

Media and Communications - Technologies, Policies and Challenges

Activism, Campaigning and Political Discourse on Twitter

Innocent Chilwa
Gwen Bouvier
Editors

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ACTIVISM, CAMPAIGNING AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON TWITTER

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**ACTIVISM, CAMPAIGNING AND
POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON TWITTER**

INNOCENT CHILUWA

AND

GWEN BOUVIER

EDITORS



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Additional color graphics may be available in the e-book version of this book.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN: ; 9: /3/75837/675/7thgdqqm†

Published by Nova Science Publishers, Inc. † New York

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“This timely, truly international volume looks beyond the potential for social action afforded by Twitter for political activism, to critically interrogate how – and how effectively – its affordances are actually being exploited across a range of frontline contexts, from ‘digital Trump’ to LGBT activism in India and political trolling in Turkey. Essential reading for anyone interested in the role of discourse in contemporary political activism.”

Dr. Caroline Tagg, The Open University, Milton Keynes.

“A truly global collection of essays on Twitter activism in many parts of the world, featuring scholars from USA, Austria, China, Ireland, France, Nigeria, Turkey, South Africa, and more! Highly recommended for students and researchers interested in digital activism and global communication.”

Professor Guobin Yang, University of Pennsylvania.

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PREFACE

In times of traditional top-down media, citizens have lacked the power to make their voices heard. They were mere passive receivers of political party propaganda and government spin through the mass media. But with the advent of social media, individuals and social groups, especially the younger generation have become more vocal and critical of political leadership, asking questions and demanding political reforms (Chiluwa, 2012). Twitter and Facebook especially have empowered the citizen user, who is the “driver of democratic innovation through self-actualized networking of citizens engaged in lifestyle and identity politics” (Loader & Mercia 2011, p. 758). In other words, social media have now enabled citizens to challenge the monopoly of media production and dissemination by state and commercial institutions, taking advantage of information technology and freedom of Internet censorship in most countries to advance public opinion and the rule of law.

Significantly, Twitter and Facebook are open, transparent and support low-threshold exchange of information and ideas and show great promise for reconfiguring of the structure of political discourses towards a broadening of public debate by facilitating social connectivity (Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014). And like online forums, Twitter promotes political conversations, and so far has offered new opportunities for challenging dominant discourses and privileged positions of power. Citizens have indeed challenged and resisted existing political structures and asked for, as well as achieved democratic reforms (Chiluwa, 2012). This kind of engagement has become widespread, which began with the achievements of the Arab spring, which some have referred to as “Twitter revolution.”

In this volume, authors from different academic disciplines, coming from different social and political backgrounds and experiences have explored the increasing transformative potentials of Twitter for group advocacy. The chapters illustrate how Twitter serves as a forum for spreading awareness and information on social events, as well as for social activism and political discourse. The role of social media as a source of news responds to how the news environment and consumption practices are rapidly changing and the society appears to be moving from the traditional mainstream media to social media, which includes ordinary people involving in the process of news production and

dissemination (Bergstrom and Belfrage, 2018). In this vein, Social media feeds comprising a mixture of private and public postings and integrating news stories, have also performed the functions of “complementary press” (Shushu Li, in Chapter 4 of the current volume).

In examining the different roles of Twitter in social and political discourses, the authors have applied different theories and approaches. *Pietro Luigi Iaia* in chapter 2 adopts a cognitive-functional perspective in the study of political language on Twitter and proposes a model for the quantitative analysis of campaigning. The chapter argues that political discourse on social media is the object of a ‘preemotional’ (i.e., promotional/emotional) process, where politicians embody the statuses of “politician as consumer” and “politician as supplier.” The chapter demonstrates that online ‘preemotion’ actually helps political discourse retain its ideological nature. This argument is perhaps better illustrated in the study of “digital Trump” in Chapter 3, where *Testa Desta* applied a “multimethod” to analyse social media activities and networks of Donald Trump. The study concludes that Trump and the Republicans were influential within their networks but the analysis of Trumps tweets attracted negative sentiments. In a similar study, *Christa Jennings* in Chapter 5 examines digital paralinguistics on social media, illustrating with “Trump tweets,” which were largely accompanied by exclamatory punctuation and upper-case lettering during the Donald Trump presidential campaigns. The study shows that Donald Trump’s use of computer-mediated communication cues produced increased paralinguistic digital affordances in comparisons to tweets without them. In Chapter 6, *Isioma Chilwa* and *Olaniyi Ayodele* view Twitter activism as a platform where individuals and groups not only campaign for political transformation, but also as a medium to construct “transnational identity,” while doing advocacy through hashtag activism. The chapter shows how multi-national activists attempt to end female genital mutilation in Africa and the Middle East.

Through the use of hashtag, activist users engaged in social movements to articulate their voices to spread social awareness and information on social justice (Konnolly 2015). Their campaigning actions were aimed at, among others, combating social injustice and victimization. Some examples of this include the living wage and marriage equality campaigns in the United States, the anti-abortion campaigns in Australia and the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign that originated in Nigeria (See Hughes and Wyatt, 2009; Brulle, 1996; Chilwa, 2015; 2018). In our current volume, *Paromita Pain* in Chapter 7 articulates the voice of the LGBT activism in India against negative representation of their individual and collective identities and mobilizes support for social change. *Cigdem Erdal* (Chapter 8) writes about the feminist movement in Turkey, while *Floribert P. Endong* (Chapter 9) describes the structures of hashtag activism in the *#Occupy Nigeria* and *#BringBackOurGirls* Twitter movements. Significantly, *Allen Munoriyarwa* (Chapter 10) discusses the strong contributions of ‘Twitter discourses’ to the coup in Zimbabwe and the eventual removal of President Robert Mugabe after 37 years in power.

And just as social media have become increasingly popular with social movements and activist groups, ethnic militias, terrorists and separatist groups have also adopted the use of

social media. In particular, they Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to propagate their ideologies and propaganda. In Chapter 11, *Innocent Chiluwa* discusses the online activism of the Movement for the Liberation of Azawad – a separatist group of Northern Mali that seeks independence from the government of Mali.

The transformational roles of social media activism and the achievements of online movements and campaigns have prompted authoritarian regimes to gradually become better users of social media platforms in order to curb dissent (Shirky 2011). In Chapter 12 *Mustafa Cem Oguz* and *Ozhan Demirkol* discuss the formation and characteristics of “networked authoritarianism” in Turkey and look at how the AK Party adopts political trolling and astroturfing strategies on Twitter to consolidate their rule. Interestingly, for the reason that social media are also instrumental in the hands of either authoritarian governments or dictatorships, often undermining the safety of pro-democracy movements, activists and journalists, *Helia Asgari* and *Katharine Sarikakis* argue that “there is a need to situate the relation of activism and Twitter within the context of domestic legal structures and the political culture within a country” (Chapter 13). *Sebastien Moutte* in Chapter 14 examines the issue of freedom of speech on social media and how Twitter as an organisation has handled this question within the context of political activism following the investigation of the November 2015 Paris attacks.

This collection of chapters written by established as well as budding academics from different disciplines, will be an invaluable handbook and can serve as resource material for students, scholars and practitioners of Communication, Political Science and International Relations, Law, Linguistics, Journalism and Media Studies.

Innocent Chiluwa and Gwen Bouvier
February, 2019.

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Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL OF TWITTER FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Gwen Bouvier^{1,} and Le Cheng²*

¹Department of Media Studies, Maynooth University
Maynooth, Ireland

²School of International Studies, Zhejiang University
Hangzhou, China

ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews key themes that have emerged across scholarship on social media and political activism, focusing on Twitter in particular. This body of work looks at Twitter as a platform in terms of how it works and whether it offers much for the needs of activists. It looks at its potential to give voice to those formerly excluded by traditional top-down monolithic media and the extent to which this can increase citizen engagement, civic debate and democratic processes. The chapter also highlights concerns as to how social media can foster more restricted levels of debate, which may be rather insular and driven by influencers. And finally, it raises the need to question what it means when we give such platforms and the logics and forms of communication such a central role in how we run our societies.

Keywords: Twitter, activism, participation, political social media, nonverbal communication

* Corresponding Author: gwen.bouvier@mu.ie

INTRODUCTION

Social media have clearly transformed how we communicate in society, how we debate social and political issues, and even how we engage with and understand information and knowledge. Across different academic fields, there has been a specific interest in what this means for political and civic participation, taking on both theoretical and practical approaches (Hermida and Hernandez-Santaolalla 2017). This introductory chapter seeks to simply lay out some of the core themes that have emerged across this literature in regard to its potential for political activism. To what extent have scholars seen the potential of social media to allow spaces for this, to foster political participation, give voices (Cheng 2012) and means of mobilization to those who formerly had none? Can it be used to circumvent authoritarian regimes and challenge existing power relations? There is much literature suggesting that we should be optimistic. But there are also scholars who point to limitations and grave concerns, given the affordances of social media platforms and the kind of knowledge and forms of interactions that they foster.

THE BASIC AFFORDANCES OF TWITTER AS A TOOL FOR ACTIVISM

Among the different platforms, Twitter has been one of the most researched social networking sites (SNS) (Jenkins et al. 2013). The affordances of Twitter, in other words what it allows to be done, have been seen as key to its potential for activism. The platform has been described as being ‘always-on’ (Papacharissi 2012). Unlike older forms of monolithic media, it is not structured around schedules and broadcast times. Any moment comments can be posted, read and shared, making it perfect for instant mobilization. boyd (2010, 45) suggests other affordances: ‘persistence’ means online expressions are recorded and archived; ‘replicability’ means content can be easily duplicated; ‘scalability’ means content has high visibility; and ‘searchability’ makes for content to be searched for and retrieved easily. This, boyd (2010) argues, means tweets are more enduring messages that are easily spread and copied, and can be adapted to different needs, as well as be searched easily. To these affordances Papacharissi (2012) adds ‘shareability’, drawing attention to Twitter features such as replies, retweets, and hashtags. These affordances, it can be viewed, make Twitter highly useful to mount protests and inform political discourse by facilitating communication among activists and with their audiences, to inform and mobilize masses at times of demonstrations and unrest, and to serve as a precursor or companion to actual events on the ground (Gleason 2013). Users can bring attention to and discuss their concerns and grievances about issues in society, such as judicial failures, institutional corruption, and inequality (Poell and Rajagopalan 2015). This means SNS have a central role to play in how we live our lives: citizens can have an autonomous political identity that is connected to political spaces (Loader and Mercea 2011).

Social media can also connect users who are geographically remote. This emphasizes their ability to spread information, as they constitute ‘immaterial territories’ (Rousselin 2014). Indeed, platforms like Twitter create new virtual territories of conversation and daily participation (Choi and Park 2014) where people can speak together when they are unable to do so in urban public spaces (Hernández-Merayo et al. 2013; Theocharis 2011) and which are inclusive in nature, despite issues relating to the digital divide (Norris 2001).

