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Social Media's Impact on the Puerto Rican Diaspora After Hurricane Maria

Heidi Lynn Steidel II Camacho

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Social Media's Impact on the Puerto Rican Diaspora After Hurricane Maria

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Master of Arts

Puerto Rico has belonged to the United States for more than a century. In 1898, more than two decades after the Spanish American War, Spain formally ceded the island to the United States. Just over 20 years later, islanders officially became American citizens. Since then, the 100-mile-long by 35-mile-wide island has experienced economic and political crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and life-threatening natural disasters. These events provoked a vast fluctuation in its population. After Hurricane Maria unfolded in September 2017, more than 200,000 Puerto Ricans moved to the continental United States to start new lives (Schwartz, 2018). This qualitative study sheds light on social media's role in the post-Hurricane Maria Puerto Rican diaspora's decision to migrate to the continental United States through the lens of cultivation analysis theory. Findings indicate that exposure to social media magnifies diasporic perceptions of being sufficiently informed, enables them to virtually connect with people from the same experience, and influences their decisions to leave and not return to the island.

Keywords: diaspora, social media, perception, online networks, migrant attitudes

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To the Puerto Rican diaspora that inspired me to choose this topic. Like the Ceiba trees that are unmovable for hundreds of years, even in category-5 hurricanes and incessant earthquakes, you, too, are just as strong and mighty. Your legacy lives on and will always rise above any disastrous event that unfolds on our beautiful Borinquen.

And finally, to the little Puerto Rican girl inside of me that constantly struggled with imposter syndrome, especially as she neared the finish line of her thesis: You made it and I am so proud of you. Never forget that “[He] will go [before](#) your face, [He] will be on your right hand and on your left ... and [His] angels round about you, to bear you up” (Doctrine & Covenants 88:84).

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Introduction

On September 20, 2017, the deadly Category-5 Hurricane Maria left more than 3 million Americans in Puerto Rico without power. No electricity meant no internet and limited access to the outside world. These life-threatening circumstances were only aggravated by limited access to fresh water, food, and emergency supplies. According to meteorologist Eric Holthaus, “In the span of 24 hours, Maria knocked out Puerto Rico’s entire power grid, 95% of cellphone towers, the bulk of the island’s water infrastructure, as well as roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, airports, and seaports.” The weather broadcaster also made a note of the storm’s record-breaking conditions including “... rains exceeding that of Hurricane Harvey in Texas with wind speeds exceeding that of Hurricane Irma in Florida.” However, 2017 was not the only extenuating moment that islanders have lived through since then. That year, the island experienced two hurricanes, back-to-back, and its government declared bankruptcy. Two years later, in 2019, the governor resigned amid a corruption scandal. To make matters worse, just before the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on its population, its unemployment rate reached more than 8%. Puerto Rico officially became twice as poor as Mississippi, the nation’s most impoverished state (Cheatham, 2020). Unlike other instances in Puerto Rico’s history, these moments unfolded when more than 80% of its residents were active social media users and when according to Pew Research, over 630,000 Puerto Ricans had left their homeland since the island population’s highest peak in 2004.

Each of these historical moments and crises is documented with different types of content and channels that members of the Puerto Rican community have used to share and receive news and information with their friends, family, and members of the public that live on the island as well as with those that live abroad. Today, a long list of social media platforms enables the real-

time sharing of photos, first-hand experiences, and opinions. While many studies have interpreted the behavior of Puerto Ricans, including the cultural identities of those that have left the island (Duany, 2000, 2003), and identified social media's role in facilitating crisis communication during some of these pivotal events in the islands' history (Bui, 2018), there is no recent academic literature that has sought to understand social media's impact on Puerto Ricans' decision to leave or return to the island.

This research seeks to shed light on the role that media plays in the Puerto Rican diaspora's decision to migrate to the United States through the lens of cultivation analysis theory, which studies how television, or media in general, impacts people's perceptions of the world. Although communication scholars have studied cultivation theory exhaustively over the years, the everchanging types of technology and, in turn, the type of social media content that has resulted from it means that few studies have focused on identifying, analyzing, comparing, and contrasting the contemporary effects of media on a diaspora demographic. For this reason, the communications field would benefit significantly from continued exploration of this topic. To accomplish this, in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with members of the Puerto Rican diaspora. The main research question asked was, "How did social media impact the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria?"

Review of Literature

To provide theoretical and relevant context for this study, the literature review below will summarize the media's role in human movements, including diasporas, in natural catastrophic phenomenon as they unfold in a globalized world. It will also expound on how the Puerto Rican demographic (diaspora and island residents) is impacted by media through the lens of Cultivation

Theory. The review of literature also outlines Cultivation Theory studies that have been carried out to illustrate its relationship with social media and diaspora groups.

Media's Impact on Human Movements

History has documented many media affecting people's lives, physically or emotionally. Historically, movements have consisted of victims of sexual violence tweeting their experiences over social media channels, the civil rights movements' influence on hip hop (Goodwin, 2019), the relocation of millions of Jews as they escaped the holocausts' oppression (Casey, 1944) and the recent emigration of Venezuelans since the 21st century (Miller, et. al., 2016).” At the dawn of the digital era, the world saw first-hand evidence of Nazis' crimes against humanity. Fear from what they saw and heard before, during, and after led to Jews leaving their home countries and everything they knew behind to begin anew in countries outside of Europe. According to the American Historical Association, Nazis used media propaganda to provoke “mental confusion, the contradiction of feeling, indecision, panic,” among Jews by controlling German journalists, suppressing anti-Nazi newspapers, expelling reporters from foreign countries and, “[taking] over the broadcasting system and every other agency that bore a relationship to the cultural life of the people” (Casey, 1944). Because of the fear and uncertainty from what they saw and heard on these controlled channels, millions of Jews, including individuals and families, fled their host countries in search of a better life.

In addition to the migration of people, media's influence has also triggered other manifestations, including cultural movements like hip-hop. Just over half a century ago, newspapers and television raged with visual depictions of African Americans' fight for equal rights (Goodwin, 2019), while black artists performed music that painted a picture of the African

American experience (Newkirk, 2018). According to The Atlantic (2018), media that documented blacks' strife for equality was a factor that led to hip-hop's birth.

Just like the spirituals invented during slavery, the blues that bubbled up after the collapse of Reconstruction, and the soul that took root during the civil-rights era, hip-hop was in a sense preordained by the social conditions of blackness. It became as much an embrace of the platform and victories for which King fought, and a necessary and careful distancing from the most pervasive pieces of his legacy, from the brand of masculinity, stressed as his calling card, from the church, and from respectability.” Newkirk (2018) also establishes that hip-hop music is a subculture and movement resulting from the exposure that African Americans had to the different types of media that encapsulated the social conditions they experienced during the Civil Rights era.

Beyond cultural movements, social media has also been used as the means for political movements that cause cognitive and affective effects, which as a result, influences people to move to new geographic areas. According to (Salas-Wright et al., 2021), social media influenced the Venezuelan community's outcomes after they left their country because two political extremes, Chavista and the opposition, used Facebook and other platforms to influence the community's voting preferences. As a result, and in the early 2010s, when scholars identified an increased usage and popularity of social media, Valcke et al. (2015) stated that users cognitively observed biases in content being shared across channels, which in turn, pushed them to seek external pluralism. This desire to obtain information from multiple channels because they lack confidence in what is being presented to them ultimately leads to "recreate their Venezuelan identity, which often competes with other Venezuelans' views. Thus, posting may be a way to show one's identity (Miller, 2016).”

A more recent example of media's influence that conveys its power to provoke an online movement during the most recent part of the digital era is #MeToo. In 2017, the hashtag spread vastly on social media platforms, with millions of users using it to figuratively raise their hands and share their experiences with sexual violence. According to Tarana Burket, the "Me Too" movement's founder, when the movement became as popular as it did in 2017, "survivors into culture-shifting leaders" (Kulke, 2020, p. 316). Because of victims' desire to express their personal experiences using the media as a megaphone, Vox News (2021) stated that rather than being just a movement of expression, its purpose was to push for change. The article concluded that commentary expressed over social media pushed for systematic change, protections for people who claimed abuse, political reforms, and even changed Americans' perceptions about sexual harassment. Although its effects are not as tangible, social media has proven to be the foundation of what began this global cultural movement.

Media and Diasporas

In the case of diasporas, or groups of people that decide to move from their home region to a new location outside of it, media's influence is significant. Diasporic identity is constructed through media and the identity they carry from their homeland to a host country as their lives unfold in those new surroundings (Stam, 1996). Stam also stated that media is a vehicle that strengthens communities that face challenges when they are geographically displaced and feel culturally alienated. Since the beginning of the internet, technology has created new patterns of global interconnection (Castells, 1996) and has thus broken down geographical limitations to accelerate people's movement. As a result, it has also expanded media's effects on diasporas that have helped satisfy various cultural-centered purposes and needs. To further solidify this, Stein (2009) argues that social media, in general, creates new channels of communication for social

movements, including information such as issues and views to those that are part of a network or to those who are just observers.

Notwithstanding, today, media's presence on online channels has proven to be of increasing value as it has become a powerful space where ideas are exchanged. Due to social media's immediate nature of reaching the world's inhabitants, what results from these types of forums are physical and abstract effects on the lives of communities around the world that are more potent than ever before, especially in the case of digital diasporas, a term that Al-Rawi & Fahmy (2018) define as communities that, "are formed online and constituted by networks of individuals sharing similar values or interests." The same authors illustrate this further by stating that examples of where to find these online diasporas including "[social networks] such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube [that] provide platforms for civic engagement and political activism by providing additional means of self-expression and active deliberation."

