Title: Whose tweets? The rhetorical functions of social media use in developing the Black Lives Matter movement

Short title: *The rhetorical functions of Twitter for BLM*

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Abstract:

Research on collective action frequently characterises social media as a tool for mobilisation. However, social media activity can fulfil a variety of different functions for social change. In particular, the rhetorical functions of social media use by social movements are not well understood. We address this shortfall by analysing the rhetorical functions of Twitter use during an early stage of the Black Lives Matter social movement. We examine how activists used Twitter to balance competing aims for social change, such as growing the movement beyond disadvantaged-group members, while preventing appropriation or dilution of their message by advantaged-group 'allies'. We find that although Twitter users promote different, and often competing, definitions of the issues that the movement represents, rhetorical strategies are used to advance inclusive definitions that focus on racism. When activists address alternative definitions of movement actors and issues, representations of Otherness are used to characterise the proponents of these definitions as in opposition to the movement. Finally, we find that one way of resolving the tension between growing the movement and promoting disadvantaged-group control is by using identity and technology resources to explicitly define (1) how different groups can be movement advocates, and (2) action strategies for social change.

Keywords:

Black Lives Matter, collective action, Twitter, political rhetoric, ally activism, social movements

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Lives Matter movement

Social movements frequently use social media for collective action, and existing

research has explored how social media use can mobilise activism (e.g., Kende, van

Zomeren, Ujhelyi, & Lantos 2016; McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Smith, & Bliuc, 2014;

Schumann, 2015; Schumann & Klein, 2015; Spears & Postmes, 2015; Thomas et al., 2015).

However, social media activity can fulfil diverse social change functions and scant research

has examined its rhetorical functions for social movements, such as how social media may be

used strategically to deploy and manage social identities within contested social movements.

This is important because social media such as Twitter are inherently public and

argumentative (e.g., Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Carney, 2016; Papacharissi, 2008),

allowing users to attempt to shape and contest social identities in the face of alternative

positions. Social media are thus an important forum where users can struggle over the

essence, meaning, and direction of a social movement, as well as trying to mobilise support

per se. Here, we extend research into the relationship between social media and collective

action by examining the rhetorical functions of social media use (Twitter, specifically) in the

early stages of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM).

Our focus on the early stages of BLM differentiates our study from most other

research on this movement, and our study is the first to our knowledge to examine the

rhetorical work that is undertaken on social media to establish the movement in a particular

form. Specifically, we extend existing research by examining how activists employed

rhetorical, identity and technological resources to grow the movement on the one hand, while

also defending disadvantaged-group control of the movement. A unique aspect is our focus

on how minority-group activists seek to manage the relationship to potential allies from the

outset. It thus speaks to debates around 'ally activism', which are critical of the relationships between advantaged and disadvantaged-group members in social movements and explore the politics of the intergroup relationships in such activism. We also explore intragroup processes such as consensualisation and norm validation.

Social media rhetoric

The United Nations HeForShe campaign, Kony 2012, and #BringBackOurGirls hashtag are examples of how social media can be used to advance social change. Previous research has primarily explored the instrumental functions of social media activity, such as how it can mobilise 'real world' protest participation (e.g., Chan, 2017; Kende et al., 2016; McGarty et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2015). However, social media use may have a variety of functions for social change (e.g., Bliuc, McGarty, Hartley, & Muntele Hendres, 2012). We suggest that social media can fulfil rhetorical functions for social movements in terms of defining the scope and agenda of the movement; for example, the issues with which the movement is concerned, who is or is not part of the movement, and the specific outgroups whose behaviour the movement seeks to change.

Language and communication are key for advancing social change, for example through leadership and influencing others to act in a way that furthers a social movement's aims (Klandermans, 1984; Klandermans, 1997): individuals must be convinced of the benefits of collective action, effective modes of participation, and legitimate targets for action. Rhetoric, or "the practical art of effective communication" (Condor, Tileaga, & Billig, 2013, p. 4), is essential for achieving such aims (e.g., Hopkins & Reicher, 1997).

Political rhetoric, as a topic, is concerned with the strategies that are used to build persuasive arguments (Black, 1965; Condor et al., 2013; Foss, 2004). Rather than considering

language as an expression of intrinsic psychological processes, it approaches communication

as strategic action, examining both the function and structure of an argument (Billig, 1996;

Condor et al., 2013; Kuypers, 2009; Leach, 2000; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Wetherell &

Potter, 1992). For example, research examining framing effects demonstrates how

communication can be used to make aspects of a perceived reality more salient, or promote

particular definitions, interpretations and evaluations, thereby shaping recipients'

understanding of events (e.g., Bateson, 1973; Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974, Hallahan, 1999;

Scheufele, 1999).