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND PROTESTS

Scholars have devoted much attention to the use of social media in relation to citizen communication networks and engagement in civic and political affairs (McLeod et al. 1999; Kavanaugh et al. 2005; Shah et al. 2005; De Zuniga and Valenzuela 2010). Here in relation to mainstream politics it has been argued that the use of social media technologies can enhance political participation in itself and also be used to provide voter information about candidates and elections (Tolbert and McNeal 2003). Awareness of this potential can be seen in how social media have begun to play an increasingly key role in political campaigning in the US and other Western democracies.

Other scholars have focused more specifically on political participation in the form of protests. Valenzuela et al. (2012), for example, looked at protest behavior among young people, noting that social media facilitate access to contacts, which makes it possible for movements to get off the ground and come into the public eye. And simply social media platforms can provide information in a single central place as a sort of rallying point, which can inspire a sense of focus. These platforms can facilitate the formation of collective identities, which, the authors argue, is an important feature of protest behavior (2012, 303).

But how does this translate to actually getting people to participate in protests? Bosch (2017) noted that social media has enabled protest participation by increasing users’ possibilities to engage in collective action (2017, 224) such as organizing protests, creating petitions, strategizing to put together writing campaigns that put pressure on companies, etc. One important feature allowing this, Penney and Dadas (2014) argue, is Twitter’s horizontally structured organization that is non-hierarchical and has peer-to-peer communication, which is particularly useful for the coordination of users and events of social movements. They conceptualize Twitter as “a privileged tool for building horizontal, “multitude”-like networks of exchange that facilitate, supplement and extend face-to-face protest movements” (2014, 77). Although other scholars note that the technology and its affordances for creating dynamic, democratic, and reactive communities itself cannot drive civic engagement of youth when we know there are high levels of political disengagement and subactivism (Bakardjieva 2009, 2010). We should not conflate technology with having a civically aware and motivated population.

The possibility to carry a range of media formats including images and film clips on social media such as Twitter have also been pointed to as being hugely helpful in increasing the scope and potential impact of its messages. Gleason (2013) found that in the case of the Occupy Wall Street movement, videos from YouTube were often shared on Twitter. Such content appeared to be important in communicating the message of the feed and also as a device for mobilization.

More critically though, these social media feeds and spaces are not truly free and unencumbered if they reflect offline power structures and hierarchies (Bosch 2017). And it is clear that only a limited number of citizens are politically active online, whose views don't necessarily reflect those of the wider population (Bosch 2017). Poell and Rajagopalan (2015) note that Twitter is indeed useful for voicing issues, and that through social media public discourse is changing, but essentially is giving mostly middle-class users a voice. A range of scholars draw attention to the role of influencers on social media platforms, both those who seek their own kinds of personal promotion or those who support specific kinds of marketing or political agendas (Papacharissi and De Fatima Oliveira 2012; Hermida et al. 2014). Bouvier (2019) argues that trending social media feeds may be down to the savviness of influencers who know how to use the medium, as much as being down to formerly unheard voices coming to the fore. Such influencers understand the process of creating engagement (Page 2012) and how to attract the attention of mainstream news media (Bouvier 2019).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WIDER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Advocates of social media use in activism have said that because of the wide reach and speed of digital communications, grassroots movements, activists, charities and humanitarian organizations can use these platforms to garner support (Chadwick and Howard 2008; Housley et al. 2018) and provide agency to citizens so they can “speak critically to power” (Elgot 2015). De Zuniga (2012) argues that the growing popularity of social media has created a new debate: do SNS contribute to society by allowing people to become informed, find common causes and participate in public life more often (e.g., Bennett, 2008)? In this sense, is there a place for greater sharing of ideas and social causes? Or do social media in fact foster shallower relationships, distract people from public affairs, and deepen their political and civic disengagement (e.g., Hodgkinson, 2008)? In this sense, do social media lead to increasingly disengaged and insular forms of ideas, values, concepts, worldviews and means of realizing these?

Indeed, social media is an arena that is open and public, but this does not mean that its content and information flow in an unimpeded manner across different groups (Bartlett 2014, 108). Users tend to interact and associate themselves with other users and institutions that share similar views, which limits the opportunities for users to be exposed to

alternative perspectives and ideas (Sunstein 2001; Shirky 2001, 2003; Adamic and Glance 2005). Whereas there is a seemingly endless amount of information available online, this information only can be accessed according to a power-law distribution. This means that about 20% of the entire content accounts for 80% of what is seen (Tremayne et al. 2006; Himelboim 2010). Bennett and Iyengar (2008) argue that because of the ability of users to select what information to access and what to ignore based on their own subjective preferences, they are more likely to “select media outlets sharing their political predispositions” (Stroud 2010, 556). Continuing this line of thought, Sunstein (2001, 2006) notes that social media creates ‘echo chambers’, where citizens are only exposed to a limited set of perspectives that suit their own (Hall Jamieson and Capella 2008; Morozov 2011; Pariser 2011). It has also been suggested that on social media we become stuck in a ‘filter bubble’, which is fostered by the software of the platforms (Pariser 2011). Algorithms, developed to keep users active on a site so that they can be exposed to more advertising, track our choices and customize our online experience so we are surrounded with information that fits our political views. These algorithms therefore reduce our exposure to information we may not agree with. When users look for competing perspectives, search engine algorithms may alter what they find based on the tracking of their preferences (Brossard and Scheufele 2013; Jacobson et al. 2016).

Further, friending and liking practices facilitate the creation of networks where everyone shares similar opinions, and posts are circulated that confirm existing views (Bartlett 2014: 108). Twitter’s retweet function and Facebook’s feed based on friends’ posts feed into this dynamic. This too fosters the sense of echo chambers (Hall Jamieson and Capella 2008), rather than wider civic engagement and participation. These are social groups where messages are circulated that confirm one’s own views of the world, and because of their exclusive nature. Baumgaertner et al. (2016) noted that opinions tend to be hardened in such echo chambers in the absence of alternative views or new evidence. Jacobs and Spierings (2018) examined populists’ Twitter use in The Netherlands and found that the centralized order of hierarchy, and the exclusive and closed nature of such a group, make the circulation of alternative ideas even further unlikely. Rather, people having similar opinions will opt to share stories that support each other’s views. As such, users actively contribute to creating echo chambers (Jacobs and Spierings 2018).

Some scholars take a more nuanced view. Prior (2005) noted that the Internet makes it possible for information-seekers to be exposed to a broader range of political knowledge and involvement. However, other individuals may choose to “take advantage of greater choice and tune out of politics completely” (2005, 587). Garrett (2009) found that people who have more control over the media they consume “do experience an increase in opinion-reinforcing information, but that their exposure to opinion-challenging information does not drop” (2009, 677).

To what extent, we can ask, can people bond online over a cause? If indeed, like De Zuniga and Valenzuela (2010) discuss, social media promote weak binding ties between

individual users, then where does this leave real activism? Gladwell (2010) warns that actions carried out over social media would not necessarily require real effort, which could mean that we end up with passive activism or ‘slacktivism’ (Davies 2013). Others have suggested (White 2010) that social media reduce activism to mere ‘clicktivism’. This involves users merely liking or retweeting content to demonstrate their approval for a cause, without extending their activism any further (Housley et al. 2018, 2). This means that users might manifest their support for social change only by signing a petition or sharing information, and without getting involved in offline action. In contrast to this, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) noted that the use of social media meant that the probability that individuals attended the first day of the Egyptian Tahir Square protests was greatly increased.

PUBLIC SPHERE

Despite these limitations, Twitter and other social media areas constitute discursive spaces, where there is the potential for public sphere discussion (Bosch 2017, 224). But whereas many earlier sources were celebratory about the potential of social media, only few studies looked at the quality of discussion of civic debate (Bouvier 2015). Social media is social, but may only be so in an immediate sense. The work of Lindgren (2010), Georgakopoulou (2014), Way (2015), Al-Tahmazi (2015) and Bouvier (2019) are some examples of research that suggests that discussions of socio-political issues online do not deal with actual details but rather seek to frame events into pre-existing personal interests and alignments.

Papacharissi (2015) and Bouvier (2019) in particular have discussed social media movements in relation to their coherence in regard to motivations and aims. Papacharissi argues that social media are “powered by affective statements of opinion, fact, or a blend of both, which in turn produce ambient, always-on feeds” (2015, 127). By ‘affective’ here she means, for example, that a Twitter feed about a particular issue may itself contain little in the form of clear rational statements. Rather, it might be comprised of floods of emotion. Her interest lies in how people can feel so engaged by events when political ideas and motivations are less clear. One of her case studies is the Egyptian revolution, where emotion and affect provided the connectivity, rather than clear agreement among users in terms of political ideology and perspectives. Bouvier (2019) makes a similar argument with the example of the pro-abortion campaign in Ireland, observing that some people showing their commitment and alignment with the movement may have had little idea of its actual nature.

Such affective alignments with social movements have been characterized by some as mere clicktivism (Dean 2010), and Bouvier (2015) asks of the meaning of such political acts when they form, for users, part of a stream of transient and trivial events that pass

through our multiple social media platforms and personalized news feeds. In the same few minutes we may react to a picture of a friend's dog, post a review of a restaurant where we ate the previous evening, and then declare our irritation on Twitter in a feed that criticizes how our favorite eco brand of soy milk may not have fully explored its packaging sourcing.

Papacharissi (2015) would reject a notion so simple as clicktivism. Rather, she argues that social media can bring about new forms of affective participation. And she suggests that these too can bring about social change. They simply allow users to have power in how things become represented in society, a power formerly occupied by monolithic media organizations. Social media can raise awareness. But if, as Bouvier (2019) shows, the actual nature of the issue that is motivating the affective connectivity is never clear for participants, then the kinds of change called for can never be more than on a symbolic level.

Following similar concerns, Krzyzanowski and Ledin (2017) argue that social media have fundamentally changed how we go about social and political debate. They observe a shift away from more concrete discussions to simplified exchanges based on buzzwords and symbolism. The affordances of social media with its short posts, its fast-moving nature and the need to attract likes to be visible, makes complex, detailed argumentation impossible or unviable. But rather than seeing this as removing the possibility for ideas that are actionable rather than comprised of affective connectivity, they argue that quite the opposite can take place. Those who are best able to harness the simplified narratives that drive social media feeds, the symbolism and the buzzwords, can have the power to mobilize (2017, 579). They give the example of right-wing populist politicians such as Trump in the US and others across the EU. These people understand the power of social media, the need to create narratives about clear good and evil where the ordinary person is the victim of a corrupt establishment, and where ethnic minorities are scapegoated. Logic and detail is not so important as providing affective connectivity. And as scholars such as Wodak (2017) note, we live in societies where there is growing disengagement, disenchantment and disgust with mainstream politics, making these populist simple ideas and solutions yet more attractive.