For instance, Jacob (2018) concluded that in the case of Malayalis, an ethnolinguistic diaspora group from India that lives in Qatar, "ethnic media served as a symbolic tool that aided in the reinforcement of cultural identity... through stories and images" and magnified their feeling of "increased connection to their homeland." Another example of media's impact on diasporic identity is Romanians living in Ireland. Their use of online forums has shaped their understanding of who they are and assisted them in their ability to articulate their identities (Macri, 2011). More specifically, scholars pointed out that this type of internet place functioned as a way for the Romanian community in Ireland to push back against the stigmas they felt while living in a host country to "'liberate' the Romanian identity" from what they perceived to be false notions of what they considered their identity. By doing this, researchers concluded that the diaspora used their daily interactions on social media's online forums to modify their identity.

In addition to cultural identity shaping, reinforcement, and increased connection to their homeland, Chama (2015) determined that diaspora-centered media effects also satisfy these groups' everyday needs. To illustrate this, they expounded upon the United Kingdom's Zambian diaspora's interest in UKZambians, a website that engaged members of this group with ten million visits each month. As the largest group of Zambians that live outside of their country, in the United Kingdom, this research illustrated how a diaspora engages with media, specifically social media, to connect with entertainment, e-commerce, and other types of Zambian-centered content. The study argued that UKZambians became "an alternative medium that meets the immigrant community's needs" with these resources.

Media's effects on diasporas extend beyond identity, uses and gratifications, and increased connection to their home country. Shi (2005) further describes what he termed the "cultural Chinese," one of the United States' largest sub-culture groups. While Shi (2005) states that ethnic media accomplishes the ability to connect them to their homeland through stories and images and serves as a channel through which they can express their identity, he also emphasized that connections and expressions are just the beginning. Shi adds that an additional effect is an increased desire to participate in social activism. Although this may be the case in some scenarios of the Chinese diaspora in the United States, he admits that media's "mobilizing ability" and "alternative consciousness" is not something that applies to all and is less observable in the Chinese diaspora's "elitist" research subjects because "[t]heir life stories indicate that they do not experience the material, cultural, and political injustice as much as working-class diaspora members do."

Shehata, M. (2020) shed light on media's influence on diasporic identity with a study on Tunisians throughout Europe by asserting in the conclusion that media "exerted short-term

transformative effects on the political ideology and a reverse effect on religious orientations” that was heavily dependent on their experiences in their homeland and their host country. In addition to the political and religious identity impact, the scholar established that because of this relationship between two different countries and the experiences associated with each, “[the] diaspora is more likely to construct a hybrid identity, supported by media channels that facilitate the adoption of sociopolitical principles derived from both countries of origin and country of residence.”

Globalization’s Impact on Diasporas’ Movement

Globalization has had a significant impact on the movement of diaspora populations. For example, it has made it easier for people to move across borders, facilitated by improvements in transportation and communication technologies. Additionally, it has led to increased migration and the growth of diaspora communities worldwide. Furthermore, globalization contributes to political instability in some countries, leading to increased displacement and migration. To emphasize globalization’s physical impact on diasporic groups, Knobler and Mahmud (2006) stated, “The unprecedented volume and speed of human mobility are perhaps the most conspicuous manifestations of the present era of globalization. More people are on the move from international tourists to war-displaced refugees than ever before.” Another facet of globalization’s physical consequences is its ability to create new diaspora communities and lead to the growth of existing ones. In today’s world, where media is heavily digital, globalization has facilitated communication and travel between countries, allowing diaspora communities to stay connected with their homeland and each other. It has helped to maintain cultural ties and facilitate the exchange of ideas and resources. Christensen (2013) said, “the end result [of globalization] is the experience of interconnectivity as both bonding and bridging forces, and

vehicles for boundary maintenance and creation of new borders.” Therefore, these connections have led to increased cultural exchange and intermingling, creating new cultural hybrids and enriching local cultures.

Globalization of digital media has, in turn, not only provoked cultural flows but has also resulted in an increased understanding of human movement. This growth in movement because of globalization, per Hinds et al. (2022), is becoming more apparent than ever. In their study, researchers identified human mobility patterns by collecting digital data. They said that all types of movement in this globalized era, from small to large scale, like people moving from geographic location to another, are being digitally recorded and, as a result, “offer new possibilities to advance understanding of human behavior.” To arrive at this conclusion, they considered studies that used cell phone records, smartphone data, and social media to track different groups’ intergroup behavior, social interactions, and overall mobility (including that of individuals and crowds). Other academics have found that globalization has also impacted people’s identities, including “an intensification of cosmopolitan identifications” (Christensen, 2012). Berry (2005) also previously correlated globalization and movement data with another facet of individuals’ identity, specifically acculturation, something they defined as “the process of cultural and psychological change caused by intercultural contact between individuals and groups.”

Overall, globalization has had a profound impact on diaspora movements, leading to opportunities and challenges for diaspora communities worldwide. Because of globalization, diasporas have taken advantage of the economic opportunities it creates, like better trade, investment, and jobs – all to enhance their economic well-being. An excellent example is Puerto Ricans who have moved to the continental United States for increased economic opportunity. On

the flip side, some scholars argue that the rapid pace of globalization and cultural homogenization can lead to the loss of traditional cultural practices and values, particularly among diaspora communities. Morris (2002) said there is a concern "... that imported media fare causes members of national or ethnic groups to lose their sense of themselves as a collectivity is often expressed as the fear of the dilution of cultural purity," and within this literature, pointed to the example of Puerto Rican youth being exposed to English language and U.S.-based television content and its influence on their upbringing. They referenced how media like this shapes them to be more like youth in the continental United States than from the island.

According to digital-era scholars, there is further need to research "new media environments [that] have become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life in migrant groups" (Andersson, 2019) and is considered a research field that is "understudied" and still "developing."

Media and Environmental Catastrophes

Media has played a significant role in bringing attention to environmental disasters and their consequences. By reporting on these events, media can inform the public, raise awareness, and increase pressure on governments and corporations to act. On the other hand, media can also perpetuate misinformation, sensationalize events, and create a distorted perception of the issue. Therefore, it is crucial for media to report on environmental disasters accurately, responsibly, and comprehensively.

In addition to media's role in raising awareness about what is going on with the environment, there is a growing body of academic literature that evaluates the role of media in natural disasters and its impact on people's well-being. Some studies suggest that media can play a positive role by providing critical information, resources, and support to those affected by natural disasters. Finch et al. (2016) found that social media, in these instances, becomes a "...

useful surveillance tool because public health officials can...gain insight into public opinions and perceptions. Social media allows public health workers and emergency responders to act more quickly and efficiently during crises." Some examples include information on evacuation routes, shelter locations, and assistance programs, as well as updates on the status of the disaster, which can help people make informed decisions and feel more secure.

However, other studies suggest that media coverage of natural disasters can negatively affect people's well-being. For example, media can perpetuate stereotypes and create a distance between the affected communities and the public, leading to a lack of empathy and support. In a report by Geng et al. (2020) that studied Chinese nationals' response to floods in Shandong, they found that "The psychological distance on the Internet and the effect of risk communication may be the main factors that cause the temporal and spatial differences in the perception of storms flood by new media users." Additionally, excessive media coverage can cause distress and anxiety, particularly for those directly affected by the disaster.

Media's impact on people's well-being during natural disasters is complex and depends on various factors, including the tone, content, and duration of media coverage, as well as the context and characteristics of the affected communities. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that media has the potential to play an essential role in both improving and worsening the well-being of those impacted by natural disasters.

Media and Post-Natural Disaster Protests

Media has played a crucial role in enabling individuals to express their frustrations with governments after natural disasters. By providing a platform for individuals to share their stories, opinions, and experiences, media has helped to amplify the voices of those directly impacted by natural disasters. It has put pressure on governments to respond to the needs and concerns of

disaster-affected communities and to take action to address the underlying causes of natural disasters. For example, media brings attention to government failures in responding to natural disasters, such as inadequate evacuation plans, slow disaster relief efforts, and a lack of support for rebuilding communities. It has led to public outrage and demands accountability, transparency, and improved disaster management practices.

However, political and economic interests can also influence media by shaping how disaster events and government responses are reported. It can result in biased or incomplete coverage that fails to reflect the experiences and perspectives of disaster-affected communities accurately.

Overall, the role of media in shaping public perceptions and expressions of frustration with governments after natural disasters is complex and multifaceted. Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that media has the potential to play an influential role in holding governments accountable for their actions and ensuring that the needs and concerns of disaster-affected communities are heard and addressed.

Puerto Ricans as Media Consumers

In mainstream media, Puerto Ricans are widely known for their music, Afro-Puerto Rican heritage (Rivera, 2012), and resilience (Rodriguez-Diaz, 2018) after experiencing deadly hurricanes and economic strife. With more than 3 million people on the island, one of the Spanish-speaking countries with the highest percentage of the population that uses social media (Statista Research, 2022), Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism students carried out a study that suggests that Puerto Ricans have approximately, “66 news outlets: 20 newspapers, 18 websites, ten radio stations, eight podcasts, seven TV stations, two newswires, and one magazine” available to them. In addition to the list of news media that islanders tune in to, the

same researchers concluded that most of these are in closer proximity to the metropolitan side of the island but can still be found throughout the U.S. territory. “These outlets have few resources, little or no revenue, and sometimes just one person to produce, edit and distribute the content,” they stated. As far as language is concerned, although the island’s official language is Spanish, there are channels in English. Many Spanish-language channels available to Puerto Ricans incorporate English and Spanish content into their programming.