Existing research has recognised that in order to understand the direction and nature

of social movements, researchers must examine the communicative processes through which

movement issues and actors come to be defined as such (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000;

Hopkins & Reicher, 1997). It has demonstrated that political leaders and activists use rhetoric

strategically during social movements to construct issues, conflicting parties, and audiences

in ways that benefit movement aims (e.g., Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins,

1996a, 2001).

Regarding the content of political rhetoric, social category construction is key for

collective action (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, 2001). It can influence behaviour in two

ways: (1) the content of a social category (norms, values) will direct the behaviour of

individuals who self-categorise and identify with that category; and (2) leaders who are

perceived to be prototypical ingroup category members will be more influential than those

who are not (Hopkins & Reicher, 1997). For example, Reicher and Hopkins (1996a)

examined a speech arguing against abortion to a medical audience. They found that the

speaker defined himself as a member of a common ingroup with his audience, defined the

whole category as standing against abortion, and argued that abortion was in opposition to the

audience's medical identity. Similarly, although not a social movement *per se*, in Thatcher's and Kinnock's leadership speeches during the British miners' strikes of the 1980s, both leaders defined the strikes in a way that was compatible with their own political party, and used this representation to define their own party as consonant (and the opposing party as incompatible) with the British electorate (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b). Although examining different contexts, both of these papers indicate that how a self-category is defined (its inclusiveness, content and who is a prototypical member) affects the reach and direction of collective action, as well as who is able to direct that action (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b).

In spite of these contributions, and the fact that social media can be a key place for communication for social movements (e.g., Juris, 2012; Kende et al., 2016; McGarty et al., 2014), limited research has examined the rhetorical functions of a social movement's social media activity. A rhetorical analysis is suited to examining how activists argue for control over movement issues and outcomes, define opponents and allies of the movement, and position the movement in relation to existing protests and leaders of change (Griggs & Howarth, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Steuter, 1992). These are important questions that cannot be answered by examining the objective conditions that lead to mobilisation (Hopkins & Reicher, 1997); instead, these definitions are contested, with multiple possible positions, especially in the early stages of a movement where its scope and agenda are beginning to be defined. In particular, given that social media is leveraged to broaden support for social movements (e.g., Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; Barberá et al. 2015; Rüdig & Karyotis, 2013), a rhetorical perspective on social media activity can provide insight on how activists are able to negotiate the subtler and more sensitive aspects of social movements. One such concern is how to manage the contention between growing the movement beyond disadvantaged-group members and maintaining disadvantaged-group control over the direction and definition of the movement itself.

'Ally' activism

An important component of successful activism is the ability of disadvantaged groups

to harness the support of members of privileged groups (Simon & Klandermans, 2001;

Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). This is often referred to as 'ally activism': collective

action on behalf of, or in conjunction with, a disadvantaged group (e.g., Montgomery &

Stewart, 2012). Allies are typically members of groups who have relatively higher power,

status, and/or other resources compared to the disadvantaged group (e.g., Droogendyk,

Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016). Nevertheless, advantaged-group allies can have both

positive and negative effects on social change. For example, although advantaged groups

have greater resources that can be used by social movements, they can also engage in

behaviour, such as dominating the movement, that reinforces inequalities (Droogendyk et al.,

2016; Mizock & Page, 2016). Thus, 'allies' can potentially undermine social change by

reproducing the subordination of disadvantaged groups within the movement.

While there is substantial interest in the effects of allies (e.g., Cakal, Hewstone,

Schwär, & Heath, 2011; Greenaway, Quinn, & Louis, 2011; Louis, 2009; Saguy et al., 2009;

Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Subašić et al., 2008), limited research has considered whether

and how social movements balance these competing concerns on social media. This is despite

the fact that online spaces can be a key place for interactions between advantaged and

disadvantaged groups during social movements (e.g., Carney, 2016; Raynauld, Richez, &

Boudreau Morris, 2017). Nevertheless, there are some relevant findings. Examining how

rhetoric was used to mobilise the Bulgarian public against the deportation of Jewish people

during WWII, Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, and Levine (2006) found that definitions

of inclusive categories, advantaged-group norms for action, and advantaged-group category

interests were integral for advantaged-group mobilisation. Nevertheless, this work examined

rhetoric in an 'offline' context, and to our knowledge research is yet to examine whether and how rhetoric can be used to manage advantaged-group members' impact on social movements.