Further, online behavior can be problematic. Authors have noted that the viral character of online communication means that hateful words quickly circulate, spread, and become normalized (Foxman and Wolf 2013). Social media discussions where users enjoy anonymity can easily suffer from hate speech and group polarization (Citron 2014). Terms like 'trolling' and 'flaming' have been used to describe hate speech and anti-social behavior online, be this of a gender-based or racist nature (Shepherd et al. 2015; Kim 2017). Nevertheless, advocates of social media have hailed them as democratizing, enabling citizens to organize and speak up against authoritarian regimes.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

It has been argued that social media enables information about protests and movements to circumvent channels that may curb communications in contexts where the state has complete control over media such as news outlets and television broadcasting (Poell and Borra 2012; Neumayer and Valtysson 2013; Penny and Dadas 2014; Poell and Van Dijk 2015). Examples of countries where government-controlled media also control what information goes out are rife, e.g., Egypt (Khamis and Vaughan 2011; Tufekci and Wilson 2012) and Ukraine (Ronzhyn 2014). Social media, therefore, can be considered alternative channels for public communication, and Twitter has been dubbed as “the most promising platform for crowd-sourcing alternative reporting” (Poell and Borra 2012, 709).

But can social media actually mobilize masses? Some authors have argued so, suggesting that a veritable re-appropriation of public space is emerging because of new forms of protest, coordinating and assembling protest groups in places like Tahrir Square, Cairo, Zucotti Park, New York, and Gezi Park, Istanbul (Gerbaudo 2012). Social media, it was argued, also played a role in the Arab Spring to mobilize people and keep them informed of developments and events (Cohen 2011; Webster 2011). However, the terms “Twitter Revolution” and “Facebook Revolution” have been called into question (Christensen 2011, 234). Social media were shown to work in tandem with mainstream media in events in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Iran and so on (Cottle 2011). Nevertheless, Twitter in particular has been pinpointed as the fastest and most critical campaign tool for reaching and mobilizing people; for gathering data and responding to public reactions (Vergeer and Hermans 2013; Parker 2012). Twitter was used not only to foster activism but also to recruit, as well as radicalize protesters and militants (see González-Bailón et al. 2012), leading to extreme uses of what Gentleman (2011) calls ‘Twitter terrorism’. In sum, the exact role of the Internet, social media and mobile phones for activism and political change remains contested (Bosch 2017).

What is more, the popular view that social media can democratize authoritarian regimes has been deemed uncritical (Morozov 2011). Rather, such regimes may use social media for surveillance, political repression, and the circulation of propaganda (Christensen 2011; Morozov 2011). And social media can be seen as channels of capitalist values. Dean (2005, 53) pointed out that “The proliferation, distribution, acceleration and intensification of communicative access and opportunity, far from enhancing democratic governance or resistance, results in precisely the opposite – the post-political formation of communicative capitalism.” In addition to this, others have argued that online social movements do little to change the perception of citizens and have minimal impact on government policy (Choi and Park 2014; Marmura 2008). Others still have said that social media are insufficient as a way to increase public interest in issues (Kruikemeier et al. 2014).

DISCOURSES OF TECHNOLOGY

Some scholars argue that the emancipatory power of social media may not be called into question enough (Fisher 2010). We run the risk of (uncritically) seeing the technology as a “means of fostering democracy, literacy and human well-being” (Wynn et al. 2003, 2). We live in societies where digital is good, and we see a proliferation of digital systems whenever we interact with companies. Our own institutions can be organized around dense interlocking digital databases. Schools use such systems to log and measure learning outcomes and performances. We are encouraged to engage with digital forums as consumers, leaving reviews. The dominant present ideology is that this interactive technology simply must be good and it increasingly takes over the logic not only of what we do but also why we do it and how we do it (Cheng and Chen 2019). And in the news media we are constantly reminded of what is being said on Twitter, which has taken on a huge power in what kinds of social and moral issues are foregrounded. Yet we have little open discussion about what this reliance on technology is doing in terms of what we are losing. Fisher (2010) argues that we must engage with technology for the instrument it is, and critically assess its uses and implementation. In a sense, we might suggest, technology can come to signify things like transparency, civic participation and community, where there is none.

CONCLUSION

What we learn from this literature is that it seems that social media such as Twitter can allow new voices to speak and new communities to be created, even if a large proportion of those doing so are middle-class. And it is clear that many scholars feel this process has already led to positive results in regard to political participation and engagement. In particular, Twitter appears perfect for social and political activism since it is always switched on, allows multiple access and fast sharing of information across those who have access. But there are also questions about how people engage with social media feeds, what kind of activism this is and the complexity of ideas and motivations that can be shared. While much engagement may not entirely be able to be dismissed as clicktivism, we must take on board that the symbolic and simplified formulation of ideas that Twitter fosters led to more affective forms of connectivity. And a form of communication that does this certainly requires further consideration before we hand it full control of which civic issues take the fore in our societies.

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Chapter 2

**THE ‘PREMOTION’ OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
ON TWITTER: PROMOTIONAL AND EMOTIONAL
STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATING
AND CAMPAIGNING**

*Pietro Luigi Iaia**

Department of Humanities, University of Salento, Lecce, Italy

ABSTRACT

This chapter proposes a model for the qualitative analysis of language uses characterizing political campaigning on Twitter, in order to expand the results of quantitative studies (e.g., Small 2011; Parmelee and Bichard 2012; Larsson and Moe 2014; Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014). The model—which will be defined ‘Reviewing-&-Previewing’—has been devised by adopting a cognitive-functional perspective (Halliday 1978; Langacker 2008) and drawing upon Sentiment Analysis (Liu 2015) and Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) to investigate the strategies of persuasion and information in a selected corpus of tweets from Hillary Clinton and President Donald Trump. This chapter contends that political discourse on social media is the object of a ‘premotivational’ (promotional/emotional) process, according to which politicians are Subjects who embody the statuses of ‘Politician-as-Consumer’ and ‘Politician-as-Supplier,’ when they respectively review and evaluate their adversaries’ and partners’ actions and ideological viewpoints, or describe the main aspects of their programmes. In the examined tweets, Subjects therefore blend personifications of the electors’ needs and opinions, schematic contrasts between utopian and dystopian scenarios of hope, courage and fear, and metaphorization processes so as to prompt the emotional participation of Twitter users, who are meant to feel reassured or threatened, depending on the themes and objects of the

* Corresponding Author Email: pietroluigi.iaia@unisalento.it.

authors' messages. Finally, this study also aims to demonstrate that online 'promotion' actually helps political discourse retain its ideological nature. This is because Subjects resort to these communicative and emotional strategies in order to gain consensus and attain a positive outcome of political elections, thus 'reasserting' or 'holding' their power (Fairclough 2015: 94).

Keywords: political communication; campaigning; Critical Discourse Analysis; Twitter communication; promotional discourse

INTRODUCTION

The historical evolution of Twitter, which Rogers (2014) divides into three main phases, has seen a shift in its use, as people have passed from posting only messages "of scant interest" about everyday activities (Kelly 2009), to conceiving this virtual space for "networked sociality" (Gillespie 2010) as the best "event-following tool" (Rogers 2014: ix). Political communication has actively exploited Twitter's transformation "from a niche service to a mass phenomenon" (Weller et al. 2014: xxix), resorting to it to report news, personal interests and opinions about politicians' actions. The actual aim of this is to prompt specific perlocutionary effects (Austin 1962) and gain or maintain consensus. For these reasons, it is interesting to enquire into this instance of online communication from a Critical Discourse Analysis viewpoint, hence considering to what extent tweets are meant to attain a positive outcome of political elections, thus 'reasserting' or 'holding' power (Fairclough 2015: 94).

This chapter proposes a novel model for the analysis of political communication and campaigning online, devised at the University of Salento and defined as 'Reviewing-&-Previewing' (or, 'R&P'). This Model applies a cognitive-functional reading (Halliday 1978; Langacker 2008) to the object of study, assuming that the chief purposes of political communication via Twitter are informing and ultimately persuading receivers through a particular blend of personifications of the electors' needs and opinions, compelling contrasts between utopian and dystopian scenarios of hope, courage and fear, and a register with reduced formality. This blend is intended to prompt an emotional participation on the part of web users, who are meant to feel reassured or threatened, agree or disagree with what senders claim. The construction of the Model has drawn upon Sentiment Analysis (Liu 2015) and Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) to provide evidence that political discourse on social media is the object of a 'promotional' (promotional/emotional) process. Within it, politicians could be thought of as 'Subjects' who embody the dual status of 'Politician-as-Consumer' and 'Politician-as-Supplier,' when they respectively review

and evaluate their adversaries' and partners' actions and ideological viewpoints, or describe the main aspects of their own programmes, so as to convince wavering electors and retain the loyalty of their supporters. This process is in accordance with the dynamics of the marketization of political discourse (Leithart 2013; Moscrop 2014), or the "tendency in politics to refer to individuals as taxpayers, customers, or clients instead of as citizens" (Moscrop 2014: online).

The following Section introduces the main findings of studies on campaigning through Twitter, before contextualizing Promotional Discourse (Guido et al. 2016). Then, after the introduction and justification of the selection of the corpus of analysis, the chosen tweets will be examined to detail the emotional and promotional dimensions of President Trump's and Hillary Clinton's attempts at informing and persuading tweeters.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND TWITTER

The production of, and reaction to political discourse on Twitter are the objects of a number of studies that basically exemplify that "debanalising" this social network's uses (Rogers 2014) coincides with recognizing that it has become an "emergency communication channel" (Rogers 2014: xxi) and "an everyday part of the arsenal of political communication" (Larsson and Moe 2014: 319). Through the Internet and, obviously, through Twitter, politicians such as Prime Ministers, Presidents, and party candidates provide information, state their opinion (Small 2011), share their views (Maireder 2012) about social events and political behaviour of common interest, and inhabit virtual places to structure political debates (Yardi and boyd 2010). Generally speaking, the informative and persuasive traits of tweets aim to strengthen "already existing patterns of societal debates" (Larsson and Moe 2014: 327) and therefore enact that clash of power that, in Fairclough's (2015) terms, is one of the peculiar aspects of the ideological nature of political discourse. In other words, despite the freedom of participation that is normally attributed to social networking, or the fact that Twitter allows "political actors to connect to other professionals as well as politically active citizens" (Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014), online political discourse is still more "evolutionary" than "revolutionary" (Larsson and Moe 2014: 328). It is produced so as to pursue "normalisation" (Larsson 2011), an enhancement of "already established modes of discussion and campaigning, rather than a shift regarding such practices" (Larsson and Moe 2014: 329). It follows that politics through Twitter is still to be seen as an "ideological" activity (Fairclough 2015), insofar as the production and transmission of messages aim to trigger specific effects on ideal receivers and therefore help politicians hold on to or reassert their power.

