" as being his election tactics is directly criticizing him. In addition, a tweet by LOLGOP (@LOLGOP), a politics parody account that Bush herself follows, read as follows: "Maybe a guy who just had to settle a fraud suit for $25 million isn't a great judge of how the law works?" This is coded as a direct shot at President Trump because of the sarcastic tone in asking a fairly rhetorical question. The fact that Bush retweeted it signifies that she agrees with the overall message of Trump not being

the prime or most ideal person to run a country. She is retweeting a post about someone calling Trump a liar. There is limited interpretation outside of this, meaning that she too thinks he is spewing false words.

Bush uses personal involvements when further vocalizing her political views and morals through various tweets against Trump. For example, in a tweet from February 3rd, where there is a direct link to a specific Instagram post, she addresses Trump directly, explaining what it means to #DressLikeAWoman: "You know what both of these ensembles have in common, Mr. President? The woman wearing them. And whether I'm in head to toe tactical gear or couture, I am both feminine and tough [as f***]." The photo that holds this caption is one of Bush armed with multiple guns, collaged next to one of her on a red carpet in a hot pink dress, makeup and hair done. This post was categorized both as political and feminist, as it is a direct referral to the President and the alleged rumor that he has told the female staff on his team to "dress like women." Bush challenges both Trump and the true meaning of what it actually means to *dress like a woman* by showing through experiences that there is no set standard to female norms. She uses aggressive and blunt language that portrays her as strong and up for a fight: "Whether I'm strapped or wearing strappy heels is none of your damn business." She is telling one of the most influential, highest ranking people in the country to stay out of her "damn business." If that's not brave, it's hard to tell what is.

Bush's voice isn't only expressed in *what* she retweets, but als*o who* she retweets. On February 5th, Bush reposted a tweet in support of Lady Gaga's 2017 Super Bowl Halftime performance and added the comment "#BornThisWay" with multiple positively coded emojis. Because Gaga's performance was about human equality and love through

her song 'Born This Way,' this tweet was placed under the category of human rights and equality. Though, it was also placed under political because of who posted the original tweet – President Trump's competitor in the election, Hillary Clinton. This is telling and relevant because if this tweet was by any non-political figure, or even by Donald Trump, it would dramatically change the overall meaning of the message and for whom she shows support.

Since Sophia Bush does not hide or mask her political views, it is uncovered that even in a situation where audiences would reject her opinions, she is still influencing them. With a following of over one million people, it is inevitable that there are some that will adopt Bush's same positions on certain political issues, either because they logically agree or because of the lust of her celebrity status. This makes the topics she addresses online very important as she does hold power in each tweet, because even when she doesn't tell the public *what* to think, she is telling them what to think *about*. There is no telling how her followers might interpret her tweets or even what action they might take. Ultimately, any action or thought that each individual takes after reading Bush's Twitter page is all up to that individual; Bush's *direct* role in physically influencing others starts and stops at an online level.

It was recognized that Bush continuously shows support for people of all demographics, whether it be people of diverse religions, genders, races, and sexual orientations, adding to the amount of activist content on her Twitter page. Sixteen percent of tweets studied were placed in the human rights and equality grouping; in fact, that was the second largest grouping, as shown in *Figure 2*. While many of these tweets overlapped into the political category, they are evident on standing on their own as it

shows that Bush does overall address and use her voice for human equality. The tweets solely in the human rights group amplified issues about race, particularly the current 2017 Muslim Ban (brought upon by President Trump), anti-Semitism, LGTBQ rights, and rape controversies. On February 16th, Mehdi Hasan (@mehdirhasan) tweeted: "Over 100 Muslims killed by ISIS in Pakistan & Iraq. 1) [Very] little media coverage in the West. Shameful. 2) Muslims still blamed for ISIS (!)." Bush retweeting this directly implies that she is against the Muslim ban and the discrimination against Muslim and the stereotypes around the religion. Additionally, it implies that she has a problem with the media coverage on issues regarding Muslims and terrorism, as she's retweeting a post about the accuracy flaws in the news system. Ultimately, Bush is using her Twitter account as an alternative site for news and education, one that is tailored with information that may not make it to the wide audience of television. A similar tweet by Michael Skolnik (@MichaelSkolnik) on January 31st also addressed the topic of Muslims, only this time President Donald Trump was mentioned: "I believe when Trump issued the #MuslimBan he knew it was unconstitutional, that is why he didn't inform any of the agencies or lawyers." Though technically this is an opinion by Skolnik, it includes information of Trump failing to include mentioned agencies and lawyers on his decision. Again, Bush retweeted this, symbolizing that she is ultimately opposed to Trump's actions and Muslim intolerance.