Similarly, there is evidence that activists can use computer-mediated communication to build support for social movements. Although not explicitly examining political rhetoric, Batel and Castro (2015) found that, in an online forum, local resident protestors used inclusive constructions of goals and identities to mobilise third-party group members against the transformation of a local convent. Furthermore, Bliuc and colleagues (2012) examined how rhetoric can function to obtain influence in the face of hostility. They found opponents and supporters of the 2005 Cronulla riots used arguments that aligned their own opinion-based identity with positively-valued social categories. Although this research examined conflict between opinion-based groups, where there are no objective power or status asymmetries, digital platforms may also be an important site of contestation for disadvantaged groups.

In sum, to our knowledge, research in social psychology is yet to examine how political rhetoric is used on social media by activists to: (1) promote collective action in advantaged-group members, and (2) prevent advantaged-group domination, dilution of the movement's message, or more generally derailing the movement. We consider how social media is used to navigate these competing concerns within an ongoing and contested social movement: Black Lives Matter.[1] We examined conversations on Twitter that used the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. Analysing rhetoric, we consider how activists seek to mobilise social movement participation among disadvantaged-group members and (potential)

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[1] Regarding these two social change aims, rather than suggesting that they were or are the specific objectives of BLM, following existing research we suggest that they are important components of social change for any social movement (e.g., Droogendyk et al., 2016; Leach, 2013; Maeckelbergh, 2016; Mizock & Page, 2016; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Subašić, et al., 2008; Yates, 2015). Thus, we consider the ways in which Twitter is employed by users of #BlackLivesMatter to manage these components of social change.

advantaged-group allies. We also consider how they argue for disadvantaged-group control in a context of power asymmetries, and the bases on which they oppose ideologies and behaviours deemed problematic for movement outcomes.

Black Lives Matter as a context

'Black Lives Matter' is broadly recognised as a social movement (e.g., Langford & Speight, 2015). Self-described as a Black-centred project, it aims to "build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" ("About", n.d., para 1). The movement began with the use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in July 2013 on social media (Freelon, McIlwain, & Ckark, 2016). The hashtag was created by three Black women activists in America: Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. They created the hashtag after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year old Black boy. Sometime after August 2014, Black Lives Matter was introduced as a chapter-based organisation by Garza, Cullors, Tometi and others (Freelon et al., 2016). There have been movement protests worldwide (e.g., Winsor, 2016).

The phrase 'Black Lives Matter' can refer to different objects. Following Freelon and colleagues (2016), we use 'Black Lives Matter' to refer to the official organisation; '#BlackLivesMatter' to refer to the hashtag, which is used both by those who are and are not members of the organisation; and 'BLM' to refer to the overall movement, which is all organisations, individuals, protests etc. who seek to raise awareness about and end anti-Black violence.

Although #BlackLivesMatter has been recognised as an important social change hashtag (e.g., Sichynsky, 2016), BLM has also attracted negative attention, criticism, and resistance (e.g., Matthews & Cyril, 2017). In particular, a number of counter-hashtags

appeared on social media that were used in arguments against BLM; three of the most

prominent are #BlueLivesMatter, #WhiteLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter (see Langford &

Speight, 2015). Thus, BLM is also a contested social movement.

Previous research on BLM has tended to focus on the period after Mike Brown's

death on 9th August 2014 when movement issues had already gained prominence (e.g.,

Carney, 2016; De Choudhury, Jhaver, Sugar, & Weber, 2016; Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark,

2018; Ray, Brown, Fraistat, Summers, 2017). Limited research has focused on the period

prior to Mike Brown's death. This early timeframe is important because it is a period in

which the movement was being defined as well as grown. Moreover, as it represents a period

prior to the creation of opposing hashtags, it was potentially a phase in which

#BlackLivesMatter, and BLM as a whole, was particularly open to appropriation. These

factors make the early phase of BLM an ideal context for examining the rhetorical functions

of social media activity, particularly for managing the double-edged nature of ally activism

from advantaged groups.

Method and Analytic Strategy

Data collection and preparation

Data came from a set of Tweet IDs released by Freelon (2017). The Tweet IDs

referenced all Tweets that were posted between 1st June 2014 – 31st May 2015 that matched

at least one of 45 keywords (including #BlackLivesMatter), and had not been deleted or

removed from public view as of July 2015. The data used in our analysis represented a subset

of these Tweets.

As our dataset was compiled in May 2017, it only included Tweets that had not been

deleted or protected as of this date. R (R Core Team, 2013) and Python were used to recreate

the entire dataset from Freelon's (2017) list of Tweet IDs, and then create a subset of the data based on the following criteria. Due to practical time constraints, and its close association with BLM, we only included Tweets that included #BlackLivesMatter (case insensitive). Moreover, as we were interested in strategies prior to the materialisation of hostile counter-movements, we only included Tweets that were posted up to and including 10th August 2014. We justified this end date because it was before #AllLivesMatter emerged as a hashtag in our reconstruction of Freelon's whole dataset. Our final dataset contained 326 unique Tweets, once retweets and duplicates had been removed.