A case in point is represented by communicating and campaigning by means of tweets that are actually “vehicles of self-promotion” (Golbeck et al. 2010: 1612), created by senders so as to present themselves as bearers of qualities that are universally perceived as benefits deriving from good politics. The latter include national and international security, proximity to specific social figures (such as workers or teachers) or the reduction of gender-based and wealth-based discrimination. Due to this promotional nature of online campaigning, the ‘Reviewing-&-Previewing’ Model is proposed here for the examination of language uses on Twitter in order to investigate the interaction between promotional, informative and emotional traits at the time of developing political communication on social networks. The Model stems from the cognitive-functional approach (Langacker 2008), according to which messages are tailored to the activation of specific effects on recipients. In particular, when promoting their own actions and behaviour and, in turn, contrasting their opponents’ views, politicians become holders of opinions that are delivered to their interlocutors with the help of specific words, or in a less formal register, with the objective of facilitating the addressees’ favourable reception. Hence, since opinions are generally paramount in the chosen tweets, Sentiment Analysis (Liu 2015) and Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) have been selected to enquire into the strategies that politicians adopt in order to attain their perlocutionary effects. Sentiment Analysis is a multidisciplinary research field that originates from computer science and affects social, industrial and political areas, and is commonly used to analyse “people’s opinions, sentiments, appraisals, attitudes and emotions towards entities and their attributes expressed in written texts” (Liu 2015: 1). With regards to political discourse, Sentiment Analysis is mainly employed for “quantitative studies” of “reaction—through tweets—to events or debates” (Thelwall 2014), also with the technical assistance of dedicated software, such as SentiStrength. It is true that when the examination is limited to technological tools, the value of the findings can be undermined by the impossibility of coping with the use of “complex linguistic formulations, such as sarcasm or irony” (Thelwall 2014: 93). However, while this may seem to limit the application of Sentiment Analysis to examine political discourse on Twitter, this chapter contends that its use is still essential, provided that analysts have the final say in deciding to what extent the computational results are reliable, especially through the aid of qualitative methods, like the one presented here.

In this chapter, Sentiment Analysis and Appraisal Theory are adopted for the investigation of a mini corpus of tweets from Hillary Clinton and President Donald Trump, in order to exemplify that the strategies of self-promotion and marketization reflect the actions and language uses that can be found on e-commerce websites, firstly when sellers promote their goods by underlining their positive qualities (sometimes comparing their products with those of their rivals) that are expected to fulfil the implied receivers’ needs and requests. Secondly, when buyers negatively review products by reporting on their experience and highlighting why their expectations were not met. Tweets will therefore be

approached as written messages in which one can “identify positive and negative opinions expressed or implied in text” (Liu 2015: 3), whereas addressers will be labelled as “Subjects” who employ language in order to activate a special relationship with their addressees, which is based on the authors’ suggestion to the recipients of the desired reading and interpretation of messages. In this light, the lexical choices, metaphorical constructions and intertextual references (through retweets and mentions) to controversial or debated news serve to let receivers infer the actual pragmatic sense of the Subjects’ messages, by sharing their positive or negative evaluation of the object of discussion. As regards this case study, the analysis will demonstrate that Subjects tend to take two stances—‘Politician-as-Consumer’ and ‘Politician-as-Supplier.’ These stances respectively represent the Senders’ “alignment/disalignment” (Martin and White 2005: 95) with their partners’ and adversaries’ actions and opinions, and their proposal to change political agendas or improve specific social situations if they win the elections. Because of this theoretical assumption, the selection of Sentiment Analysis and Appraisal Theory is vital to help analysts consider to what extent language used is intended to lead readers towards a positive or negative evaluation of the objects of the tweets. The ‘R&P’ Model will adopt the “aspect level” of analysis (Liu 2015: 9), according to which Subjects evaluate an entity (in this case, the Democratic and/or Republican administrations) “with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly and Chaiken 1998: 1), revealing their positive or negative orientation by judging some of their “aspects,” or qualities. By way of example, the alignment/disalignment with the US government could be carried out by disapproving a measure concerning the children’s healthcare system, which is therefore connoted as one of the aspects on which a good administration should focus in order to serve American citizens. In cognitive-functional terms, such positive or negative evaluations are meant to guide the receivers’ reaction, through the words, expressions and semantic fields that are chosen to deliver the senders’ appraisal, or their “attitude” (Martin and White 2005) towards what they are commenting on or talking about. Precisely, the inclusion of opinion words, less formal register and the reference to emotions and cognitive opposition between dystopian and utopian realities signals whether senders are “judging” or “appreciating” (Martin and White 2005) the main objects of their tweets. Finally, the Subjects’ orientation is then passed on to the implied receivers, striving to guide their interpretation and construct a “community of shared feeling” (Martin and White 2005: 4).

By integrating self-promotion, implicit or explicit communication of Subjects’ attitudes and evaluation of the socio-cultural and political scenarios through the involvement of recipients’ emotions, this study tries to bring political discourse on Twitter into the research areas investigating ‘promotional’ uses of language—a particular, emotion-based elaboration and interpretation of texts, which is described in the next section.

Premotional Discourse

The term ‘premotion’—initially coined for a research project that was devised at the University of Salento—concerns the theorization and production of innovative multimodal marketing plans that are meant to provoke the potential customers’ positive evaluation of the advertised objects, through their emotional involvement in the promotional campaign (Guido et al. 2016; Guido et al. 2017). Tourism was the first area of application of this strategy due to its importance for the Apulian region in Italy (Spagnolo 2016; Vigilante 2016), with the main research objective of comparing the conventional view of this activity as a mere luxury practice (Amatulli and Guido 2012) and an alternative mode of ‘responsible tourism.’ The latter originates from the definition of journeys as an “inclusive social experience” whereby travelers attain enjoyment, as well as personal and cultural growth, while appreciating “the conservation of natural and cultural heritage [...] the world’s diversity.”[†] The main area of application of Premotional Discourse, though, is now going to be broadened by the understanding that political discourse is also characterized by the alternation between neutral and attitude-bearing opinion words and sentences, which should be regarded as indicators of the ideological nature of the messages that are produced. From the cognitive-functional perspective, then, the “semiotic labour” of tweets (Kress 2009)—or the transmission of their semantic and communicative potential through the simultaneous use of audiovisual and verbal items—actualizes oppositions between utopian and dystopian realities and the benefits resulting from better living conditions, social benefits and economic growth, in order to guide the recipients’ sentiment evaluation of the politicians’ behavior. This evaluation has to be turned—in the Senders’ view—into an actual decision about whether to continue to support the candidate last voted for or to vote for another candidate. Political campaigning via Twitter is considered an important ground for Premotional Discourse because Subjects blend self-promotion with the emotional reading of their actions and their opponents’ actions, declarations or behavior so as to provoke the desired response, thus demonstrating that the combination of promotional and emotional strategies is an ideological process by which the institutions holding power try to maintain or gain dominant positions (van Dijk 2001: 356).

Due to the critical analysis of the selected extracts, this chapter does not aim to endorse or oppose the messages that are examined. The objective is only to report on the first application of a Model that could be useful for language students, teachers, lecturers and scholars to further explore the potentiality of language in establishing social relations and shared viewpoints, or in establishing the boundaries and traits of the reality that is commonly experienced, hopefully advancing the state of research on, and tools for, the investigation of online political discourse.

[†] <http://responsibletourismpartnership.org/>.

ANALYSIS

Introduction to the Analysis

The following section adopts the 'Reviewing-&-Previewing' Model for the examination of the selected corpus of tweets from President Donald Trump (henceforth, DT) and Hillary Clinton (henceforth, HC), in order to examine the main strategies of production and conveyance of the promotional nature of political discourse. The corpus includes twenty messages (nine from DC and eleven from HC) posted from December 2017 to May 2018, dealing with some of the most urgent topics of social discussion, which are normally employed to evaluate the actions of political administrations. In particular, HC and DT comment on the decision to cut funds for Children's Health Insurance Program, their positions regarding the nuclear deal with Iran and on dramatic events like the mass shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Florida. Finally, the chosen tweets are also dedicated to self-promotion, through references to women's rights (when it comes to HC) or to the media coverage of DT's presidency. The preference for these themes in the collection of the corpus is due to the fact that Subjects tend to talk about them with passionate messages that usually reveal an inclusive attitude towards recipients. The latter, in fact, are addressed in the examined tweets as peer members of the Subjects' communities, as is shown by HC and DT resorting to tags such as "American people" or "citizens" to refer to readers and instigate in them the perception of lesser degrees of social and psychological distance between interlocutors.

The analysis also follows the transcription indications for "aspect-based sentiment analysis" (Liu 2015: 22), according to which analysts should point out the entity (e) and aspect (a) that are evaluated, along with the sentiment (s) expressed by the opinion holder (h) and, finally, the date of the latter's judgement (t). In formula, the above list is indicated as:

e, a, s, h, t

Due to the assumptions behind the R&P Model, the above schema has been modified in order to specify, before the entity, the 'Reviewing' (R) or 'Previewing' (P) nature of the message, whereas the sentiment will be indicated in terms of positive or negative orientation, and further explanation may appear below the list of standard values to provide more information about the reasons behind the opinion holders' appraisals:

R/P, e, a, s, h, t

further explanation of the reasons behind the Subjects' appraisals

The size of the selected corpus is justified by the qualitative nature of the following analysis, which aims to explore the interaction between the following strategies: metaphorization; personification with potential and actual electors by means of an inclusive stance; the positive and negative appraisals of the colleagues' and rivals' actions and ideas; the reiteration of a contrast between dystopian (generally, contemporary scenario) and utopian (the potential future following the speaker's election) situations.

Examination of the Selected Corpus of Tweets

One of the strategies that are adopted to attract the readers' attention is the description of a clash between dystopian and utopian scenarios, respectively associated with the aspects that senders criticize and the qualities of the administration that they lead or support. This technique is adopted by both DT and HC when commenting on decisions or intentions that are considered crucial for national and international security, such as the nuclear deal with Iran. Since the latter was one of President Obama's achievements, the two Subjects have different views on the need to keep negotiations active.

Starting from HC, the emotional tone overcomes the promotional one in tweet (1), when she aims to downgrade the Trump administration's decisions. She openly disaligns, defining DT's view as "a big mistake," before passing on to a detailed prevision of the catastrophic upshots of leaving the negotiation table:



Figure 1. (1)—HC on Iran nuclear deal.

The negative evaluation is in the definition of America as "less safe and less trusted," which is meant to lead recipients to imagine a different world from the one they are living in, permeated in addition by an increase in the sentiment of fear also because of the possibility of a war against the other country resulting from the absence of firm control. The latter aspect can be inferred from HC highlighting the lack of "plan B" through her question and claiming that DT is "woefully misinformed" if he thinks that "bombing" can be "the answer" to the impasse in negotiation. When the terminology of Sentiment Analysis is adopted for the qualitative examination of this text, in fact, the Republican administration—represented by DT's actions—could be labelled as the entity that HC

(playing the role of opinion holder) is evaluating, when she assumes the stance of “Politician-as-Consumer.” She is expressing her view about the qualities of “national security” and “international security” which should be guaranteed by a satisfactory government and administration—and she is clearly posting a negative appraisal of such traits. This evaluation then could be rendered as follows:

- (1) P, Republican administration, national security, negative, HC, May-9-2018
appraisal signals: “big mistake”; “less safe,” “Iran is now more dangerous”; lack of “plan B”; “woefully misinformed”
- (1) P, Republican administration, international security, negative, HC, May-9-2018
appraisal signals: “big mistake”; “less safe and less trusted,” “Iran is now more dangerous”; lack of “plan B”; “woefully misinformed”

HC’s disalignment continues in (2), which is posted right after (1):



Figure 2. (2)—HC on Iran’s nuclear deal.