In September 2017, these channels went eerily silent. Hurricane Maria, a category-five storm, caused devastation to the island’s inhabitants and left millions, if not all, without electricity. What unfolded from this point on was millions of Puerto Ricans losing access to the outside world. Without power on an already faulty grid, cell phone access with limited access due to towers not functioning reduced their ability to reach out to loved ones. Alternatively, for those who wished to connect with people on the island, most could not communicate with their friends and family members who survived the deadly storm. The despair they felt before the hurricane made landfall swayed them to immediately document the hurricane's destructive impact over the island on social media channels, with the Puerto Rican community and the world tuning in.

According to Bui (2018), the island's official crisis communication channels served as "traditional 'one-to-many,' centralized model of emergency management communication systems," while social media afforded Puerto Ricans "' many-to-many,' or decentralized communication across peer networks." In Bui's interviews with state government officials and individuals responsible for the territory's disaster communication system, they observed several themes. From those interviews, Bui identified opportunities for crisis communication to 1) adapt message dissemination to newer types of communication platforms like social media to reach

more people, 2) combat misinformation with official government social media accounts, 3) increase access to information in Spanish, Puerto Ricans' official language since "The National Weather Service provides all warnings in English first, then Spanish" (Bui, 2019) and concluded that the time it took for messages' translation to Spanish. As a result, this "... cause[d] many native Spanish speakers to seek their news from other sources like Spanish-language social media accounts instead." Bui's research further emphasized the need for future scholars "to better understand whether similar challenges with social media, rumor control, and trust are consistent in the island context" and find out "whether social media becomes a communication tool that circumvents existing language barriers."

Fortin (2017) reported that beyond official entities' crisis communication, the island's residents contributed to a boom in downloads for social media messaging apps like Zello, a channel that enabled faster and primary source information, including text and multimedia, to spread like wildfire and share with the world the damage the storm had done. Additional social media use consisted of memes to produce and engage with this type of content "to express political discontent, make calls to action, engage in catharsis, and seek political change" and, by doing so, create "... a collective storytelling process where the distinct participation patterns shown above play a major role in expressing catharsis, ideas, sensations, and feelings" (Costanza-Chock., 2018).

Since Hurricane Maria, the Puerto Rican diaspora and those that continue to live on the island have demonstrated the power they, as social media consumers and authors have in disseminating information that can even influence Puerto Rico's public agenda. For example, during the island's latest political uprising in 2019 to oust former governor Ricardo "Ricky" Rossello PennState academics concluded that #RickyRenuncia (#RickyResign, in English) was

shared on social media more than 1 million times. They also determined that "almost 40% of all geo-located tweets originated from persons living outside of the island," meaning people living in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to understanding where the pro-resignation messages originated, they also identified how pro-Rossello tweets were authored by accounts that "appeared to be acting in coordination with government officials." The pull mentioned above of both political extremes demonstrates how Puerto Ricans use social media to express their opinions about the island's crises.

In addition to expressing their opinions of how matters on the island should or should not continue on social media channels, Rodriguez (2019) pointed out that natives on the island and those that lived abroad psychologically processed and expressed their emotions about Hurricane Maria's first anniversary as demonstrated in tweets they published on that date. The study concluded that those that lived in Puerto Rico used the hashtag #PuertoRicoSeLevanta (Puerto Rico rises, in English). This theme reflected optimism versus tweets originating from members of the Puerto Rican diaspora living elsewhere. This example illustrates that media authored by Puerto Ricans varies, that there are opinions on both sides of the spectrum, and that there is keen interest in expressing them over social media channels.

The Puerto Rican Diaspora

Today, more than five million Puerto Ricans live in the continental United States. Most recently, journalists (Robles et al., 2017) documented interviews with members of the Puerto Rican diaspora that still had family members on the U.S. territory during Hurricane Maria. One of the interviewees described their emotions when receiving messages from family members there, "We here are nervous, terrified by the news and the photos, and unable to do much for our families and the thousands that have no roof." As the situation continued to unravel and affected

people's lives, the total net outflow of those that left the island from September through October 2017 amounted to more than 300,000 individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Ayala (2021) described this and previous islander movements by stating, "At present, the Puerto Ricans are a diasporic people" and has also labeled these types of movements as "great exodus[es]." The same author says that Puerto Ricans in the continental United States have always contributed to a "positive population growth despite the large number of Puerto Ricans that left for the United States every year."

However, this constant population increase on the island changed when Flores and Krogstad (2021) determined a few years later and after Hurricane Maria that the island's population growth rate declined and reached its lowest point since 1950 (when this yearly data first became available). Melendez and Hinojosa (2017) equated this decline to an 8% decline in the total population. Before that, the same report said that yearly the average population loss between 2000 and 2009 never amounted to more than 6,000 people. Even before this research was compiled, in his research, Ayala (2021) pointed to questions that academics should continue pursuing. For instance, Ayala suggested scholars inquire more about Puerto Ricans' movement from the island to the continental United States, including the reasons behind it and its impact on the nation. One question he asked was, "What is the significance of the fact that two-thirds of Puerto Ricans now live outside [of] Puerto Rico?" and also said they should be considered "...a new political powerhouse capable of redefining the U.S. political system."

To better understand the Puerto Rican diaspora, it is necessary to be familiar with the scope of where they live and outline the circumstances that factored into more leaving the island after Hurricane Maria. The group of approximately 5.6 million live across the United States' 50 states, with New York and New Jersey having the highest Puerto Rican population concentration

(Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). The group has had U.S. citizenship since 1917 (Jones Act - the World of 1898: The Spanish-American War (Hispanic Division, Library of Congress), n.d.). After that, Puerto Ricans could join the U.S. army (saymedia.com, n.d.) but could not and still cannot exercise all U.S. citizens' rights, including voting for the country's president past primary elections or unless they claim residency in a state (D.C., Puerto Rico, And The U.S. Territories, 2022b). The flexibility of pertaining to a U.S. territory that belongs to but is not territory of the same nation, officially known as an "unincorporated territory" (Lewis, 2017b) since 1898, has enabled them to move back and forth from the island as they please without restrictions and with the utmost flexibility. For generations, this political ambiguity has opened the door to Puerto Ricans who feel frustrated or impacted by many different situations, including the island's political situation, lack of economic opportunity, and natural disasters (Cohn et al., 2020). Ortiz-Blanes (2021) said that Hurricane Maria, "the largest disaster in the island's modern history, killed thousands and destroyed critical infrastructure," and as a result, "is creating a 'demographic crisis' that will fundamentally alter Puerto Rico's society, economy and culture, as family structures change and there are fewer workers to pay for government services."

Cultivation Theory

In today's media-driven world, its content can be found everywhere, and cultivation analysis focuses on its influence on people. Its effects have been analyzed for many years by scholars. One of the most foundational theories from this theory's framework is a cultivation study that explains how television content is "a system of messages" readily available to entire communities, as explained by Stacks et al. (2019, p. 113). Because of media content's multifaceted nature, George Gerbner, a communication scholar, and the founder of cultivation theory, observed that television could affect people's perceptions of the world (Stacks et al.

2019, p. 113). Although this theory is based on television, media itself has since evolved, and today, the theory can be applied to people's social media interactions. In short, cultivation analysis explores how media shapes the ways individuals perceive the world. The primary research question guiding the study is that people who watch more media are more likely than those who watch less to see life and society as they are portrayed in different formats (Stacks et al., 2019, p. 114). The average person spends about seven hours daily on television or social media (Strasburger et al., 2010). The type of content people view can make all the difference in how they perceive the world, even during natural disasters like Hurricane Maria. Cultivation theory studies the correlations between people's exposure to media, including media content, and their perceptions of the world. According to Bievenour (2014), the theory of cultivation analysis focuses on people's exposure to television, which is a system of messages, in a long-term perspective. They also investigated the central themes presented in that content and their effects on people's perceptions of reality. Researchers like Gerbner believe that if people spend too much time being exposed to television content, which can be associated with streaming apps, they will also start seeing the 'real world' in the same terms as that of the fictional universe". The same researchers intend to "uncover" those messages and try to understand how people are influenced by those messages. A big concern comes to specific age groups, like adolescents. Since they usually spend a long time exposed to media content, whether television, cable, or streaming apps, they could be affected by media's views on several different topics, like sexuality, violence, gender roles, and others. "While the presence of sex in the media does not cause adolescents to engage in sexual behaviors, it may cultivate the message that most teenagers are already having sex." The aforementioned study also explained that since adolescents tend to feel the need to fit in, having access to sexual content may influence their perceptions of their

peers' sexual behavior and can ultimately affect their decisions regarding sexual initiation.

Another concern is that most media portrayals of sex do not show the consequences of initiating sexual behavior, which can influence adolescents' perceptions of sex.