Thematic analysis

We submitted all Tweets to a thematic analysis, supported by QSR International's Nvivo 11 Software. We adopted a contextualist approach to the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The hybrid coding process. We used a hybrid coding process, which combines top-down (deductive) and bottom-up (inductive) coding strategies to develop themes and patterns from the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The deductive aspect enables theoretical concerns to shape the data, while inductive coding allows the incorporation of data-driven themes. First, data were divided into three deductive categories: (1) characterisations of issues that the movement represents; (2) characterisations of those who are in opposition to the movement; and (3) characterisations of the scope of the movement, including advocates. Following Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), these categories were defined a priori, based on our research questions and theoretical framework. Specifically, we drew on existing analyses of social movement rhetoric, which emphasise how characterisations of the ingroup, the opposition, and the issue at hand are integral to social influence processes (e.g., Hopkins & Reicher, 1997; Livingstone, Spears, & Manstead, 2009a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a). We

then followed the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and developed themes primarily at the semantic level, within the explicit meanings of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We developed three themes in the category of *issues the movement represents*: (1) the perpetrators of injustice, (2) the targets of injustice, (3) the nature of the problem. Two themes were developed in the category of *movement opponents*: (1) immoral groups of people, (2) undermining systems. Two themes were developed in the category of *movement advocates:* (1) disadvantaged-group members, (2) movement-endorsing actions. Additional sub-themes were generated within some of these themes to structure the complexity of the themes and to illustrate hierarchy within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the present paper, due to limitations of space, we integrate key points from *the movement opponents category* into the other themes and do not present it as a distinct category. Moreover, although the corpus of Tweets provided a very rich data set, we chose to focus our analysis on novel aspects of the data that are of direct relevance to our research question. More detailed analysis of extracts and further examples are available in the Supplementary Materials, which present the issues that the movement represents (pp. 1-16), a full description of the movement opponents category (pp. 16-24), and the movement advocates category (pp.24-32).

Analysis

We argue that while activists take action to grow the movement, they also attempt to advance and defend disadvantaged-group control of the movement. Our first point is that hashtag users promote different, and often competing, definitions of the issues that the movement represents. Given the contention over growing the movement and defining and

preserving the movement's focus, different rhetorical and identity strategies are used to

advance inclusive definitions that focus on racism. There are instances in which hashtag users

also address alternative definitions of movement actors and issues. Here, representations of

Otherness are used to characterise the proponents of these definitions as being in opposition

to the movement. Finally, our analysis illustrates that one way of resolving the tension

between growing the movement and maintaining disadvantaged-group control is to define

how different groups can be movement advocates, and to define appropriate (and

inappropriate) action strategies for social change (for a summary of themes see Table 1).[2]

The issues the movement represents

We begin by illustrating how movement issues were contested. There were three

points of contention in defining the issues that the movement represents: (1) who is

responsible for the injustice, (2) the disadvantaged groups that the movement represents, and

(3) the nature of the problem. Although referring to different objects, common across these

themes is the tension between more vs. less inclusive definitions of actors and issues.

However, given the role of inclusive definitions in facilitating mobilisation among broader

groups of participants (e.g., Batel & Castro, 2015; Bennett & Sergerberg, 2016; Subašić et

al., 2008), what is striking is that rather than endorsing boundless and universal definitions of

disadvantaged-group membership and the problem itself, activists policed other users'

characterisations and only endorsed definitions that focus on racism.

The perpetrators of injustice. In terms of who the movement stands against, a

number of different categories were deployed (see Supplementary Materials, p.2). However,

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[2] Due to Twitter's public nature, a Tweet can function to shape both intragroup and intergroup relations. Thus, although our interest is in how social movements manage their relationships to potential allies we haven't made a distinction between intra- and intergroup communication where this isn't clear. By any means, our analysis suggests that intragroup communication can also function to manage a social movement's relationship with allies (e.g., extract 9).

the most prominent category in the time period is the police, which is the category on which

we focus here. The perpetrators of injustice are defined on an inclusive level when they are

represented in intergroup rather than interpersonal terms. For example:

(1) Eric Garner's death & exasperation with police violence http://t.co/D33DTB0qIh
#BlackLivesMatter #Justice4EricGarner @thenation @[user1]

Although referencing a specific example of police violence, the word "exasperation"

characterises the concern as a pervasive issue. Moreover, the author does not define specific

guilty individuals, instead attributing guilt at the group-level ("police violence"), which

implicitly defines the whole police group as perpetrators. Together these definitions

characterise police violence as a pervasive and intergroup concern, which functions to

mobilise action (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2009; van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). Nevertheless, inclusive

and group-based definitions were not universal: more exclusive representations were

advanced at times. For example:

(2) Shameful. Good cops should take these men to task. RT @[user2]
#BlackLivesMatter #BrownLivesMatter #MikeBrown #Ferguson

Here, the author defines the issue as a 'rotten apple' (as opposed to a 'rotten barrel')

problem. The juxtaposition between "good cops" and "these men" distinguishes between

different types of police officer, locating the problem within a subset of deviant individuals

rather than the whole group. This functions to rarefy the issue of police brutality,

downplaying its prevalence and importance in society. The author also suggests that good

police officers could take the guilty individuals "to task". Together this implies that the police

can regulate and reform themselves, downplaying the need for collective action. Thus, the

conceptualisation of the police as a homogenous and dangerous outgroup is neither automatic nor uncontested.

In addition to specific outgroups, hashtag users defined particular and undermining ideologies and actions both as issues that the movement stands against, and structures that act in opposition to movement aims. Examples of undermining ideologies include colourblind (e.g., extract 3), victim blaming (see Supplementary Material, pp.16-17), and respectability politics (e.g., extract 8). In terms of undermining actions, behaviours such as inaction or silence in response to police violence was characterised as oppositional to the movement (8 codes; e.g., extract 12). This demonstrates how hashtag users employed notions of psychological group membership, as well as social category membership, as a basis for categorisation (see also Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007)

The targets of injustice. The second subtheme involves defining the disadvantaged group. In very general terms, and explicit within #BlackLivesMatter itself, a limited but inclusive definition of "Black people" is presented. Nevertheless, a limited definition bound by race does not go uncontested. For example:

(3) **Don't all matter?** RT @[user3]: Follow @[user4] for the minute by minute update on what's happening in #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter

Here the author used Twitter's Quote Tweet function to repost another user's content to their own followers (in roman), with their own text added (bold added). This Tweet could be read as disputing the legitimacy of #BlackLivesMatter. Although the use of a rhetorical question functions to invite agreement rather than claim knowledge, it challenges the limited definition of the target group as Black people, instead suggesting a universal definition, unbound by race. While it could be argued that this is an attempt to increase the inclusiveness

of the movement, it also functions to divert attention away from racial inequality and delegitimise the movement by providing alternative definitions of its aims and activists (see Langford & Speight, 2015). Specifically, it denies the importance of race-based injustice, which absolves the perpetrator group of racism. It also characterises BLM as a movement that excludes White people, and in doing so positions movement activists as the real deviant and racist group (for detailed analysis, see Supplementary Material p. 8). This functions to delegitimise the movement and thereby limit the use of the hashtag for protest. It also works to centre Whiteness and marginalise Black people within the social movement in a manner that potentially reproduces the power inequalities the movement is fighting against.

Unsurprisingly, movement activists policed such universal constructions: the following Tweet was generated in direct response to extract 3:

(4) .@[user4] your retort is basic. has there ever been any doubt about the value of white life? Ergo, #BlackLivesMatter

In addition to direct criticism ("basic", which defines extract 3 as unintelligent and uninteresting), a rhetorical question is used, which functions to persuade the audience to reject the characterisations in extract 3. It makes clear why White lives are not the focus of the movement: White lives are already valued by society. Thus, by policing and rejecting universal constructions of the target group, the Tweet denounces the associated demobilising representations of movement aims and activists. It can therefore be seen that activists work to define the targets of injustice on the inclusive, but limited level of all Black people. However, there are also instances where more exclusive definitions are advanced. For example:

(5) Black & Unarmed in America. Our men, we must remember their humanity. We must love & protect them. #BlackLivesMatter [broken link]

Although this Tweet has mobilisation functions – for example, defining the target group as "Unarmed" provides a reason for mobilisation by charactering police actions as unjust (see also extract 7), while the use of the words "our" and "we" can function to mobilise a large group of supports (see also extract 9) – it also explicitly defines the prototypical target as male, characterising police violence as predominantly affecting a narrower category of Black men. In contrast, those outside of this target group are delegated the task of protecting Black men. Although perhaps suggesting that different sections of the community (women, men) should mobilise differently due to their different experiences, this comparatively narrow representation of the target group potentially functions to marginalise disadvantaged-group members who are not male (for detailed analysis see Supplementary Materials, p. 9).