In (2), HC continues to predict a dystopian and adverse outcome of quitting negotiations, but now balancing the emotional and promotional elements. Initially, one can read that Iran—represented as one of America’s enemies—is said to be “free to do what it wants,” reiterating the sense of lack of control of a potential threat and explicitly talking about “missiles and terrorism.” These nouns are again essential to prompt a specific reaction on the part of addressees, who are meant to feel pervaded by fear and hopelessness. Then, the promotion of the Democratic Party is evident from the hypertextual link to a Facebook post by former President Obama, when he reports on a different way of dealing with foreign countries and coping with the danger of an increasing availability of nuclear weapons.

When (1) and (2) are examined as instances of the ‘Previewing’ phase through the taking up of the “Politician-as-Supplier” stance, it is clear that the prevision of a more reassuring future is proposed to electors, hoping that they will consider these elements at the time of voting. This situation can be represented as:

- (1)+(2) P, Democratic administration, national security + international security, positive, HC, May-9-2018
 appraisal signals: explicit reference to former President Obama’s view about negotiations with Iran

As for DT’s position, his tweets on the deal preserve the emotional tone and a similar ratio between the two natures of Promotional Discourse, but the perspective is—of course—different. Although both Subjects act as reviewers and previewers, DT negatively appraises the path that has been followed since Obama’s decision to mediate with Iran, delivering a message that counts on Americans’ need to perceive that they have complete control of negotiations:



Figure 3. (3)—DT on Iran’s nuclear deal.

Tweets (1)-(3) are constructed around some shared pivots. At first, Iran is classified with other threats to the homeland, thus providing one of the sources of the emotional reading of the examined messages—namely, the division of the world into two main parts, opposing America to states such as “the world’s leading state sponsor of terror” in (3). Indeed, the imagining of a potential conflict and the chances of a negative outcome are crucial factors of the tweeters’ persuasion. The latter, unfavourable scenario is insinuated by the exploitation of the semantic dimension of “war” when previewing the devastating consequences of the downgraded actions, like facing enemies with a more accommodating

attitude, which could be perceived as marker of the country's weakness. Anyway, these goals of the opinion holders' argumentation are subject to their alignment/disalignment with the parties under discussion. In fact, it is the current deal that is "defective" in (3), thus rejecting former President Obama's decision. In addition, President Trump tries to reduce the formal distance between the sender and American citizens through the use of the pronoun "we," which should ease the recipients' sharing of the deductive process underlying the above tweet. From a general perspective, what DT is offering is the prediction of a better future where America's potential enemies are not beyond control, as would be the case resulting from the unsatisfying, current negotiation strategy:

- (3) R, Democratic administration, national + international security, negative, DT, May-8-2018
appraisal signals: inadequate ability to deal with potential threats
- (3) P, Democratic administration, national + international security, positive, DT, May-8-2018
appraisal signals: adequate ability to deal with potential threats

The emotional tone of (3) is shared by example (4), whereby DT evaluates John Kerry's actions:



Figure 4. (4)—DT on Iran's nuclear deal.

The promotional nature is again in the negative appraisal of the ability to negotiate with foreign countries, which is associated with the aspects "national security" and "international security." This can be presupposed from DT's disapproval of John Kerry's conduct. In fact, the former Secretary of State, from the rival party, is associated with an "illegal Shadow Diplomacy" and a "very badly negotiated" deal. The selection of adjectives is vital also in this case to guide the readers' reaction and hence their evaluation of the Democratic Party, as it is when HC comments on the alternative principles of negotiation in (2). The President's disalignment is then strengthened by the insertion of the noun "mess" in capital letters, a typographic characteristic known as 'all caps' and conventionally used in online communication to shout words or notions, also for emphasis.

The aspect of “national security” is constant in the promotion of political parties, and another case in point is represented by HC’s comment on the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, which took place on February 14, 2018. The dramatic episode actually serves to commence a debate about the right to own weapons and the need for a “gun reform,” as can be read in the tweet below:



Figure 5. (5)—HC on mass shootings.

The message starts with a positive, reassuring note about the possibility of a better future and eventually reveals its campaigning value, when the Subject openly invites electors to vote and to vote differently. Premotion is in the inclusive attitude when the opinion of “[t]he majority of America” is expressed by HC as if she were their spokesperson. Furthermore, the positive appraisal of a twist in the current state of facts entails the connotation of the gun reform as a “common sense” act. The passage from ‘Reviewing’ to ‘Previewing’ is performed by giving citizens an empowering message after the list of the dramatic adjectives “angry, heartbroken” and “helpless.” Finally, HC also promotes the members of a different administration, who will “protect lives, not gun sellers’ profits”:

- (5) R, Republican administration, social proximity, negative, HC, Feb-16-2018
appraisal reasons:
“we [= American people] feel abandoned”;
the politicians that were elected protect gun sellers’ profits, not citizens’ lives
- (5) R, Republican administration, national security, negative, HC, Feb-16-2018
appraisal signals: “Mass shootings are not inevitable” >> [= presupposes] the
government has the power of preventing the escalation of these dramatic events
- (5) P, Republican administration, social proximity, positive, HC, Feb-16-2018
appraisal reasons:
“to elect people who will protect lives, not gun sellers’ profits” >> electors need to
choose people with different qualities and from a different party

The promotion of the Democratic Party's agenda continues when HC reflects upon mass shooting and gun reform, claiming that:

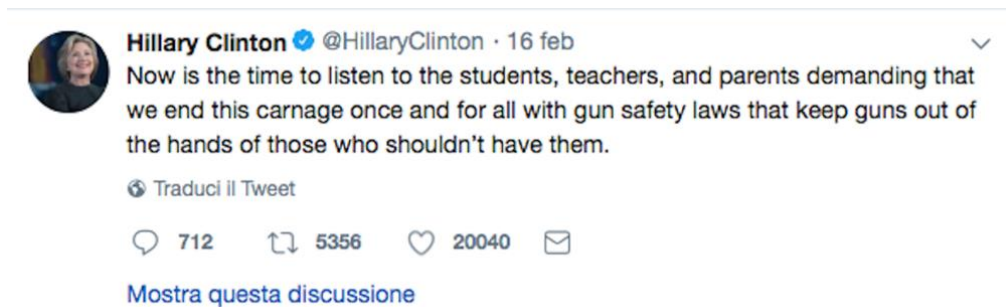


Figure 6. (6)—HC on gun reform.

An inclusive attitude is chosen from the beginning, when the social figures of “students, teachers and parents” are mentioned as the logical and psychological subjects (Halliday 1994) of (6), who are all urged to react and have their say and subvert the dystopian reality where people are not afraid to damage and kill their peers, causing “carnage.” Although (5) and (6) are inclined towards the emotional side, their illocutionary force could still be considered as promotional, when the sincere concern turns into a proposal of a different reaction to such facts, should the elections have a positive outcome.

- (6) R, Republican administration, social proximity, negative, DT, Feb-16-2018
 appraisal reasons:
 lexical choice—e.g., “carnage”;
 “[...] that keep guns out of the hands of those who shouldn’t have them” >> the current scenario is dangerous and potentially without control

- (6) P, Democratic administration, social proximity, positive, DT, Feb-16-2018
 appraisal reasons:
 “NOW is the time to listen to [...] demanding” >> these needs are unanswered;
 explicit mention of specific social figures;
 “[...] that keep guns out of the hands of those who shouldn’t have them” >> solution to the current scenario

The utopian future, which generally pertains to the ‘Previewing’ phase of promotional political discourse, is also characterized by equal rights. The latter are within the main qualities on which HC’s self-promotion is based, as in the tweet where she thanks Cecile Richards for her work with ‘Planned Parenthood.’ In the latter extract, promotion is

multimodal due to the fusion between the verbal and visual dimensions, which implicates a positive message of strong women that are committed to building a world without gender-based discrimination:



Figure 7. (7)—HC thanks Cecile Richards.

- (7) P, Democratic administration, social rights, positive, HC, May-1-2018
 appraisal reasons: Subject and other people are all women, who are smiling

As some of the already analysed tweets have exemplified, one of the main aspects that are underlined by both Subjects when producing their promotional messages is the inclusion of American people in the texts—a strategy that is more evident when tweets revolve around social problems about which citizens care. These issues are conventionally associated with those features of human lives that entail personal and economic stability and become aspects of the entity that senders evaluate. In particular, the next samples deal with two reforms of the healthcare system, which HC and DT support or otherwise according to their position in the political spectrum—lowering the price of prescription drugs, and cutting funding to the ‘Children’s Health Insurance Program.’ With regards to the former, President Trump relies on spreading a positive message of a future with more affordable medication, thanks to a novel system of negotiation:



Figure 8. (8)—DT on the reform of healthcare system.

In the first tweet of a set of two about the same object of discussion, a video of DT's speech is attached, where the slogan "LOWER DRUG PRICES for Americans" is visible. In it, the alternation between all caps and italic is meant to mark the most important elements of the message, which in fact becomes the most visible 'preview' of what DT's administration is going to produce. The central, visual component of the multimodal tweet under examination is completed by the strictly verbal elements, where he mentions "American people" first, who are expected to share the Subject's positive appraisal of the reformed healthcare system that should take care of citizens and replace the existing one "that takes advantage of" Americans. The emphasis on the positive consequences is completed by mentioning the supply of "quality, affordable medication," whereas the tweet ends with a more explicit promotion of DT's administration, whose members "will not rest until the job is done." By means of the last claim, recipients can infer that these politicians will work hard and relentlessly until such favourable results are achieved. The union of these features contributes to a negative 'review' of the social proximity of the Democratic administration, in contrast to what the Republican government is going to attain:

- (8) R, Democratic administration, social proximity, negative, DT, May-11-2018
appraisal reasons: reduced benefits for American people
- (8) P, Republican administration, social proximity, positive, DT, May-11-2018
appraisal reasons: increasing benefits for American people

The message of a tireless group of people that serve their electors and all American citizens is confirmed by the second of the selected tweets that are dedicated to this reform. Also in tweet (9) the President underlines the qualities of “hardworking” and “caring for American people,” eventually creating a tweet that rightfully belongs to the group of messages dedicated to self-promotion:



Figure 9. (9)—DT on the reform of healthcare system.

The subjects of the above sentence are the “Politicians-as-Suppliers,” who are going to “launch” the reform having the traits of “tougher negotiation, more competition, and much lower prices” of drugs, which he favourably appraises.

(9) R, Republican administration, hardworking, positive, DT, May-11-2018

A world with better access to medication and healthcare systems is also the keystone of HC’s self-promotion through promotional tweets, but she associates these positive features with the care for children and families, when she disapproves of the tax reform that will also cut funding for the ‘Children’s Health Insurance Program’ (also abbreviated as ‘CHIP’):



Figure 10. (10)—HC on CHIP’s rescission.