Cultivation analysis suggests that media's influence on people depends more on the content they watch on television rather than the time they spend in front of the television. Shrum (1995) has published findings in the *Communication Research Journal* analyzing the effects of television viewing on an individual's perceptions of the world. Shrum (1995) mentioned that this content does not have to be entirely negative; sometimes, it introduces new topics and teaches empathy regarding cancer, depression, dealing with death, and others. This content, however, has the power to influence people's judgments of things (Shrum, 1995). "It is important to consider the types of programs particular viewers watch rather than only considering total viewing hours" (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981). Studies differ in the average hours' adolescents spend watching streaming or television content. However, the type of content they watch has a higher effect on their perspectives of violence and sex than the number of hours they spend in front of a television or mobile device.

The cultivation analysis theory explains that frequent exposure to media can influence people's perceptions of the world. Shrum (1995) conducted a few studies that analyzed people's answers and correlated them with how often they were exposed to media. Heavy television-viewers usually perceived the world as worse than what it is when it comes to violence (Shrum, 1995). However, he did find a few issues with the research because no one can be 100% sure about what influenced someone's answer. For example, if one of the questions focused on lawyers, a heavy-viewer respondent could know a lawyer or could be a lawyer, so media would probably not be the biggest influencer in their answer (Shrum, 1995). Although this type of

research can find general answers, it comes with a few issues. However, it does show some correlation between television viewing and perceptions of the world.

Media Coverage Impacts Diasporas' Perceptions of Diasporas' Homeland

Exposure to negative media coverage can shape diaspora's perceptions of their homeland. A study by Etchegaray and Correa (2015) illustrates that when diaspora members are exposed to negative media coverage of their homeland, it can affect their perceptions of their country of origin. Negative portrayals can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction or even disillusionment, which may influence their decision to leave. Media consumption can create a sense of "imagined community" among diaspora members (Mahmoud, 2016). Cultivation theory suggests that media consumption can help create a shared set of beliefs and values among a group of people. For diaspora members, this can create a sense of belonging to an "imagined community" of people who share a common experience of migration or displacement. This shared identity may contribute to the decision to leave their homeland. In addition to shaping perceptions and creating a sense of community, media consumption can also provide practical information about migration opportunities and destinations. Social media platforms have become important sources of information for diaspora members looking to migrate, as they can connect with others who have already made the move and learn about job opportunities, housing options, and other practical considerations. Finally, research has shown that media consumption can reinforce the decision to leave among diaspora members. Exposure to positive portrayals of life in the host country or negative portrayals of the homeland can create a sense of "pull" toward the host country and a desire to leave the homeland behind. In summary, cultivation theory suggests that media consumption does play a significant role in shaping diaspora members' perceptions of their homeland and their decision to leave. However, it is important to note that media is just one

of many factors that influence migration decisions, and individual experiences and circumstances may vary widely.

Social Media Groups Cultivate Diasporas' Perceptions of Cultural Heritage and Identity

There is a growing body of academic research that examines the ways in which social media groups cultivate diaspora groups' perceptions of their cultural heritage and identity. Some studies suggest that social media can facilitate a sense of connection and belonging among diaspora communities, as well as provide a platform for sharing cultural knowledge and experiences. For example, one study by Al-Rawi and El Asam (2017) explored the impact of social media on the cultural identity of Syrian diaspora communities. The study found that social media allowed Syrian diaspora individuals to connect with their cultural community, even if they were geographically distant. Social media also facilitated the sharing of cultural knowledge and traditions, which in turn contributed to a sense of cultural pride and identity among the diaspora community. Another study by Sharma (2015) examined the role of social media in fostering a sense of belonging among South Asian diaspora communities in the UK. The study found that social media groups provided a platform for individuals to connect with others who shared their cultural background and facilitated the sharing of cultural experiences and traditions. This, in turn, contributed to a sense of belonging and connection among the South Asian diaspora community.

Overall, research suggests that social media groups on different platforms can play an important role in cultivating diaspora groups' perceptions of their cultural heritage and identity. By providing a platform for connection, knowledge-sharing, and cultural exchange, social media can contribute to a sense of cultural pride and belonging among diaspora communities.

Social Media Exposure Cultivates Cultural Heritage Pride in Different Demographics

There is limited research on the direct relationship between social media exposure and cultural heritage pride. However, there are cultivation studies that suggest a link between media exposure and cultural attitudes, which may be relevant to understanding the relationship between social media and cultural heritage pride. One study conducted by Al-Rawi (2018) explored the relationship between social media exposure and collective national identity among Arabs. The study found that the more television watched, the more likely they were to identify as being, “members of an online public sphere ... connected along the same platforms and communities due to their shared linguistic understanding though they have multiple perceptions of their Arab identity.” This suggests that media exposure can influence individuals' cultural attitudes and identification. Another study by Mastro and Greenberg (2000) explored the impact of television exposure on African American identity. The study found that African American individuals who watched more television were more likely to perceive negative portrayals of African Americans in the media, which in turn was associated with lower self-esteem and decreased pride in their cultural heritage. While these studies do not directly examine the impact of social media exposure on cultural heritage pride, they suggest that media exposure can influence individuals' attitudes and identification with their cultural group. It is possible that similar mechanisms may be at play with social media, particularly given its potential for creating communities and facilitating cultural exchange. Nonetheless, more research is needed to understand the specific relationship between social media exposure and cultural heritage pride.

Social Media Cultivates a Greater Sense of Activism in Cultural Groups

Research on the relationship between social media and activism is a relatively new area of study, and there is limited research that directly examines the impact of social media on cultural groups' desire to participate in activism. However, there are cultivation studies that

suggest a relationship between media exposure and social and political attitudes, which may be relevant to understanding the relationship between social media and activism. One study by Xenos and Moy (2007) found that exposure to political blogs and social media was positively associated with political participation, including voting, and attending political rallies or events. The study also found that exposure to political blogs and social media was associated with greater political knowledge and interest, which may increase individuals' motivation to participate in activism. Another study by Cheng et. al. (2017) examined the impact of social media exposure on civic engagement among Chinese college students. The study found that exposure to social media content related to social issues and public affairs was positively associated with civic engagement, including participation in community service and political activities.

While these studies do not directly examine the impact of social media on cultural groups' desire to participate in activism, they suggest that exposure to social media can influence individuals' political attitudes and behaviors. It is possible that social media exposure may similarly influence cultural groups' attitudes toward activism, particularly if social media provides a platform for discussing cultural issues and advocating for cultural change. However, more research is needed to understand the specific relationship between social media and cultural group activism.

Diasporas Use Social Media to Cultivate and Counter Negative Portrayals of Homeland

There is limited specific academic research that directly examines how cultivation theory relates to diaspora members' increased desire to use social media to share positive content about their homeland. However, some research has explored related topics that shed light on this question. One study, for example, explored the relationship between social media use and

national identity among Russian-speaking diaspora members in Estonia, Finland (Vorobeva, 2022). The researchers found that social media use was positively associated with a sense of national identity and belonging, and that diaspora members were more likely to share positive content about their homeland on social media to maintain ties with their culture and community. In this study, cultivation theory was not explicitly tested, but the findings suggest that social media can play an important role in shaping diaspora members' perceptions of their homeland and their desire to share positive content on social media. The sense of community and shared identity that can be fostered through social media use can contribute to a desire to highlight positive aspects of their culture and heritage, and to counter negative portrayals in mainstream media.

RQ1: How did social media impact the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria?

Method

Justification for a Qualitative Approach

Researchers chose a qualitative approach because of its ability to provide rich descriptions of what the Puerto Rican diaspora's perceptions after Hurricane Maria, in other words, very complex phenomena. As mentioned in this study's review of literature, members across the island that left the island post-hurricane experienced, engaged with, and interpreted social media content that was published before and after Hurricane Maria in different ways. At the time of this study, no academic research had been carried out to understand the impact that social media had on this specific diaspora and therefore, researchers identified this study as a valuable opportunity to provide them with an opportunity to voice their thoughts in interviews.

Justification for Interviews

Researchers' approach to analyzing research data is based on grounded type theory through the lens of cultivation. To implement grounded theory, researchers conducted a "constant comparative analysis of rich data in specific contexts" (Lindlof, p. 101). Researchers used principles from the interviewee guide that asked participants to describe their experiences with media exposure before and after Hurricane Maria. Researchers then attached codes to "phenomena that are typically coded from texts," including Puerto Rican diaspora members' use of social media, its impact on their perceptions that led them to leave the island, and any other themes that researchers identified during this process. To validate the study's findings, researchers identified a second researcher that used the same interview guide and proceeded to code a sample of the interviews that the first researcher recorded. Although the developed codes and assignments to different interviewee transcripts differed from the first, the codes and their subsets naturally evolved from the transcripts' study. By doing this, both samples, coded by different researchers, illustrated similar themes. Following this process ensured that researchers remained "'grounded' in the social realities and cultural understandings of the scene" (Lindlof, p. 322). In turn, it added validity to this study's qualitative findings and provided researchers with intercoder reliability.

Bias and Reflexivity

While the main researcher in this study acknowledges that they have close ties to Puerto Rico's culture and identifies as Puerto Rican, a qualitative approach was selected to avoid the possibility of bias throughout the research process. The sample expressed their thoughts a second researcher was identified to also ensure that the developed codes aligned with the original researcher's findings and in turn, they did. To also ensure that the main researcher's background had no influence on the study, the main researcher consciously tailored open-ended questions for

the interview guide and purposefully approached each interview until interviewees voiced they had nothing else to say. Furthermore, once researchers noticed recurring patterns in interviewees' answers and reached saturation, they stopped interviews. By approaching interviews in this way, it reduced possibilities of bias.