It simply was not anticipated that a tweet would find its way into three categories, though exactly one tweet did. The post was by Resistance Chicago (@Resist_Chicago) and reposted by Bush, and it informed people of six large marches taking place in April. The marches included taking action against different issues, which ultimately made the

overall tweet land in the categories of political, human equality and rights, and environment. Bush retweeting this not only helped prove that she is an activist towards many issues in the world, but that she wants her Twitter audience to go out and take action to fight for what they believe. Similar to the posts encouraging citizens to call offices to voice their positions, this tweet is taking online activism out into the real world away from a computer screen. There is no point in preaching and advocating online if no physical action is taken to create change, but it is interesting that Bush is using her online platform as the first step into activism.

To determine how activist based Bush's Twitter account was, there had to be the contrast, which was determining how much content had to do with her professional work as an actress. Ten percent of the total tweets studied fell under the promotion category; these were not as much promotion as it was Bush connecting with *Chicago P.D.* fans, thanking them for their support and responding to questions about filming. There was never any "watch *Chicago P.D.* tonight at 10 on NBC!" but rather simple engagement. Since Bush live tweets when new episode is aired, there was commentary that went along with the characters and situations happening in the show at that time. On February 15th, Bush tweeted, "The soft side of Platt is the SWEETEST!! #ChicagoPD." The post included two heart emojis along with the puppy emoji, which adds character to the capitalized, enthusiastic words. With an actual actor of the show discussing the personal development of a tough, cold character in the series turning soft and sweet makes fans excited, since they are addressing the fictional persona as if they were real. This is an example of one-way communication; both fans and Bush are engaging in together at the same time, and she is sending out a message to her live audience. With the recognition of

fans' support and keeping up with conversation on her work, especially through live tweeting, an organically built relationship is created. There is also the factor of indirect promotion in a way that the information is not forced down followers' throats, but the basic topic of her series is being distributed to over a million people. The *Chicago P.D.* conversations are not simply to get more viewers, though that may be a result of Bush talking about it and addressing those tweets in the first place; they're disguised promotions. With that, Sophia Bush uses her Twitter account for both activism and her professional work, conclusively and successfully rebranding herself from actress to actress-activist.

Oddly enough, some of the causes that I previously have seen Bush stand for on her Twitter account were absent in this sample. I originally had the groupings of animal rights and disease awareness in my set list of categories; however, neither were present in this study. Charities in which Bush is involved, even the one linked in her Twitter biography, The Girl Project, were also absent among the tweets studied. While that is not to say my final findings are invalid, it proves that this study is a slice of what the topics Bush vocally stands for.

As almost every person would use social media, Bush made use of her Twitter account by posting personal photos and inspirational quotes. It was not even close to the amount of activist tweets in this study, in fact it was only eight percent; however, they were still pertinent to this analysis. All of these tweets found their way to the 'other' category, and most of them were links to her Instagram account. The quotes she shared were typically affiliated with the hashtag "Monday Mantra," making sure her fans start the week off strong with thought provoking, positive messages. This quality of content

ultimately exhibits a personal side to Bush, much like sources from my literature review found about the studies done on Tyra Banks and Katie Price. After all, social media is a way for fans to personally connect to the celebrities they follow, so it is smart and personable that Bush includes intimate posts of herself and her friends, and wants to share positive quotes.

The details embedded in some of Bush's original tweets were telling in and of themselves. Emojis were only present in tweets that were personal and showing appreciation towards *Chicago P.D.*, with the exception of the Lady Gaga Super Bowl Halftime performance post that was categorized as political. For the more serious topics, emojis were absent for obvious reasons – an animated smiley face of any sort would simply be inappropriate. However, with the addition of hearts and emojis in lighthearted, happy tweets, such as ones about Bush and her best friends, a more personal feeling is presented, while simultaneously incorporating the informal features native to online social media platforms.