In the analysed example, HC is ‘supplier’ of a different policy in support of sick children, as well as ‘consumer’ while reviewing the consequences of the Republican Party’s decision. The emotional tone of the message is enhanced by the explicit reference to the “wealthy & corporations,” which presupposes a division of people into two groups, namely ‘wealthy people’ versus ‘poor people,’ resorting to a persuasion strategy that is already evident in (2), when she takes position against the end of negotiations with Iran. In terms of the ‘R&P’ Model, this situation could be rendered as:

- (10) R, Republican administration, healthcare system, negative, HC, May-11-2018
appraisal reasons: causing social inequalities and exclusion
- (10) R, Republican administration, hardworking, negative, HC, May-11-2018
appraisal reasons: not serving the interests of all American citizens, causing social inequalities and exclusion
- (10) P, Democratic administration, social proximity, positive, HC, May-11-2018
appraisal reasons: caring for reduction of social inequalities and exclusion in healthcare system

The division of the world into (at least) two formations is maintained in the other tweets on the same theme, when the members of the Republican Party are described as siding with opulent donors against most families (Figure 11) and their children (Figure 12):



Figure 11. (11)—HC on CHIP’s rescission.



Figure 12. (12)—HC on CHIP’s rescission.

In the extracts above, Republicans are marked as greedy people that do not care for children’s health or for their families’ needs. Indeed, the economic and social policies are negatively appraised when “perverse priorities,” “immoral agenda” and lack of concern and worries for kids’ health are explicitly nominated. Also here, the inclusion of children is an emotional strategy that is intended to prompt a specific evaluation of current political choices, ultimately leading to the promotion of the opposite party, which has a chance to present itself as the bearer of the solution to these issues. Anyway, this solution can be actualized only if electors actively change their choice in the course of mid-term elections (see tweet (5) above), or at least if they have their say by calling Senate members and contributing to the modification of these dystopian, “surreal times”:



Figure 13. (13)—HC on CHIP’s rescission.

The last group of samples will cover the process of self-promotion by DT. In the selected tweets, he only acts as the “Politician-as-Supplier” who underlines the positive qualities of what he offers. This end is pursued by presenting himself as better than his competitors, although political rivals are not directly mentioned, and as the victim of inaccurate media coverage, which is not deemed consistent with how real people evaluate him:

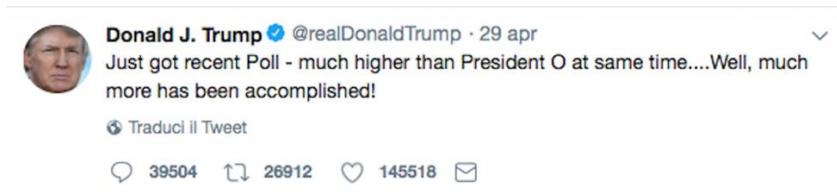


Figure 14. (14)—DT’s self-promotion against President Obama.



Figure 15. (15)—DT’s self-promotion against “Fake News Media.”

From the perspective of the marketization of political discourse, those last tweets focus exclusively on the results of polls, with the ‘Politician-as-Supplier’ describing the results of the entity that he is guiding. At first, the adversary is downgraded by naming only his surname’s initial letter (indeed, a strategy that is used also in Italy, in particular when some newspapers avoid naming Silvio Berlusconi), then the achievements of DT’s administration are celebrated, also in direct contrast with the high percentage of news stories that, according to the Subject, are “bad” and “fake.” Likewise, self-promotion is actual promotion in tweet (15), when the “American public” becomes the object of appraisal—an appraisal that is positive, and which is concluded with the reiteration of the President’s slogan.

Even though the characteristics of HC’s and DT’s alignment/disalignment are different, the basic pattern and grounds of their promotional tweets are very similar, since they both try to influence and guide the electors’ reasoning by means of describing compelling social scenarios whose essence is the identification of divisions, such as those between ‘wealthy people’ and ‘poor people,’ between ‘unscrupulous politicians’ and ‘caring politicians,’ or between ‘fake media’ and ‘trustworthy media.’

CONCLUSION

This Chapter has proposed the first application of the ‘Reviewing-&-Previewing’ Model, which has been devised at the University of Salento for the analysis of the linguistic strategies of emotional promotion in political discourse. The Model stems from the assumption that the producers of the examined messages rely on an emotional involvement of implied addressees in order to prompt the desired effects, which normally coincide with downgrading the rivals’ actions and behaviour and supporting their own party’s political and social agenda. The analysis of the selected corpus of tweets from Hillary Clinton and President Donald Trump seems to confirm that the current marketization of politics leads to the constant alternation between two stances, which the Model defines as ‘Politician-as-Supplier’ and ‘Politician-as-Consumer,’ when Subjects respectively promote their ideas and achievements or try to describe the positive effects of the laws that they support to their present and future electors. By detailing the Subjects’ evaluation of their adversaries’ and partners’ actions as if they were reviewing the actual and potential eminent features of Democratic and Republican administrations, the ‘R&P’ Model succeeds in revealing that good government is conventionally associated by opinion holders with national and international security, peaceful conditions and an increase in the perception of social equality, as is now summarized:

- (1)-(15) R+P, Democratic administration, negative, DT, Dec-2017-May-2018
appraisal reasons: reduction of national and international security; increase of perception of America’s weakness; ignoring the interests of American citizens; increase of social discrimination in healthcare system
- (1)-(15) R+P, Republican administration, positive, DT, Dec-2017-May-2018
appraisal reasons: increase of national and international security; reduction of perception of America’s weakness; serving the interests of American citizens; reduction of social discrimination in healthcare system
- (1)-(15) R+P, Democratic administration, positive, HC, Dec-2017-May-2018
appraisal reasons: increase of national and international security; commitment to promotion of international peace; serving the interests of American citizens; reduction of gender-based and wealth-based discrimination; reduction of social discrimination in healthcare system
- (1)-(15) R+P, Republican administration, negative, HC, Dec-2017-May-2018
appraisal reasons: reduction of national and international security; reduction of international peace; ignoring the interests of American citizens; serving the interests of wealthy donors and gun sellers; increase of social discrimination in healthcare system

When reviewing their partners' agenda, Subjects conventionally show alignment by means of positive adjectives and references to life conditions that are perceived as peaceful and prosperous. On the other hand, dystopian scenarios are developed with the help of the semantic dimension of struggle between two opposing groups, from 'friend countries' versus 'enemy countries' to 'rich families' versus 'poor families,' to facilitate the negative evaluation of the operations and laws belonging to the other side of the political spectrum.

Because of the initial nature of this study, further research is welcome to increase the examined corpus of political communication and campaigning, as well as to extend the area of investigation to posts on other social networks and to speeches and messages that are broadcast on television or available on other media. Furthermore, it would be interesting to adopt the Model for the analysis of the communication strategies of other Subjects, even from different parts of the world, in order to report on the main forms of promotion of political discourse. This could eventually help to list the common or peculiar features of the interaction between promotional and emotional elements used to persuade voters. Finally, the 'R&P' Model could also be employed as an aid for quantitative analysis by means of dedicated software, such as SentiStrength (Thelwall 2014). It would be especially useful where the analysts' task is essential to determine to what extent the face value of messages is trustworthy, in particular when cooperation maxims are deliberately flouted for the purpose of irony or sarcasm.

Social networking is affecting human communication, granting it new spaces and eliminating temporal and spatial boundaries, as people can now discuss virtually anything from anywhere in the world in real time. Yet, as this study may have exemplified, virtual interactions and political campaigning are still characterized by conventional rules and traits. In fact, in the selected corpus of tweets, Subjects keep on maintaining control of conversation and debate by deciding and proposing the objects of discussion and evaluation. The standard constraints that rule social interactions are virtualized, but not completely dissolved.

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Chapter 3

DIGITAL TRUMP AND CONFLICT: A MULTI-METHOD ANALYSIS

Tedla Desta

Edward M. Kennedy Institute, Maynooth University, Ireland

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate Twitter discourses and network of the current and 45th President of the U.S., Donald Trump. The theoretical section of the research drew from literature and theories such as social influence, echo chamber and sociality or social media (Twitter). Multi-method research including Social Network Analysis (SNA), Sentiment Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were employed. Social network analysis software, NodeXL Pro was applied to study the nature of the network within the “Make America Great Again” (#Maga) hashtag. The findings of the research showed that in terms of the general sentiment of the selected Tweets of the President in all the dataset, none of Donald Trump’s tweets attracted a majority positive sentiment. Using SNA, the study showed that Donald Trump and some Republican politician broadcasters and social media activists were influential within the network. The study also found features that indicate a “radical” identification social influence and violence incitement among the top #Maga out-degree and Twitter nodes.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Twitter, social network analysis, social influence

“All the world's a stage and most of us are desperately unrehearsed.”
(Seán O'Casey)

INTRODUCTION

It is unbearable, if not tormenting, to read the level of insensitivity, hate, intolerance, and promotion of violence online in the comments and response sections of popular News websites and social media, especially about minorities, immigrants, people of different faiths and colour or the “other” in general. The trend of live transmitting amateur violence on Facebook Live or the use of social media by non-state actors or extremist groups is essentially an alarming trend. One of the best places to study this trend is Donald Trump’s own social media accounts and the responses to his comments. On his Twitter account, Trump openly attacks the mainstreammedia (including a video clip he posted beating up a man with a CNN logo on his face outside a World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) ring[‡]), journalists, women, religious groups, immigrants, politicians and all those who challenge him or those he does not like. The general impression is that the sentiments of Donald Trump’s tweets, mostly appearing on the main social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, are negative and conflict-inciting. In short, since Trump’s election in November 2016 as the leader of the most economically, militarily and diplomatically powerful country in the world, it appears new problems have surfaced, which test global order and human relationships.

The discourses of celebrities and social influencers can sometimes change the normal audiences into extremists. Therefore, given the rise of social media as an important form of communication, socialisation and influence, and the increase in the number of social media- mediated and influenced conflicts, it is useful to study the Twitter activities of Donald Trump and his social influences. This chapter is based on tweets retrieved from President Donald Trump’s official Twitter page before and after his inauguration. Three thousand tweets tweeted using the #MAGA hashtag, including tweets posted days before June 15, 2017 and Trump’s 20 most favoured tweets in 2016 and 2017 up until the date of the analysis, were collected and analysed. Trump’s “Non-politically Correct (PC)” speeches, rhetoric, actions and policies did affect the international sentiment towards the US as a country of global power and an exemplary, “policing” and progressive nation but gained much support and emboldened far right and new alt-right[§] groups. Research by the Pew Research Center in June 2017 found that the image of the United States has deteriorated after Donald Trump’s election, with only two countries, Israel and Russia, of

[‡] Right after Trump tweeted the video on June 2, 2017, CNN released a strong statement saying “sad day when the President of the United States encourages violence against reporters” and described it as a “juvenile behaviour far below the dignity of his office.” Trump is also accused of making gender-insensitive or misogynistic rhetoric. A sexism-tracking article by the *Telegraph* listed 54 sexist public comments made by Trump about women from the 1980s to July 2017.