Participants

Researchers selected members of the Puerto Rican diaspora for this research for the following reasons. Although islanders' decisions to leave and migrate to the continental United States have been investigated, previous research indicates that information on how social media impacts this specific group during this time is lacking and should be pursued by future researchers. The second reason researchers chose this group is that no research pinpoints media content's influence in that decision-making process leading up to and after they have relocated to the United States mainland.

Another reason is that, unlike other subcultures that come from countries outside of the U.S. that belong to the Latin American demographic, Puerto Ricans' are, by default, citizens of the United States. However, most do not prioritize American citizenship over Puerto Rican cultural identity. These nationalistic ties to the island and the ability they have to travel back and forth easily because of their U.S. citizenship mean that focusing on this group will allow us to identify a minority group that still has strong ties to their homeland and are primarily like being continually cultivated by Puerto Rican-centric media regardless of their geographical location and the timing of their move to the United States.

Finally, although there have been many contemporary studies on the Puerto Rican diaspora, these have mainly focused on reasons that have influenced them to move to the United States, and no studies have focused on whether the digital eras have played a role in this

community. Past research has instead focused on factors like socioeconomic development and historical ties between islanders and the U.S. that have naturally led to the formation of a diaspora community (Santiago & Acosta-Belén, 2008), cultural identity and the transitional migration dynamic that led to the diaspora's growth (Sanchez, 2008). Similar to a study on the Garifuna diaspora by Johnson & Callahan (2013) that found that "newer forms of social media are ... creating virtual cultural cyberscapes that are extending minority cultures," in this study, researchers opine that members of Puerto Rico's diaspora qualify as another valuable group that can help mass communication scholars add to the current body of knowledge that exists that can help the world understand how media is influencing these diaspora groups as they make decisions that not only transforming their day-to-day lives but are also impacting future generations.

Analysis of Data

For this study, researchers used a qualitative interview approach with open-ended questions that would shed light on how this group of Puerto Rican mainlanders consumed media before and after September 2017. To accomplish the above, researchers designed and used a wide variety of questions within the guide, including questions that allowed interviewees to "[walk] us through a part of their life" (Lindlof, 2017), time-line questions that allowed researchers to go "deeper into the participant's world" and probes to increase our opportunities to expound upon their responses (p. 255-266).

Questions started broad to understand the interviewees' social media habits. Then they became more specific with time to narrow down and shed light on what they perceived their preferred platforms' content, personal feelings, and views changed from one specific time (before Hurricane Maria) to the next (post-hurricane). The study's purpose was to understand

how social media influences the Puerto Rican diaspora’s decision to move to the continental United States. As part of this study, researchers obtained Institutional Review Board approval. Each question targeted answers that would best expound upon interviewees’ experiences and results of their exposure to social media before and after their transition from the island. To obtain three types of answers, the study used three lines of questioning. Within each line of questioning, each formulated inquiry found specific information about areas including:

- What their social media habits consisted of prior to and today, after the storm
- What their perceptions of Puerto Rico-themed social media posts were before and after leaving Puerto Rico
- What influence does social media have on their opinions, emotions, and decisions to leave or return to the island

Table 1

Examples of Various Question Types Used in Interviewee Guide.

RQ1: How did social media impact the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria?	Interview guide question type:	Interview guide question:
	What were your perceptions of Puerto Rico-themed social media content after moving to the continental United States?	When you saw social media posts about Puerto Rico, what tone did they have? (i.e., positive, negative, a mix)
		What other characteristics did you tend to see in these types of posts on social media?
		Would you say that Puerto Rico-themed social media posts differed based on which

		platform you used? If so, how? If not, why not?
		Did you notice any differences between social media posts before Hurricane Maria and now, after Hurricane Maria? If so, what differences do you recognize?

The study’s researchers conducted interviews in the language interviewees felt most comfortable with and over Zoom. Because of the recruited sample, most interviews were conducted in Spanish, with very little English since all study participants were bilingual and expressed confidence in their ability to speak both languages fluently. During each interview, researchers captured interviewees’ statements using an audio recording transcription app, Otter. Researchers in this study used an interviewer who was a fully bilingual (English and Spanish) native speaker. After carrying out the interviews, the same researcher manually translated the interviews’ transcriptions first and verified the quality of each interview transcription translated by listening to the audio interview recordings again and one more time totaling three reviews. After conducting a quality control step for each translation, the researcher coded the interviews.

After thorough inference of what each participant said, researchers developed and assigned codes to interviews’ transcripts to use them “as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data” (Charmaz, 1983, p. 317). Researchers then decided which codes to develop and which data to compile within each code based on the inference of specific themes and categories (Lindlof, p. 315) that interviewees shared during their time with them. In summary, researchers based their approach to analyzing the research data on grounded type theory. They conducted a “constant comparative analysis of rich data in specific contexts”

(Lindlof, p. 101). They used organizing principles from their established interview guide to attach codes to “phenomena that are typically coded from texts,” including relationships, settings, and states among the full-time working women invited.

It is important to note that the principal researcher that carried out this study used the same research questions and interviewee guide every time they met with a participant. To ensure that these codes fully reflected intercoder reliability and could build a solid foundation for reliable results, researchers independently developed, compared, and verified the codes and the subsets that naturally evolved from the transcriptions. Implementing this process illustrated similar themes in several interviews, and in turn, researchers successfully verified the interviews’ codes. This process enabled researchers to remain “grounded’ in the social realities and cultural understandings of the scene” (Lindlof, p. 322) and continue with the study’s next steps.

Table 2

List of Codes Developed to Analyze Interviewees’ Responses.

Research Question	Code	Subset
RQ1: How did social media impact the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria?	SM (social media usage)	PLAT (social media platforms) TIME (time on each platform) PURP (purpose with which respondents used social media) DIFF (perceived differences between different platforms) COMM (preferred communication feature)

	PCP (perceptions of Puerto Rico from social media content)	BEF (prior to Hurricane Maria) EXSB (examples from before Hurricane Maria) EXSA (examples from after Hurricane Maria)
	EMO (emotions when exposed to Puerto Rican-centric content)	IMP (impact on participant's emotions) NEG (negative impact description) POS (positive impact description) DIFFP (difference in emotions felt when comparing platforms)
	CHG (changes in opinion after having moved to the continental United States)	OPS (overall opinion as to whether or not social media impact what they think about Puerto Rico) DEC (did they make a final decision as to whether or not they would return?)

Table 3

A Table Representative of Interview Phenomena Identified, Codes Developed and Association Made from Interviewees' Responses

Research Question	Code	Subset	Interviewee	Quote
RQ: How has social media impacted the	EMO (emotions when exposed	IMP (social media's impact on emotions)	Person 4	"A very strong feeling of anger, why is this happening? No one is reacting. Everyone continues as if normal."

Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria?	to content about Puerto Rico)	NEG (negative content)	Person 5	“I feel bad because it's home and you don't like to see happening in your homeland.”
	SM (social media usage)	PURP (purpose with which they used social media today)	Person 2	“With the little there was after Hurricane Maria, it was a way to find out where I could find gasoline, ice, and to update people on the mainland about what was happening/going on. [Today I use it to] connect with the family we have and friends [in Puerto Rico]. Our family isn't in Utah.”
			Person 3	“I keep up with what my friends are doing far away. I watch YouTube for guitar tutorials. It allows me to give classes and make money.”
		COMM (sense of community)	Person 3 Person 1	“I'm a part of the Facebook group <i>San Antonio Boricuas</i> .” “I have a Bomba (Puerto Rican dance) group and we want family and others to see us. We have a page on Facebook and Instagram.”

Table 4

Table 4 Locations of Puerto Rican Diaspora Study Participants

Geographic Location (where they are currently residing)	Participants
Texas	3
Puerto Rico	1
Utah	3
Florida	3

Findings

RQ1: How did social media impact the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria?

Findings for RQ1 reflect that interviewees' social media habits changed significantly to insignificantly when comparing the channels, preferred content, purpose, and emotions associated with platforms from before Hurricane Maria to after members of the Puerto Rican diaspora moved to the United States. A summary of the top five categories that emerged from the interview data follows.

Puerto Ricans' Use of Social Media and Purposes Pre and Post-Hurricane Maria

To answer research questions about social media's impact on the Puerto Rican diaspora, interviewee guide first inquired about the diaspora's social media platform preferences and the purposes they gave each platform before and after the 2017 hurricane. During interviews, participants' answers heavily weighed in favor of having used Facebook more than any other social media platform before the Hurricane. Their responses illustrated patterns of its ability to render and distribute the latest information and news about the island versus other media platforms. They also emphasized how Facebook allowed users to easily be exposed to, create and share the most up-to-date information, specifically news content. When asked to expound upon this preference and explain their choice, participants argued that unlike other platforms available

to them, Facebook provided a wide variety of features that increased their ability to see more content and engage with it, rather than being limited to one specific type of format and a few ways to interact with what popped up on their newsfeeds. While Facebook was the participants' primary preference out of the many social media platforms, their second favorite was Instagram. The study's participants conveyed that either they used Facebook and Instagram hand in hand or only Instagram. They reasoned that Instagram facilitated more freedom to browse other types of content, especially videos. When researchers inquired with them about which social media platforms they preferred and how they used this post-Hurricane Maria after they moved to the continental United States, researchers observed patterns of interviewees pointing out how Facebook incorporated a wide variety of features that enabled them to easily connect with family members and friends that remained on the island through phone calls and video conferencing features. Once Hurricane Maria happened, interviewees shared how their preferred social media platforms and features within these top two social media options changed intentional use and highly increased focus on interpersonal relationships. They referred to these platforms as ways to help them, as new residents across the United States, fulfill their desire to strengthen friendships and family ties, especially since they were now far away from their loved ones. One person said that although they used social media primarily for entertainment before they moved to the United States and Hurricane Maria, leaving the island, and using it eventually enabled them to create a larger network of relationships with people virtually.