Conclusion

At the core of this study, it is concluded that Bush's brand goes beyond her profession of an actress and includes her activist Twitter presence to where her title becomes actress-activist, and her self-branding is through both her on-screen work *and* activism. While I was originally seeking to determine whether her voice was more selling/advertising towards her work, and therefore more self-branding, or more activist in causes she cares about, it turns out that it expresses both. When tweeting about her professional work and *Chicago P.D.*, there was no real promotion in terms of trying to

sell or spread information for work benefits sake; it was all simple, two-way engagement. While that is ultimately self-branding since it echoes her brand as an actress, 75 percent of her Twitter postings were in the matter of activism; therefore, her self-branding *becomes* her activism.

Like findings expressed in the studies done on stars Tyra Banks and Katie Price, social media is a fundamental self-branding tool for celebrities and this is the same case with Sophia Bush. Social media is great for displaying two-way communication between fans and someone who is typically out of reach in terms of connection, as Stever and Lawson discovered, and this is very much true with this study as well. However, this study adds information/conclusions about the use of social media use in terms of activism, specifically celebrity activism.

As a public figure who has not found herself in the news every day for being scrutinized like mega celebrities such as reality icon Kim Kardashian, it's important for Bush to self-brand. In terms of creating a name for herself and continuing to be relevant in Hollywood and the film industry, it would be more effective for her to post controversial or racy content of herself, resulting in talk about *her*. Though, it's interesting that she chooses to use her social media platforms to confront issues that don't even begin to affect her, but instead strangers all around the world; hence why her title moves away from the surface level affiliation of actress and combines with the empowering, influential role of an activist.

One minor flaw in my study was that when gathering random tweets from each day, there was sometimes no telling on what exact day Bush retweeted something. For example, if she retweeted something from February 10th, it was impossible to tell if she

retweeted that on the 10th or 11th if the tweet wasn't blatantly between others of a

determining date. This issue led to practicality flaws where I may have categorized a

tweet as being retweeted on a different day than it actually was, resulting in an alteration

of which tweets were randomly selected in the study. I also think a study of strictly

Sophia Bush's original tweets would be very telling of what kind of influence and voice

she has on social media. This would mean to ignore all of the retweets from outside

accounts. For this initial study, I wanted to include the retweets, as they are large

contributors to the kind of messages Bush is broadcasting to her fans; the retweets are

simply part of Bush's online voice. Lastly, a further categorization of the tweets would

provide a stronger interpretation of Bush's views. Among grouping tweets as being

political or human rights and equality, it would be effective in categorizing those

categories; for example, how many of the human rights and equality tweets are about

LGTBQ rights, or a specific race? This would show an even more specific use of Bush's

voice online, as it would be narrowed down to show that she advocates most for Muslim

or LGTBQ rights, for example. I did not do this in my study solely because the sample of

100 tweets would not provide sufficient data if they were broken down further.

As the majority of tweets studied were retweets, it could be argued that Bush's

voice isn't fully represented throughout this study. That is simply the downfall with an

overpowering amount of retweets; the user isn't giving audiences original content, but

broadcasting the highlights of what they think is important from other Twitter accounts.

However, in retrospect, this isn't necessarily a bad thing, as retweeting allows a mix of

individuals to come together in raising awareness and allowing variety in agencies. Like

previously stated, a future study done solely on Bush's original tweets would be more

telling in determining how she uses her own voice; though, in terms of what she is displaying as her online brand, the retweets are vital to look at. A separate thesis comparing Bush's online activism with her "real life" activism and charity work would also be very useful in further discussing the significance of her title and brand.

In a world where social media is used for reassurance and a confidence boost, this study works to show that there is substance through the words said online. Celebrities are very looked up to and have a strong influence on large audiences due to them impacting a popular culture to a high degree; it is refreshing and useful that there are celebrities that are using their online platforms for more than "selfies" and strict self-promotion, as social media influencers have been on the rise. Bush tends to separate herself from the crowd, as she isn't typical of other celebrities that look at social media as a heavy marketing tool. Like previously stated, she encourages her audience to go beyond online activism and simply move further than decoding her tweets, as she tells them exactly how to start bringing about peaceful change.

Initially, this study is inviting everyday citizens to again take action, use their voice and express their opinions on issues that matter, and even ones that don't. Since everyone's opinions seem to be more prominent than ever thanks to the Internet, it's vital that we don't let these platforms go to waste, in that we don't use them to express what we *truly* believe in.

Works Cited

Ackerly, Brooke. "Human Rights Enjoyment In Theory And Activism." *Human Rights*

    Review 12.2 (2011): 221-239. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 12 Dec. 2016.