However, there were also Tweets that countered this male-centred representation, and advanced a more inclusive definition of the target group including cis women and trans folk (80 codes; for more examples see Supplementary Materials, pp. 10-12). One user Tweeted:

(6) Marlene was assaulted by CA highway patrol. @[user5] honors her #IAmMarlene #BlackLivesMatter [URL1]

The Tweet contains a link to a Facebook post, which contains the text:

(6.1)"Because Marlene [Pinnock] Still matters #blackwomenmatter #iammarlene"

Below the text are four photographs; each of a different Black woman holding a hand-written sign, with "I am Marlene #BlackWomenMatter" written on the sign. The substitution of "Lives" with "Women" in "#BlackWomenMatter" functions to bring attention to female victims of police violence, increasing the inclusivity and intersectionality of the movement.

While "#IAmMarlene" is an expression of solidarity with the victim, it also constructs the sense of fungibility – that this could have happened to any Black woman.

The nature of the problem. The final subtheme in this category describes what the movement represents by defining the problem itself. In the analysed Tweets, *exclusive* definitions of the problem are constructed through a narrow focus on specific issues. Concerns such as private citizen violence and police brutality are presented as the primary concerns of the movement. For example:

(7) Police brutality is out of control. No one should fear being shot 10 times when walking down the street #BlackLivesMatter #RipMikeBrown

Here, the author explicitly defines police brutality as a problem the movement should address, representing the violence as a total violation of moral standards ("being shot 10 times"), and also as unpredictable, with the potential to happen at any stage in one's everyday life ("when walking down the street"). Implicit within this representation is the juxtaposition of the victim as an innocent and ordinary individual, and the perpetrator as an immoral deviant, which also characterises the issue as unjust (for detailed analysis see Supplementary Materials, p. 13).

Activists also placed restrictions on social issues that are accepted as part of the movement. For example:

(8) Don't tell me how many blacks kill other blacks. It was WHITE cops who killed #MikeBrown. Tonight we mourn #Ferguson. #BlackLivesMatter

Although it is unclear who or which statement the Tweet responds to, by defining intragroup crime within the disadvantaged group as irrelevant to movement aims, the Tweet

author delimits boundary conditions for the problems that the movement represents. This is an important representation because crime rates within Black communities are part of societal and academic debates about the nature of police violence (e.g., Cesario, Johnson, & Terrill, 2018; Goff, Lloyd, Geller, Raphael, & Glaser, 2016). To justify this exclusion, the author highlights the race of the individuals responsible for Mike Brown's death, thus defining the scope of the movement – or the problems that it is concerned with – as of an intergroup and race-based nature. This exclusive representation of the problem functions to focus public attention on issues of racism, thereby advancing movement aims for the end of anti-Black racism (for detailed analysis see Supplementary Materials, p. 15).

To summarise, positions on *what the movement represents* characterise the problem, perpetrators, and targets of injustice at varying levels of inclusivity. Representations of race and racism function to justify what and who is included in the movement. Moreover, hashtag users police other groups' and individuals' constructions of movement actors and issues, to delegitimise definitions that have the potential to undermine social change aims. Nevertheless, only defining movement opponents risks alienating certain groups who may be sympathetic to movement aims. One way that hashtag users balanced the social change needs of growing the movement and maintaining control is by constructing representations of legitimate movement advocates.

Movement advocates

Advocates of the movement are described in two types of representation: (1) disadvantaged-group members, and (2) allies who perform movement-endorsing acts. The *disadvantaged group* theme involved representations of Black people as the leaders and core participants of the movement. The *movement-endorsing acts* theme outlines how powerful

and advantaged-group members can be advocates of the movement, and functions to mobilise

majority group action by representing collective action as integral to allyship.

Disadvantaged-group members. On a general level, Black people were constructed

as the core members and advocates of the movement. For example:

(9) Then I realize that our blackness is beautiful & we must fight to protect our babies,

our black men by any means necessary #BlackLivesMatter

The action imperative in this Tweet is clear. By using first-person plural pronouns

"our" and "we", the author constructs a common category between themselves (as the

author), the audience, and the individuals who have been killed; explicitly defining each of

these actors as being part of the same group of Black people. The specific claim that the call

to action has originated from a Black person and is addressed to other Black people works to

locate Black people in a leading position in the movement as core members and activists. It

also puts White people and other advantaged groups outside the circle of activism (for

detailed analysis see Supplementary Materials, p. 25).

The position of Black people as core movement activists is further asserted through

specific affordances of the technology, such as the ability to share videos and images of

protest through Twitter (e.g., extract 6). There are also examples where Black people are

represented as the leaders of the movement (see Supplementary Materials, pp. 26-27).

Movement-endorsing acts. The final theme characterised movement advocates in

terms of performance of movement-endorsing acts, and functioned as the antithesis of the

undermining acts discourse. In particular, the requirement for collective action on behalf of

the movement is defined as integral to legitimate movement support: to claim that one

supports the movement, one must take action to further its aims. It is comprised of two

discourses: the first addresses authority group members, and the second addresses the general public.