Excerpt 1:

“Facebook allow[ed] me to connect more with people. It is more accessible, and people know more about it.”

In addition to their most-used social media platforms, they listed examples such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube that became meaningful to them in this way. An avid YouTube user and former public-school teacher in Puerto Rico agreed with the participant's statement when they explained how they used the same social media platform.

Excerpt 2:

"I use it to keep up with what my friends are doing far away."

According to interviewees, their ability to virtually connect with people on the island became more manageable because of the social media platforms with phone calls, messaging, and videoconferencing features.

Researchers also observed how these Puerto Ricans, who now resided in the continental United States after Hurricane Maria, used social media to carry out their entrepreneurial dreams.

Excerpt 3:

One participant described how they use "...YouTube for guitar tutorials" and shared that "It allows me to give classes and make money."

Excerpt 4:

Another individual said they used Instagram and Facebook to "find clients for [their] business."

In addition to for-profit themes, interviewees said their most-used social media platforms, as outlined above, provided them with continued access to entertainment, hobbies, and news of interest to them, all responses that appeared in their pre-hurricane responses. They shared examples about Puerto Rico and tourism-centric content that pointed them to specific activities or places to visit during short-term returns to the island.

Excerpt 5:

“[They are] very repetitive. My interests are education and, children, reading. I continued seeing the same things. Merging of channels' content frustrated me, so I just stayed with one.”.

However purposeful they felt platforms could be to them, many members of the Puerto Rican diaspora that participated in the study echoed that although each social media platform enabled them to accomplish purposes, when they encountered or felt redundancy among them, they naturally grew weary of the media content and therefore, eliminated them when they interpreted their features as redundant. For this reason, they described how they intentionally deleted their accounts and even the applications associated with platforms they felt overlapped with each other, including content and features. Furthermore, after deleting most of them, they chose a primary social media platform that met most of their needs and forgot the rest.

In summary, the study found that participants heavily favored using Facebook over other social media platforms before the Hurricane. They perceived Facebook as the most effective platform for disseminating the latest information and news about the island and emphasized its ability to facilitate the creation and sharing of up-to-date news content. These findings suggest that Facebook played a crucial role in shaping the information landscape surrounding the Hurricane and highlight its potential as a powerful tool for promoting awareness and mobilizing communities during times of crisis.

Diaspora Used Social Media to Inform their Move to the Continental United States

In interviews, members of the diaspora expressed how heavily they depended on social media as their primary way to obtain information that would help them prepare to leave the island and move to the continental United States. As soon as the tangible and intangible destruction unraveled in the lives of those living in Puerto Rico when the power grid's

connections, including electricity, internet, and phone signals, were slowly restored over time, researchers observed patterns of participants highlighting in their responses newly found purposes for social media including priorities like finding resources and facilitating urgent communication. Excerpt 6:

"With the little there was after Hurricane Maria, it was a way to find out where I could find gasoline, ice, and to update people on the mainland about what was happening, [about] what was going on. The family we have are friends, our family isn't in Utah."

Another participant noted how social media enabled her to develop a drawing board and guide for where to live and what schools her children would attend well before she left the U.S. territory.

Excerpt 7:

"I had everything ready to go before I stepped foot in Texas."

Interviewees explained that details from other Puerto Ricans that had already made the same life decision or information they could find through research on social media platforms increased the information they had to prepare them for the move and covered everything from potential jobs, housing, and even religious communities. A recurring theme from data was how access to information through social media platforms highly increased their confidence to make their decision to move to the continental U.S. as they felt more informed about what was to come and what life would feel like if they started a new life outside of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Ricans Increasingly Used Social Media to Join Virtual Communities

According to respondents, when they officially moved to the continental United States, most found that using social media to locate virtual communities with fellow Puerto Ricans and diaspora members was significantly amplified. In addition to belonging to groups, networks, or

online communities of general interest to them, the interview data demonstrated a consistent pattern of creating, searching for, becoming members of, following, and engaging with Puerto Rican-centric communities. Interviewees confirmed their membership in online groups with titles in English and Spanish with names like “Boricuas in North Carolina” (Puerto Ricans in North Carolina, in English), “Puerto Ricans in Texas,” “Puertorriquenos en Kissimmee Florida” (Puerto Ricans in Kissimmee Florida, in English) and “Boricuas en Utah,” (Boricuas in Utah, in English). As previously mentioned, many of interviewees were recruited from these social media-based communities. Common questions posted by group members resonated with interviewees, who said they had posted similar messages along the lines of:

Excerpt 8:

‘Hello, my people, I am looking to relocate. What towns are good and economical to live in [X state].’

Researchers also noted their use of these social media networks to connect with resources found offline. In this regard, participants explained how online communities helped them understand how to find in-person locations to practice religion, places to provide their children with high-quality education, and more information on where to find reputable general medical practitioners. In their responses, most diaspora members explained how they would seek this information from their online Puerto Rican groups and communities leading up to and long after Hurricane Maria devastated the island. After receiving a suggestion, they would pay attention to other members’ reviews and experiences. If the latter were positive, they explained that this validated and influenced them to reach out to the contact for what they needed. When scenarios like this unfolded, interviewees said that time and time again, they were satisfied with the

referrals they received and found that they could trust an online community for their offline needs.

One diaspora member shared that before arriving:

Excerpt 9:

"I had access to information, and I wasn't lost when I arrived. I had already obtained information."

This group consistently described how they used social media platforms for day-to-day services and everyday resources like schooling, housing, and general doctors. One respondent had a child that she explained had special needs. Because of these special needs, she shared how the Puerto Ricans in Texas group gave her a platform to publish her family's situation and concern about finding a doctor and school that could attend to her child's unique circumstances. Another participant stated:

Excerpt 10:

"[I] looked for information on how to mobilize myself easier. I developed contacts, I found a realtor, a network of Puerto Ricans, found the church I belong to, who could sell 'pasteles,' it's like a neighborhood that you have available, and I get what I need."

Interestingly enough, the same interviewee shared that having these types of experiences online and offline naturally increased her altruistic desire to help other people in the same way.

Excerpt 11:

"I have also helped other people in the same situation. They ask simple questions about things, and I help answer them ... I am more involved. Same thing with church. I help people that are Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics." The same interviewee even compared it to an "online neighborhood."

These excerpts from participants' interviews solidify this study's understanding that social media informed and prepared Puerto Ricans leading up to and after Hurricane Maria, especially as they decided to move to the United States.

Puerto Ricans' Use Social Media to Remain Connected to Island Residents and News

Another strong theme that echoed throughout every interview with the study's participants was their strong preference for social media platforms that enabled them to maintain a close connection to home. Firstly, one interviewee recognized Facebook's ability to:

Excerpt 12:

"...connect more with people [in Puerto Rico]."

The same participant also pointed to the social media giant's popularity as the main reason they perceived the platform to help them develop and maintain people-based connections by saying.

Excerpt 13:

"It is more accessible, and people know more about it... My family and friends want to communicate with me, always, but everyone else, too."

Another interviewee said:

Excerpt 14:

"I keep up with what my friends are doing far away."

Excerpt 15:

"I do not want to lose my connection with Puerto Rico; my family is in Puerto Rico. It is important for me to maintain the connection," said another participant.

One additional thought expressed was that:

Excerpt 16:

"Facebook was primarily for contacts to keep in touch with people who are far away, not for content."

On the other hand, they said they used Instagram to consume video content and did not perceive it as a platform that fulfilled their interpersonal needs to connect with information and people still living on the island like Facebook did. In addition to the pattern researchers observed of using major social media platforms like Facebook for emotional relationships, including friends and family, individuals that now live in the continental United States after Hurricane Maria heavily rely on social media's functions to continue obtaining news-centric content about the island's everyday happenings. One participant explained that since family members still lived on the island, they:

Excerpt 17:

"... [are] worried about what happens over there... and because of what goes on, it worries me."

Most interviewees shared that besides being able to access content that is of general interest to them, the news is something that shows up in their feeds regularly. One participant referred to the island's most popular digital newspaper and said:

Excerpt 18:

"Content I tend to see includes news about Puerto Rico from [news outlets including] El Nuevo Dia and Metro."

Excerpt 19:

"I also use it to keep up to date with news about Puerto Rico, especially because my family is still there."

The study revealed a consistent theme among participants: a strong desire to stay connected with their homeland through social media platforms. The participants expressed a clear preference for platforms that allowed them to maintain a close connection to their roots. These findings highlight the importance of social media in bridging the gap between diaspora communities and their countries of origin, and emphasize the role of technology in facilitating cultural exchange and preserving heritage.

Perceptions About Island Dramatically Change with Social Media after Maria

Some participants expressed their perception of content associated with Puerto Rico from before the natural disaster when what showed on their feeds relayed a mix of positive and negative content to a high influx of negative publications that flooded their social media accounts after. To them, post-Hurricane Maria's social media content reflected primarily negative, if not *only* negative, posts.