[§] A new movement (emerging after 2008) based on far-right ideals, mainly located in the US, espousing racial superiority cites an impending racial disaster, rejects conservatism and is dominated by young male members. Described as the extreme and contemporary version of far-right and violent skinhead movements, the alt-right ideology and movement is also spreading to Europe. Zack Exley’s paper published in June 2017 at the Shorenstein Center in Harvard University studied the worldview of an Alt-Right YouTuber and notes that the main topics of his subject’s YouTube uploads focused on the banking system, immigration, Islam and women.

the total 37 countries surveyed in Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia and Africa viewing Trump's presidency favourably. The survey found that 75 percent of respondents described Trump as "arrogant," 65 percent as "intolerant" and 62 percent as "dangerous."

The chapter first presents the research methodologies and research questions, followed by a review of literature and theories on Donald Trump social media and social influence. The greater part of the chapter covers the findings of the study, and concludes with a discussion and conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a mixed research method composed of qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and computing methods (Sentiment Analysis and Social Network Analysis (SNA) applying software such as NodeXL). Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) observe that social media data carry the "emotional communication or sentiment of the author or the person posting." A dataset of 3000 tweets under Trump's top Twitter hashtag #MAGA (Make America Great Again) posted days before June 15, 2017, was retrieved from Donald Trump's Twitter account using the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API). The dataset was then imported using NodeXL Pro, which was also used to analyse and visualise the nature of social networking within this hashtag. NodeXL Pro software has been purchased for this study for the same purpose. Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a quantitative method, which investigates social structures and makes use of networks based, originally, on mathematical graph theory to characterise what are called "nodes" such as individual actors, people, or things within the network and the relationships or interactions between the ties, edges, or links.

Sentiment analysis is a computer-based systematic analysis of a text or speech to study the attitudes of the author or the speaker. The orientation of the statements can then be established as positive, negative or neutral with a weaker or stronger intensity (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). Scott (2017) analysed Trump's tweets from October 2016 to May 2017 using the sentiment analysis method and found that the levels of "angry and fearful words (in Trump's tweets) dipped after election day before picking up again after inauguration day." There are various types of free and paid sentiment analysis websites and software. Although computing sentiment analysis software is useful, it would not necessarily catch the deeper, hidden and contextual meanings of the text or a speech; therefore, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** should supplement the sentiment analysis.

After retrieving the selected data (that is the top 20 most favoured tweets of Trump from January 2016 to June 2017) from Trump's tweets and analysing them using sentiment and social network analysis software, tweets that were found to be conflict-insensitive were

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) according to van Dijk (1998b) is the process of studying and analysing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias.

again analysed using CDA. CDA is used to study the latent meaning of discourses qualitatively. CDA analyses the use of language within a social context and aims to reveal the role of discursive strategies and practices in the creation and reproduction of (unequal) relations of power, which are understood as ideological effects (Fairclough, 1995). Thus, applying Fairclough's CDA model, Trump's ideological orientation or effects in the tweets will be analysed in terms of the creation or the reproduction of existing inequalities.

Some of the research questions discussed in this study include:

- (i) Are there features of social influence with potential for conflict incitement in the social network of the #MAGA hashtag?
- (ii) What does the sentiment analysis of Donald Trump's most recent tweets show?
- (iii) What were the main themes of Trump's 20 top viral tweets within the last year (June 2016 –June 2017)? Do they contain potentially conflict-inciting discourses?

DONALD TRUMP

Donald John Trump was born on June 14, 1946 in Queens, New York City. He is the 45th and current President of the United States of America, elected on November 8, 2016. The White House website states that after graduating in finance, Trump started a real estate business but also later owned towers, hotels, casinos, golf courses, pageants, reality television shows, and a university. Trump is a celebrity businessman turned politician. The website also claims that he had authored "over fourteen bestsellers." Trump has five children and eight grandchildren. According to Fortune Magazine, Trump's net worth in 2017 is 3.5 billion US Dollars. Compared to many previous American presidents who successively espoused and propagated the "American Ideals"^{††}, such as Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama, Trump's campaign has been controversial in that it regressed and put some of these American ideals into question but also for his unusual rhetoric, policies and promises, which caused concern in many parts of the world.

Trump's personal Twitter account, @realdonaldtrump was created in March 2009 and his official White House account joined later in 2016. On June 1, 2017, Donald Trump's Twitter account had 35,000 tweets posted, 31.9 million followers, and had followed 35 Twitter users; it also had liked 22 tweets, and one moment mention. When compared Trump's Twitter profile with his predecessor's (President Barack Obama), the differences become bigger than we would imagine. Barack Obama joined Twitter in March 2007, had tweeted 15,500 times, followed 630,000 users, was followed by 90.3 million Twitter users, liked 10 tweets and was on 3 lists. Although Obama was on Twitter two years before Trump, he had tweeted 55 percent less than Trump. Obama followed 629,965 more Twitter

^{††}Jenkins and Hsu in their 2008 article note that these values are "dignity, fairness, opportunity, and the belief in creating a better society for all." One might correctly argue that these are not just American but human values in general but America has been peculiar in capitalising on and selling these values as American.

users than Trump, who only followed 35 users, most of which were organisational Twitter accounts or his siblings. Following a limited number of accounts could mean limited interest in limited things and following means interest in other more accounts, issues and people. Parkinson (2015) points out that over 50 percent of Trump's followers came from Asian countries such as Malaysia, prompting the author to suggest that Trump's supporters came from "places notorious for online and social media fraud." Parkinson's Twitter Audit showed that around 64 percent of Trump's followers were thought to be real while the remaining 36 percent were robots (bots). Khan (2016:1) finds that Trump won social media by mastering Twitter and by "embracing immediacy (right now), transparency (unvarnished expression), and risk (rather than caution)." Balsley (2016) finds that Trump uses Twitter as a form of political communication, as a part of his overall campaign strategy to set his agenda, and the majority of the tweets had a positive tone, though some were offensive and defensive. Balsley (2016:2) argues that Twitter is a relevant tool for Trump because of "its short, ego-centric nature."

SOCIAL MEDIA, TWITTER

The ubiquity of social media in every segment of the society and geography is having an effect on our daily lives. Social media emerged on the back of "web 2.0," which Christian Fuchs describes as "the second coming of the Web after the dotcom bust" (Fuchs, 2017: 10). Social media are defined as web-based applications that have as their primary function the development and exchange of user-generated content. Boyd & Ellison (2007) trace the launch of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to the 1997's *SixDegrees.com* and later *Classmates.com*. The former was defunct in 2000. The social media gradually dominated the networking sites terminology. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010: 61) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Some of the widely used social media applications include social networking sites, blogs, microblogs, wikis, content community sites, consumer review sites, Internet forums, and location-based social media. According to the electronic business website eBizMBA.com, the three most popular social networking sites in May 2017 were Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

TWITTER

Similar to Facebook, another social media microblogging service and tool that is becoming dominant, particularly within mass media and political circles, is Twitter. Small (2011) defines microblogging as a smaller form of blogging such as "(1) short text

messages; (2) instantaneous message delivery; and (3) subscriptions to receive updates.” Twitter is by far the leading microblogging site. Twitter was founded in 2006 in San Francisco, US. Twitter’s official website describes itself as “an online news and social networking service.” The maximum word limit on Twitter is a 140-character status update. Hashtags (#) are symbols commonly used on social media (especially Twitter) to organize discussions around specific topics or events, and to reach wider audience, but Hashtags are frequently used on Twitter to announce or follow the top trending stories of the day or the hour. Retweeting is the reposting or sharing of the tweets of another person, while following, being followed or unfollowing, replying to tweets with links and media as well as the favourite option, creating subscription lists, are the other main features of Twitter.

Similar to Facebook and Snapchat, Twitter is also used for different social networking and informational purposes. Java et al. (2007) found four main uses of Twitter namely: “daily chatter, conversations, sharing information and reporting news.” Sharing information and reporting news seems to be the major features of Twitter at present. Joyce and Kraut (2006) find that content that evokes high-arousal emotions (awe, amusement, anger, anxiety) can be more likely to go viral and content that evokes low-arousal emotions (sadness) is less viral. A preliminary review of Donald Trump’s sampled tweets shows the use of these types of virality techniques. On the other hand, Klausen (2015:17) argues that Twitter is used for purposes of “recruitment and indoctrination, as well as to build a transnational community of violent extremism.” Recent studies have also showed that during electoral periods, Twitter could embed partisan loyalties (Gruzd & Roy, 2014).

SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND TWITTER

The social influence theory dates back to the 1950s when Herbert C. Kelman offered the first theoretical framework. Social influence research “identifies how other individuals affect a person’s beliefs, feelings, and behaviour” (Aluri & Tucker, 2015: 51). These include influences by seniors or subordinates in a professional network or on social networking sites. The social influences could be behavioural changes in the types of movies people go to or actions they take for the sake of their reputations. Herbert C. Kelman developed a theoretical framework for the analysis of social influence, based on a qualitative distinction among three processes of influence: compliance, identification, and internalization (Kelman, 1958).

Compliance is induced when the person complies to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval by conforming. *Identification* occurs when an individual accepts the inference because the person wants to establish and maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another person or a group. This relationship may take the form of classical identification, in which the individual takes over the role of the other, or it may take the form of reciprocal role relationship. The individual actually

believes in the responses which he or she adopts through identification, but their specific content is more or less irrelevant. The person adopts the induced behaviour because it is associated with the desired relationship. Thus, the satisfaction derived from identification is due to the act of conforming as such (Kelman, 1958). *Internalization* occurs when the person is influenced because the content or idea is rewarding, is congruent with his or her values system and is useful for the solution of a problem (Kelman, 1958).

The probability of accepting influence is a combined function of (a) the relative importance of the anticipated effect, (b) the relative power of the influencing agent, and (c) the prepotency of the induced response (Kelman, 1958). Kelman (1974) notes that the term social influence is used here to refer to socially-induced behaviour change. Thus, social influence can be said to have occurred whenever a person (p) changes his behaviour as a result of induction by another person or group (influential agent, or O). Positive influence is the equivalent of confirming behaviour and negative influence refers to change in a direction opposite to that induced by the influencing agent.

Users of social media socialise and hang out with people that are aligned with their political, ideological and life interests. According to Fuchs (2017), social media enable the convergence of the three modes of sociality (cognition^{**}, communication, cooperation)^{§§} in an integrated sociality. In the process of this sociality, users tend to incline to or cooperate with groups and friends that have many similarities with their views, cognition or social influencers. Research findings also show that mass media audiences “emulate the appearance and behaviours of media characters” but they selectively integrate the perceived values and behaviours they see in their idolized celebrities (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991: 202). For communication scientists such as Paul Lazarsfeld and Everett Rogers, such types of influential people are known as “opinion leaders.” Offline opinion leaders are also found to be influential when they come on the Internet (Kozinets et al., 2010). A study by Fraser and Brown (2002: 183) on the social influence of Elvis Presley on his fans for instance, found “Elvis Presley’s fans and impersonators develop strong identification with him by consciously role modelling his values and by changing their own lifestyles to emulate him.” Fraser and Brown (2002: 188) cite research by McGwire (1974), who found that people try to “look and act like film and television stars by adopting their clothing styles and mannerisms.”