Authority-group members. Specific institutions and individuals within the state are characterised as advocates of the movement, or at least potential advocates. Importantly, their advocacy role is constructed in such a way that it is contingent on them performing acts to endorse the movement's aims. These authority-group members are given the role of ending deviant behaviour and/or exacting justice for past wrongs, thereby helping to restore morality and change their group from within. For example:

(10) .@CommissBratton #LatinoLivesMatter #BlackLivesMatter and #WomensLivesMatter. Do the right thing! #JusticeforEricGarner

The Twitter public mention function (".@CommissBratton") is used to publically challenge New York City's Police Commissioner Bill Bratton. Implicit in this extract is the claim that Commissioner Bratton – as a police leader – could help to bring about justice for Eric Garner. Although this mirrors heterogeneous representations of the perpetrator group that advance the representation of "good" police officers (see extract 2), using an @mention to separate out a specific member of the police from the larger deviant group serves a strategic function in creating a moral bind for the mentioned individual. Specifically, Commissioner Bratton would be notified that a Tweet has been posted about him, and due to the public nature of the platform, if he fails to meet activist demands it publically demonstrates that he is one of the 'bad' police officials. In this way, action to support the movement by Commissioner Bratton is integral to his characterisation as a movement advocate rather than opponent.

***Members of the public*.** The final subtheme characterises the public in general (35 codes) – and advantaged-group members in particular (6 codes) – as movement advocates through movement-endorsing acts; similar to the authority group subtheme, requirement for collective action on behalf of the movement is defined as integral to legitimate movement support. Some representations of movement-endorsing acts were rather general, for example:

(11) RT @[user6]: "Ally is not an identity it's an action" [URL4] #girlslikeus #mfom14 #blacklivesmatter #translivesmatter

In contrast, other hashtag users provide more specific definitions of acts that the general public can engage in that signal movement support. In particular, there are examples in which hashtag users correct the behaviour of (supposed) advantaged-group allies to promote actions that advance movement aims. For example:

(12) RT @[user7]: If you are white & silent about police killings of unarmed blacks, ask why. #blacklivesmatter. #MikeBrown was EVERYONE'S kid.

In this extract, the author distinguishes White people as a group from the broader spectrum of individuals who have not spoken about police violence. This characterises the White majority as potential movement opponents; implicitly it defines the difference in race between the victims and the audience as a factor contributing to the audience's inaction. This creates a moral bind for the audience: if they continue to be silent in the face of anti-Black violence, it suggests that they are racist and opponents of the movement (for detailed analysis see Supplementary Materials, p. 31).

In summary, the representation of *movement advocates* consists of two themes; namely, advocates as disadvantaged-group members and advocates as those who perform movement-endorsing acts. These discourses function to grow the movement beyond the core

disadvantaged group, but also maintain disadvantaged-group control in a context where there are power asymmetries between core group members and their (potential) allies. Core group members are represented as an ingroup audience for calls to actions, while members of authority and advantaged groups are represented as allies through movement-endorsing acts.

Discussion

Our analysis provides evidence of the ways that disadvantaged-group members can engage in internet-enabled action for the regulation of social identities and social movements. Bridging the gap between online mobilisation and political rhetoric literature, it demonstrates the different ways that Twitter users rhetorically deploy social identities to obtain and retain influence and advance social change within a contested social movement. While some parts of this discourse represent processes of intragroup communication and norm formation (e.g., extract 9), other Tweets are directed at outgroup members (e.g., extract 10), while the identity of other intended audiences are unclear (e.g., extract 8).

In our analysis, definitions of intergroup relations – particularly characterisations of racial asymmetries and Black subordination – were used to legitimise how the scope and direction of the movement was defined, as well as who had the power to influence these definitions. Moreover, definitions of the content of social identities provided a basis for how advocates and opponents of the movement were defined (see also Hopkins & Reicher, 1997). Thus, characterisations of the intergroup context and the content of social identities were used to provide an impetus for action in advantaged and disadvantaged-group members alike. They was also used to guard against actions by advantaged and powerful outgroup members that could derail broader social change aims.

Whereas previous research has focused on the mobilisation role of political rhetoric for advantaged-group members (e.g., Reicher et al., 2006), our analysis extends this literature by demonstrating how political rhetoric in general, and the characterisation of social identities in particular, can be used to manage the impact that advantaged-group members can have on social movements. Our analysis also extends political rhetoric literature by indicating how more exclusive categorisations of the ingroup, and intragroup differentiation, can be used to promote social change (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2009a; Livingstone, Spears, Manstead, & Bruder, 2009b).