Excerpt #20:

"After Hurricane Maria, I would see how Trump treated Puerto Rico and this theme about how the federal government responded and how the local government managed the situation. Everything was negative. Nothing was positive," remembered one participant.

Excerpt #21:

"I don't tend to see anything positive in my feed," argued another.

When asked whether this perception of negative content on social media changed according to the platform, most respondents confirmed that negative and positive content could be found within each. Before the hurricane, they recalled negative content consisting mainly of government and status-related publications.

While respondents primarily aligned with the general perception of more negative content about Puerto Rico in their feeds ever since, the study identified a pattern of them mentioning one positive core theme in a multitude of negative material that distinguished itself from the rest. They explained how the island and diaspora-based community used social media to demonstrate strength post-Hurricane Maria amid all the negative content published on social media platforms.

Excerpt #22:

“I have seen examples of resilience. They find a way to do it, one way or another.”

Another interviewee said that they felt pride.

Excerpt #23:

“When [after Hurricane Maria] ... the people are united, they work together to fight against something,” that respondent described.

Interviewees also consistently expressed that the content they saw on social media influenced their emotions in one way or another. For example, when referring to exposure to negative content, their answers to the study's questions reflected feelings of frustration with both the island's and federal government's role in Puerto Rico's fate before, during, and after the events that unfolded in September 2017. Most participants associated frustration and anger due to seeing content centered around the government. Another negative emotion correlated with negative content was a sense of hopelessness.

Excerpt #24:

"I feel bad for PR because instead of it continuing as it was, it continues to get worse. I no longer have any hope that things will get better. I feel this because of what I see online. The [news] updates are more complicated and difficult even after Hurricane

Maria," one participant explained.

Other feelings upon being exposed to content about Puerto Rico included guilt.

Excerpt #25:

"I'm supposed to be there fighting, and I am here... comfortable," said a participant.

In contrast with the previously mentioned feelings, when they described positive content that illustrates Puerto Ricans coming together, they said they felt "pride" and "happy."

Excerpt #26:

"Some posts make me happy because people, although the situation [in Puerto Rico] is what it is, they have gotten ahead," said another participant.

Someone else also shared that a different emotion that unfolded from frequent exposure to negative content included a proactive desire to "publish and interact with positive content about Puerto Rico" to outshine the negative content that, to them, made them feel bad. "For negative things, there's the government," they reasoned. In addition to the previously mentioned emotions, interview respondents also shared how negative media content they encountered on social media influenced their perception of Puerto Rico's situation as "stagnant" and only capable of slow improvement. "It does influence me, yes. It makes you feel like the country is stagnant and that it is going to take a long time to get out of that," they said.

Additional Themes

Regarding the differences that users from this group noticed between platforms, most of participants highlighted variances in content format and purposes. For example, they stated that Instagram presented more video-formatted content. When they compared other platforms to Facebook, they expressed that it differed from others because it offered multiple content formats and a myriad of consolidated functions. Therefore, they did not need to use more than one or two

social media accounts. Even when users limited their use of social media to one or many accounts, another distinction they shared about a distinction between platforms included how, according to their perception, Instagram portrayed the “ideal Puerto Rico... what isn’t real, and inspiration.”

Beyond differences, users also explained how many platforms coincided in similar aspects when referring to confusion with social media news content’s credibility. For example, respondents explained that all social media provided news about Puerto Rico without specific differentiation between official news sources and those that are simply sharing news topics based on hearsay and without the appropriate credentials. They shared that everyone that reported news claimed to know the ‘truth’ and that, as users, they could no longer identify credible versus non-credible sources, especially since everyone was sharing news. Two interviewees expressed that there was more rich news about Puerto Rico that they came across on social media than what they ever experienced in their news consumption via social media channels when they lived in Puerto Rico before Hurricane Maria.

Toward the end of the interview guide, researchers also inquired with members of the Puerto Rican diaspora to gain a clearer understanding of whether their perceptions about Puerto Rico changed or were influenced based on what appeared on social media. According to many respondents, although their media habits and the attached purposes they gave to social media changed, exposure to certain types of social media content did or did not influence their perception of Puerto Rico as a place where people face strife and cannot provide decent standards of living to themselves and their loved ones. Participants shared that although most content they engaged with seemed to have at its core a pessimistic theme, to them, their reality

and acceptance of that as truth was almost unchangeable, even if it would have reflected the opposite.

Also, after conducting interviews, researchers observed that about half of interviewees were former educators who taught in Puerto Rico's public or private schools. One takeaway was that although most interviewees understood their absence meant a worse situation for the island and even validated brain drain, they reasoned that their decision was based on desperation to find a better life for their family and justified that matters would continue to get worse, with or without them.

Discussion

Several recurring themes developed as researchers carried out this study, including how members of the Puerto Rican diaspora are utilizing and finding cyberspace communities as relevant and valuable to them as in-person communities, thanks to their ability to provide them with means of social exchange and validation of their cultural identity. The means of social exchange outlined included access to a network of resources they could use leading up to their departure and after arrival to the continental United States. Interviewees in this study resoundingly expressed a deep sense of gratitude for social media's ability to serve as a reservoir of resources that gave them access to online communities that provided referrals to information they needed throughout their journey – from deciding to leave the island to well after they lived at a different location. Their responses also suggest that these previously mentioned “online neighborhoods” gave them a greater sense of connection to the island and their cultural identity. While these online networks of Puerto Ricans, from their perspective, helped them amplify this, they also agreed, for the most part, that positive content on social media, in general, carried the same weight and equally strengthened those feelings. Examples included social media messages

incorporating tourism, inspirational, and nationalistic-themed content. Their answers also suggest that as they reaped the benefits of belonging to these online networks, they naturally felt committed to identifying ways to extend a helping hand to their fellow diasporans that belonged to the same social media groups in a pay-it-forward spirit and way of showing appreciation for how they had been helped. Finally, in regards to online networks and their use of them, researchers noticed a prevalence of how members of the Puerto Rican diaspora utilized social media platforms as the means to stay connected with what is going on and remain “in the know,” especially if family members still live on the island.

Although members of the Puerto Rican diaspora have a significant amount of contact that reflects negative aspects of the island, many consider themselves as playing an active role on social media when sharing good or positive-centric content related to Puerto Rico. The majority of the sample that aligned with this point of view expressed a sincere desire to proactively share positive messages to fight against the stark contrast of social media content that reflects the trouble and controversies Puerto Rico and its residents have experienced since September 2017. To them, social media provides a way to express their thoughts and amplify their sense of activism for a better Puerto Rico. Furthermore, it enables them to actively engage in improving their future. Rather than being negatively influenced by constant exposure to negative social media content about the island’s situation, the study suggests that while many members of the Puerto Rican diaspora may not opine that returning to the U.S. territory is in their plans in the short or long term, social media allows them to engage and push for positive change continually. In addition to this increased desire to participate in activism due to the social media content they saw or engaged with, many of the study’s respondents shared that these items strengthened their sense of pride in their cultural heritage. So much so that several participants in this study shared

their intent to inculcate the same in their children to develop a commitment and appreciation for Puerto Rico's reality and identify ways to give back and make it better, even if they were not on the island.

Even if social media content and social media channels revealed or reflected that Puerto Rico's situation is, at times, slowly improving, most interviewees' opinions reflect the island's actual reality as one that does not allow sustainable conditions to live as an individual or as a family unit since to them, the circumstances there would not easily change. Furthermore, they agree that constant exposure to positive-themed media would not be sufficient to influence them to return and live there again. Instead, they shared that they would need to hear about these improved realities from their friends, family members, and colleagues for that type of effect on their perception. This would have to pair with being inundated with messages from all types of communication-based channels, including social media, for them to change their mind and think otherwise.

In addition to their perception of Puerto Rico, negative content not only helped them remain informed about things going on there (as many of them still have friends and family on the island). The sample's interviews also suggest that social media's constant sharing and publishing of negative content about the island to them validated why they left and strengthened their commitment to continuing their life in one of the country's 50 states.

Cultivation theory is a social theory that explores how exposure to media shapes an individual's perceptions and attitudes towards social reality. In the context of the Puerto Rican diaspora's increased use of media after a catastrophic natural disaster, cultivation theory can help us understand how this exposure to social media may have influenced the diaspora's perception of the disaster and its aftermath.

Social Media Communities Cultivated Confidence in Diaspora's Move to Continental U.S.

Cultivation theory helps researchers understand how the increased use of cyberspace communities by the Puerto Rican diaspora after Hurricane Maria influenced their perceptions and attitudes towards the disaster and its aftermath. According to cultivation theory, exposure to media messages over time can shape an individual's worldview and attitudes. In the case of the Puerto Rican diaspora and those wanting to leave the island for the continental United States, the study's participants that were part of the aforementioned demographic expressed how their increased use of Puerto Rican-themed cyberspace communities exposed them to a different set of content than that of traditional media outlets. For example, because cyber communities consisted of other residents inside of Puerto Rico and those that had already left the island, content within these virtual spaces included personal accounts, testimonials, and stories from those directly affected by the disaster, as well as updates on relief efforts and other resources available stateside and on the island. For this reason, the Puerto Rican diaspora's use of these online groups resulted in a cultivation effect on participants. In interviews, they expressed how their perceptions and attitudes towards the disaster, its aftermath, and their ability to resolve issues associated with what happened were directly influenced by the unique messages, networks, and resources they interacted with through these online communities.