@ddale8. "Another lie. Trump is bringing back some of his greatest campaign hits."

    Twitter, 07 Feb. 2107, 1:43 p.m.,

    https://twitter.com/ddale8/status/829037832568188928.

Genz, Stéphanie. "My Job Is Me." *Feminist Media Studies* 15.4 (2015): 545-

    561. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 17 Nov. 2016.

Gebreyes, Rahel. "Sophia Bush Nails The 'So Not Complicated' Definition Of

    Feminism." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 10 Mar. 2016. Web.

    06 Apr. 2017.

Houvouras, Shannon, and J. Scott Carter. "The F Word: College Students' Definitions

    Of A Feminist." *Sociological Forum* 23.2 (2008): 234-256. *Academic Search*

    Complete. Web. 12 Dec. 2016.

Keller, Jessalynn Marie. "Fiercely Real?: Tyra Banks And The Making Of New Media

    Celebrity." *Feminist Media Studies* 14.1 (2014): 147-164. *Academic Search*

    Complete. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

Kim, Jihyun, and Hayeon Song. "Celebrity's Self-Disclosure On Twitter And

    Parasocial Relationships: A Mediating Role Of Social Presence." *Computers In*

    Human Behavior 62 (2016): 570-577. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 3 Feb.

    2017.

@LOLGOP. "Maybe a guy who just had to settle a fraud suit for $25 million isn't a

    great judge of how the law works?" *Twitter*, 4 Feb. 2017, 12:57 p.m.,

    https://twitter.com/LOLGOP/status/827939083687190533.

@mehdirhasan. "Over 100 Muslims killed by ISIS in Pakistan & Iraq. 1) V little media

    coverage in the West. Shameful. 2) Muslims still blamed for ISIS (!)" *Twitter*,

    16 Feb. 2017, 12:20 p.m.,

    https://twitter.com/mehdirhasan/status/832278574568787968

@MichaelSkolnik. "1/ I believe when Trump issued the #MuslimBan he knew it was

    unconstitutional, that is why he didn't inform any of the agencies or lawyers."

    Twitter, 31 Jan. 2017, 7:39 p.m.,

    https://twitter.com/michaelskolnik/status/826409488198619141?lang=en.

Persis Murray, Dara. ""This Is What Was Birthed": Motherhood And Postfeminist

    Self-Branding In Tyra Banks' Brand." *Journal Of Communication Inquiry* 39.3

    (2015): 232-248. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

@Resist_Chicago. "Six big marches in April! Mark your calendars.

    https://t.co/7A45zoYZvg #TheResistance #marchforscience #TaxMarch

    #climatemarch" *Twitter*, 12 Feb. 2017, 1:04 a.m.,

    https://twitter.com/Resist_Chicago/status/830658917915095040.

@SophiaBush. "#BornThisWay https://t.co/DvzsBwDiLn." *Twitter*, 06 Feb. 2017, 9:39

    p.m., https://twitter.com/SophiaBush/status/828433023708299264.

@SophiaBush. "Call De Blasio's office and let him know you support this push!

    #NoDAPL." *Twitter*, 10 Feb. 2017, 6:44 p.m.,

    https://twitter.com/SophiaBush/status/830200876098809856.

@SophiaBush. "The soft side of Platt is the SWEETEST!! #ChicagoPD." *Twitter*, 16

Feb. 2017, 10:47 p.m.,

https://twitter.com/SophiaBush/status/832073784446316548.

@SophiaBush. "You know what both of these ensembles have in common, Mr.

President? The woman wearing them. And…

https://www.instagram.com/p/BQELY-EjNV3/." *Twitter*, 3 Feb. 2017, 4:55

p.m., https://twitter.com/sophiabush/status/827636571545411585.

Stever, Gayle S., and Kevin Lawson. "Twitter as a Way for Celebrities to Communicate

with Fans: Implications for the Study of Parasocial Interaction." *North American

Journal of Psychology* 15.2 (2013): 339-354. *Academic Search Complete*. Web.

27 Jan. 2017.

Waters, Richard D., and Jensen M. Williams. "Squawking, Tweeting, Cooing, And

Hooting: Analyzing The Communication Patterns Of Government Agencies On

Twitter." *Journal Of Public Affairs (14723891)* 11.4 (2011): 353-363. *Academic

Search Complete*. Web. 12 Dec. 2017.