Previous research has highlighted the importance of inclusive category constructions for the direction of collective action (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins 1996a; Reicher et al., 2006), indicating how characterisations of sameness and similarity can support social change. In contrast, our research also sheds light on the ways that constructions of difference between identity groups and social issues can be used strategically by social movements. In sum, our analysis demonstrates how exclusive category constructions and differentiation can be used to manage relations of domination and subordination within social movements.

An important conclusion is that one of the key social change functions of internet-enabled action is the regulation of social identities and the characterisation of intergroup relations in the face of alternative characterisations (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2009a; 2009b). Although this conclusion is consistent with research examining political rhetoric in 'offline' settings (e.g., Reicher et al., 2006; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, 2001), it extends research that examines the social change functions of internet-enabled action. Specifically, digitally-networked spaces are not only a space for building (or undermining) key psychological antecedents for mobilising higher-threshold modes of collective action (e.g., Spears & Postmes, 2015); rather, it is a space in which new social identities and modes of social

relations are constructed and enacted in the present. Thus, our analysis reiterates the need to look beyond the instrumental functions of internet-enabled action. In particular, it highlights the importance of interaction through internet-enabled action in the construction of social reality.

This is relevant to a consideration of the role of advantaged-group allies within social movements. Although research is beginning to examine the ways that advantaged groups can affect social change (e.g., Droogendyk et al., 2016; Mizock & Page, 2016), limited research has empirically examined the strategies that disadvantaged groups engage in to counter and resist the potentially problematic behaviours of advantaged groups, particularly in online settings. Our analysis suggests that characterisations of movement opponents and advocates not only reflect the behaviour of advantaged-group members, but also function as attempts to influence it. Thus, our work demonstrates that rather than being passive recipients of the actions by powerful and advantaged groups, even in online settings disadvantaged-group members can be active in constructing and communicating their ingroup's position, resisting and negating alternative, undermining characterisations of the movement and its agenda.

Our analysis also sheds light on how individuals negotiate burgeoning and contested social movements online. Extending previous literature that has examined computer-mediated communication as a mechanised to form opinion-based groups and has highlighted the role of consensus and validating interactions (e.g., McGarty et al., 2014; Smith, Thomas, & McGarty, 2015), our work considers online communication as a means to rhetorically manage the movement category and to define proper and possible forms of action against alternatives. Specifically, it indicates that there is also a process of contestation through which already-existing social identities can be brought to bear on current and potential future

social relations; that contestation and resistance within and between groups are integral to the process of growing new social movements and advancing social change.

Strengths, limitations and future research

This study had several key strengths, including: (1) the use of rhetorical analysis that enabled an examination of real behaviour in a real-world social movement, and (2) the inclusion of a longer 10-week time frame for analysis. Nevertheless, there were also some limitations.

Firstly, the first author must engage in the reflective process of acknowledging that my own identity affected my reading and interpretation of the data. As a British, heterosexual, cis woman of biracial (White European and Black Caribbean) heritage, although I share some aspects of identity with core participants in BLM, I am also in a position of relative advantage and privilege compared to African-American individuals as a group, due to the British social context and my biracial heritage. These is also privilege associated with my heterosexual and cis identities that has affected the analysis. Although I cannot remove my own subjectivity, I have attempted to make the research process transparent through the practice of reflexive thematic analysis as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) and presenting an in-depth analysis of the extracts from the dataset.

There were also limitations associated with the methodology. Due to the parameters of the dataset and qualitative methodology, we are unable to generalise our analysis beyond the immediate context. More specifically, we cannot (and do not try to) argue that internet-enabled action will always perform the functions we have discussed; although the point that internet-enabled action *could* potentially perform all of the functions is more generalisable. Thus, future research would benefit from examining how rhetoric is used for the management

of identities and social movements over a longer time frame and in different contexts. Newer

methods, such as big data analytics and computational social science (e.g., Anderson &

Hitlin, 2016: De Choudhury et al., 2016; Freelon et al., 2016), would suit these aims.

Whereas smaller datasets are more suitable for qualitative analysis of rhetoric, big data can be

employed to take account of the scale of social media data; for example examining change

over time and the spread of content across networks (e.g., Nagler & Tucker, 2015; Procter,

Vis, & Voss, 2013; Smith, McGarty, & Thomas, 2018; Tinati, Halford, Carr, & Pope, 2014).

Conclusion

The role of internet-enabled action in contemporary social movements has received

increasing attention of late, especially regarding its capacity to facilitate or undermine social

change. Our analysis in the present study contributes to this discourse by examining the

rhetorical functions of internet-enabled action and indicating its capacity as a means to

manage identity and social movements.

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