Specific instances of cultivation theory's influence on Puerto Ricans in these types of virtual spheres was consistently observed in interviewees' statements. For example, when participants expressed their interactions with Facebook cyberspace communities that constantly shared positive stories of how group members left Puerto Rico and found a better life, they stated how they developed a more positive perception of what their possibilities were if they moved to the continental United States. They said that in these groups, they came across members that

posted or commented about obtaining high quality education, better jobs and salaries, increased access to improved health care. Content like this influenced interviewees' perceptions of the situation as it made them feel more confident and optimistic about their decision to leave the island. On the other hand, when cyberspace communities consisted of members that focused on sharing stories of suffering and lack of support, the diaspora would have likely developed a more negative perception which would have influenced their decision to leave after Hurricane Maria.

Cultivation Theory's Impact on Puerto Ricans' Perceptions After Hurricane Maria

After Hurricane Maria, Puerto Ricans on the island and members of the diaspora increased their use of social media to stay informed about the territory's situation, as well as to connect with their family and friends who were affected. This increased exposure to it led to a cultivation effect, where the diaspora's perceptions and attitudes towards the disaster and its aftermath were shaped by the media content they engaged with on social media. For example, in interviews, participants expressed how the disasters' social media content primarily focused on the negative aspects, such as devastation and suffering. For this reason, these groups may have developed a more negative perception of the situation. On the other hand, when content on social media reflected was balanced and included stories of resilience and recovery, the diaspora developed a more positive perception. One example of this taking place was their recollection of the #PuertoRicoSeLevanta (Puerto Rico rises, in English) social media campaign that highlighted the strength and resilience that people expressed on different platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. In the study's interviews, interviewees noted how it was the only positive media coverage that made them feel positive about the hurricane's aftermath, specifically recovery and optimism that things on the island would get better. Overall, cultivation theory can help us understand how exposure to media shaped Puerto Ricans' attitudes leading up to and after the

natural disaster. Understanding media's impact on the territory's residents through the lens of cultivation theory can also inform how media coverage and communication impacts groups of people during times of crisis.

Social Media Engagement Validated Puerto Ricans' Decision to Leave Island

Interview patterns documented how social media content that reflected the island negatively, to Puerto Ricans, validated their decision to leave and strengthened their commitment to continue their life in the continental United States. They explained that negative social media content that highlighted the island's economic struggles, political instability, and social problems increased their belief that life in Puerto Rico was difficult and that there were limited opportunities for success and upward mobility. Over time, this repeated exposure to negative content, in their opinion, contributed to a sense of disillusionment and frustration, and many Puerto Ricans interpreted from this media content that leaving for the mainland was a necessary and worthwhile step to improve their lives and that of their families. Furthermore, and according to interviews, social media provided a platform for individuals to share their own experiences and perspectives. Reading this type of comment on social media after Hurricane Maria also influenced the perceptions and decisions of other Puerto Ricans looking to leave. When members of the diaspora, or those who had already left for the continental United States, shared their own negative experiences and reasons for leaving on social media, this further validated the decision of those on the island that it would be better if they made the same decision. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 2002) concluded that media's effects on individuals can take time and develop when people are repeatedly exposed to specific types of content. This research also concluded that individuals that are heavy media users are more likely to perceive the world as more dangerous and overestimate the prevalence of violence and crime in the world. This correlates with what

interviewees in this study expressed as their recollection of media engagement being negative about the island's instability. Their statements reflect that long-term exposure to these types of messages influenced them to set the goal to leave the island, use social media to identify resources and information to leave the island, and upon arriving to the continental United States, remain there.

Cultivation Theory Limited Impact on Diaspora's Ability to Change Perceptions

While cultivation theory provides a useful framework for understanding the influence of media on individuals' perceptions, it is important to consider the complex interplay of individual and contextual factors that can affect this relationship. Participants agreed that as part of the post-Hurricane Maria diaspora, being exposed to positive media would not be enough for them to return to living on the island. They said that beyond media, they would need to hear others' accounts for it to change their perception. Several studies have explored the limitations of cultivation theory and the factors that can moderate the effects that interviewees described. For instance, cultivation theory does not consider the influence of other factors that may shape the diaspora's views. These factors may include personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural norms. In this type of scenario, participants accepted negative media's influence on their negative perception of the island. However, it does not account for pre-existing personal experiences that Puerto Ricans had leading up to Hurricane Maria that may have contributed to their belief of the island's conditions continually worsening over time and not being capable of improvement. All members of the sample shared personal experiences that, in their eyes, validated what they saw on social media. Those that were teachers on the island said they struggled with low pay and limited resources that impacted their ability to get ahead and live comfortably. A recurring pattern observed includes the emphasis the Puerto Rican diaspora

places on cultural norms such as prioritizing immediate family members' and children's well-being because family structure is a tight one. They stated repeatedly how their children weren't obtaining high quality education or they couldn't provide what they wanted to for them.

Culturally speaking, interviewees expressed repeatedly how they had a preference for owning their own home and shared how living on the island with poor wages ultimately limited their ability to qualify and expand their financial dreams.

Social Media's Impact on Puerto Ricans' Increased Desire to Participate in Activism

In the case of social media use after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, it is possible that increased exposure to information and stories related to the disaster on social media cultivated a sense of activism and a desire to participate in opportunities for change. For example, interviewees confirmed that social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram provided Puerto Ricans with a platform to share their experiences during and after the hurricane, including stories of loss, devastation, and government inaction. By sharing and discussing these stories online, users said they developed a greater awareness of the impact of the hurricane and the need for change in their communities. Furthermore, social media also provided Puerto Ricans with opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals and organizations that advocated for change on the island. By joining these groups or following these individuals, users gained greater access to information about activism opportunities, including protests, marches, and community meetings. Through repeated exposure to these messages and opportunities and according to people interviewed in this study, social media content that heavily focused on activism cultivated a greater sense of activism and a desire to participate in creating change among Puerto Ricans. As such, the use of social media after Hurricane Maria played a critical role in mobilizing individuals to take action and advocate for their communities in the aftermath of the disaster.

Exposure to Social Media Content After Hurricane Maria Strengthened Diaspora's Pride

In addition to this increased desire to participate in activism due to the social media content they saw or engaged with, many of the study's respondents shared that this strengthened their sense of pride in their cultural heritage. Social media activism can increase a diaspora's sense of pride in their cultural heritage by providing a platform for individuals to connect with their cultural community and share stories, experiences, and knowledge about their heritage. Through social media, Puerto Ricans connected with others who share their cultural background, even if they were geographically distant. By joining online groups, following social media accounts, and participating in cultural events and discussions, interviewees gained a greater sense of belonging to their cultural community. Beyond pride of cultural heritage, social media can also facilitate the sharing of cultural knowledge and traditions, allowing individuals to learn more about their heritage and gain a deeper appreciation for their cultural identity. For example, this study's participants said that social media groups that gathered diaspora members from across the continental United States used these to find and share recipes, music, art, or other cultural artifacts they deemed significant to their Puerto Rican heritage, allowing them and their offspring to learn about and celebrate their cultural background, even if they no longer live on the island. Another correlation can be made by connecting social media as a platform for cultural activism with its ability to allow Puerto Ricans to advocate for their culture and raise awareness about cultural issues. By participating in cultural activism on social media, to the study's participants, they demonstrated their commitment to their cultural heritage and promoted a sense of pride and identity within their community. Overall, social media activism increased the Puerto Rican diaspora's sense of pride in their cultural heritage by providing opportunities for connection, knowledge-sharing, and cultural advocacy. By engaging with their cultural

community on social media, individuals strengthened their sense of belonging and identity, and promoted a greater understanding and appreciation of their heritage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media had a positive impact on the Puerto Rican diaspora by fostering a greater sense of cultural pride and identity. Because of increased exposure to social media after Hurricane Maria, individuals increasingly connected with cultural communities online, shared and obtained knowledge, and advocated for their heritage which resulted in a strengthened sense of belonging and a greater appreciation for Puerto Rican culture. Social media also increased Puerto Rican's desire to mobilize and advocate for their communities after Hurricane Maria. The study found that social media content portraying Puerto Rico in a negative light had a significant impact on the decision-making of Puerto Ricans living in the continental United States, validated their decision to leave the island, and reinforced their commitment to continue their life in the mainland. While all these findings reflect cultivation theory's impact on Puerto Ricans leading up to and after Hurricane Maria, this study is the first of its kind to interpret how repeated exposure to social media impacted a diaspora group after a natural disaster. In summary, this study's findings suggest that social media does play a significant role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of diaspora communities towards their homeland.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As far as this study's limitations, participants' time and technology were two factors that inevitably became constraints. Locating members of the diaspora that were willing to make time in their busy schedules was difficult. This study's researchers also faced a general lack of physical proximity because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, researchers heavily relied on electronic devices and the internet to interview the subjects and could not conduct

qualitative interviews with them face to face. Future scholars can use these findings to see if social media plays a role in supporting “social capital” and whether it “advances community resilience” (Roque & Pijawka, 2020). They can also further investigate if exposure to Puerto Rican-centric social media content after Hurricane Maria strengthened the diaspora’s justification for leaving the island and, as a result, see if social media increased their sense of pride and commitment to being a force for positive change for what continues to happen on the island while living in the continental United States. To accomplish this, future scholars should carry out a quantitative study that can help measure various types of social media content about Puerto Rico and other topics to see if there is a quantifiable effect that results from exposure.

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