Communication research, especially in relation to social media, has not yet come up with a theoretical framework to analyse the social influences of social media. In the case of celebrity identification, Fraser and Brown (2002: 202) theorise “the effects of identification are both short term and enduring, both beneficial and detrimental, depending

^{**} Fuchs et al. (2010: 43) define cognition as “the understanding that a person, on a subjective systemic knowledge, connects him- or herself to another person by using certain mediating systems.”

^{§§} The cognition leads to other phases in the whole interdependent sociality processes, “When it comes to feedback, the persons enter an objective mutual relationship, i.e. communication. Communicating knowledge from one system to another causes structural changes in the receiving system. From communication processes shared or jointly produced resources can emerge, i.e., cooperation” (Fuchs, 2010: 43).

on the strength and duration of the identification process and the values and behaviours embodied by the celebrity.” Cha et al. (2010) analyse the influence of Twitter users by employing three measures that capture different perspectives: in-degree, retweets, and mentions, and found that in-degree represented a user’s popularity, but is not related to other important notions of influence such as engaging an audience, that is, retweets and mentions. Retweets are driven by the content value of a tweet, while mentions are driven by the name value of the mentioned user. Their findings show that the most influential users could hold significant influence over a variety of topics. Celebrities were better at inducing mentions from their audience. This is because the name value of the mentioned influential helped them get responses from others, rather than any inherent value in the content they posted. On Twitter, one simple way influencers are identified is when users with the “highest counts of screenname in the target tweets can be considered the influencers of the information disseminated” or users who regularly repost information related to an event often. Most people who are influential on Twitter mention, repost and share particular topics, people, groups and regions that match their techno-social and politico-ideological views.

Barbera (2015) states that the online behaviour of most groups and users on the internet shows a characteristic described in media studies as “echo-chamber,” where citizens are primarily exposed to like-minded political views. In other words, social media could be spaces of bandwagon, where users follow and identify with the dominant view in their chambers. Members of the echo chambers do not share or listen to the views of the wider or alternative views but only theirs. Himelboim et al. (2013: 154) reiterate in their research on Twitter use in the US: “Twitter users are unlikely to be exposed to cross-ideological content from the clusters of users they followed, as these were usually politically homogeneous.” This homogeneity explains the echo chamber and identification nature of Twitter.

Fuchs’ (2017) concept of sociality intersects with the tenets of the echo chamber concept (Barbera, 2015). The polarized grouping and constant echoing of the single or the popular opinion within the chamber could reinforce the members’ unity, belief systems and identification. Personalised algorithms that advertise and feed information based on search histories and our already-chosen chambers influence us online. In other words, the sociality on online identification harmonies shows the types and contents of social influencers. It can be assumed that within Donald Trump’s Twitter network, people who are like-minded, who identify with Trump, and who are confined within the social network dominate the discourse. In other words, “selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention pervade the process by which we make sense of who we are as political creatures.” (Jamieson & Capella, 2008: 75). Members of a certain social media echo chamber identify with the network because, borrowing the concepts of social influence theory, of a “self-defining” identification relationship, which results in the behavioural changes of the people within the social network, in this case, the induction coming from Donald Trump.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the Social Network Analysis (SNA), Sentiment Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) respectively.

#MAGA: A Social Network Analysis (SNA)

A dataset of 3000 tweets that included the Make America Great Again (#MAGA) hashtag in each tweet was imported using the Twitter Search Network option of the Node XL Pro software. A visual graph was later produced based on the dataset of the 3000 tweets.

The graph type was a directed graph, meaning the vertices or the nodes are connected by the edges. The vertices or the nodes indicate the total number of Twitter users that participated in the #MAGA network. The *total edges*, that is, the connection between at least two Twitter users as a result of following, replaying and mentioning each other, is 5740. It includes both the duplicates and unique edges, which is a large number for a total tweet dataset of 3000 tweets.

Table 1. The worksheet describing the size and density of the network

Graph Metric	Value
Graph Type	Directed
Vertices	2791
Unique Edges	4265
Edges with Duplicates	1475
Total Edges	5740
Graph Density	0.000566593

Table 2. The top domains that were shared or circulated within the 3000 #MAGA dataset

Top Domains in Tweet in Entire Graph	Entire Graph Count
twitter.com	727
truthfeed.com	107
reddit.com	24
foxnews.com	21
msn.com	19
youtube.com	18
therebel.media	17
infowars.com	16

Table 2. (Continued)

Top Domains in Tweet in Entire Graph	Entire Graph Count
breitbart.com	15
co.uk	13

Within the #MAGA research sample, the top domains shared are *twitter.com*, *truthfeed.com*, *reddit.com*, *breitbart.com* and *americanthinker.com*. The first domain, *twitter.com*, inevitably appears first since it is also the main platform and channel on which the tweets are hosted, posted and shared.

Truthfeed.com does not have an “About” section on its website. Its official Twitter page states it joined Twitter on March 2016 and has over 14 million followers. A report on CNN on November 4, 2016 states that Truthfeed “has been repeatedly called out for spreading false rumors and right-wing innuendo.” Media Bias/Fact Check website (MBFC News), which calls itself “an independent online media outlet,” finds that little is known about Truthfeed, which is “very far right biased and promotes conspiracies.” The third top domain, *reddit.com*, is a social media type discussion website launched in 2005, hosting a specific anonymous political discussion community of over 300,000 people known as “The_Donald,” which often “attacks Islam, liberals,” and among whose many coded dialects include “MAGA” (Lagorio-chafkin, 2016). *Breitbart.com*, launched in 2007, is described by various media outlets as a far-right media outlet, which according to the June 15, 2015 article of the *Christian Science Monitor* website (Murphy, 2015) is a “website that radicalized Dylann Roof” the young man who killed nine African American parishioners at a church in Charleston, SC, USA. Todd (2016) also notes that the largest digital advertising exchange companies, AppNexus, has also banned Breitbart News after an audit of the site’s content determined that it violates the advertising exchange’s code of conduct banning hate speech”

Americanthinker.com is another domain name that was found in the first trial #MAGA search dataset. *Americanthinker.com*, founded in 2005, describes itself as a conservative daily website but has been accused of “racism, right-wing contents of conspiracy theories, and the propagation of pseudoscience.”*** The fact that the top domains in the #MAGA hashtag were described as “right-wing,” “racist,” and “insensitive” possibly indicates that the discussions and the contents shared within this corpus were conflict-insensitive and far right. The #MAGA campaign and hashtags are also, therefore, linked on Twitter with far-right domains and discourses, making Trump’s agenda and policy of framing America as great again appear as dangerous, conflict-insensitive, anti-other and imperialist agenda. The absence of any left-wing, liberal or neutral type of media domain within the #MAGA corpus is also indicative of the absence of any alternative viewpoints or participants within

*** An article by the Southern Poverty Law Center on December 04, 2014 alleged that the American Thinker sunk to “to the Bottom of Racist Barrel.”

this hashtag. The types, ideologies and contents of the domains dominantly shared and guiding the discourse within the #MAGA hashtag would have been considered highly offensive, dangerous, possibly fascistic and insensitive and would have been taken down or banned few years ago. From the dominance of these domains within this hashtag sphere, are the gradual normalisation of contents, domains and discourses that would have been fringe, taboo, illegal or racist before Donald Trump’s election. This finding also shows that little-known, sometimes citizen media-type blogs and websites with extreme content, such as *truthfeed.com*, *reddit.com*, *there bel.media*, *infowars.com* and *breitbart.com* are pushing down the legacy or mainstream media as main sources of information, communication and knowledge, especially within Trump’s social network.

Within the #MAGA hashtag, @realdonaldtrump is the most replied-to Twitter handle. Trump’s official presidential Twitter account is the second most replied-to, interestingly followed by his daughter Ivanka Trump’s handle, @ivankatrump. Mike Cernovich (@cernovich), who calls himself “a lawyer, author, free speech activist, and documentary filmmaker” on his official website and on Twitter a “National security reporter, documentary filmmaker, author,” is the fourth top vertex most responded to within this period of analysis.

Table 3. Top replies in within the #MAGA hashtag

Top Replied-To in Entire Graph	Entire Graph Count
@realdonaldtrump	159
@potus	9
@ivankatrump	5
@cernovich	4
@foxnews	4
@chasflemming	3
@cnn	3
@jackposobiec	3
@markdice	3
@sarahpalinusa	3

In addition to media outlets such as @foxnews, @cnn, are Twitter accounts like @ChasFlemming (Charles Flemming, who describes himself as “Christ-Follower, Husband, Father, Friend, Pastor-Teacher, writer. Fascinated by politics, public issues, communication, and leadership”).@jackposobiec (Jack Posobiec, who is said to be an alt-right, pro-Donald Trump activist, media figure, and conspiracy theorist) (Lewis &Marwik, 2017). @markdice (Mark Shouldice, a video blogger and conspiracy theorist), and @sarahpalinusa (Sarah Louise Palin, republican politician and supporter of the Tea Party movement) are the most replied-to Twitter accounts within the #MAGA hashtag. This finding shows that the most dominant influencers within the #MAGA hashtag after Donald

Trump are alt-right media and political personalities, conspiracy theorists, and media outlets.

Donald Trump’s Twitter posts receive tens of thousands of responses. They host debates and arguments between pro and anti-Trump Twitter users. A detailed report by BuzzFeed News on June 9, 2017 found that almost all the replies are “extreme” and a select few “still dominate,” which are often officially verified Twitter users (Warzel, 2007).

Table 4. Top mentions in the graph

Top Mentioned in Entire Graph	Entire Graph Count
@potus	792
@loudobbs	720
@realdonaldtrump	519
@ambjohnbolton	189
@edrollins	100
@rogerjstonejr	97
@rednationrising	95
@mcspocky	76
@truthfeednews	72
@donnaawr8	61

On the other hand, the top mentioned Twitter accounts within this hashtag are the president’s official Twitter handle @potus, followed by @loudobbs (Lou Dobbs, a Fox News host once accused of xenophobia (Glassman, 2006)), his personal @realdonaldtrump, @ambjohnbolton (John Bolton, a former US Ambassador and Fox News commentator), and @edrollins (a Republican campaign consultant and advisor-inactive since 2012). They are followed by @rogerjstonejr (Roger Jason Stone Jr., a pro-Trump Republican political strategist banned from CNN and MSNBC for insulting female and black journalists on Twitter). In addition to @rednationrising (Red Nation Rising, a radio program describing itself as a community of patriotic Centrists, Conservatives & Libertarians uniting to the right for civics and constitution); @mcspocky (McSpocky, an anonymous and the only pro-Democratic party account). @truthfeednews (Truth Feed News, a pro-Trump alt-right conspiracy media) and @donnaawr8 (Donna Warren, about whom little information is available but whose Twitter posts and description show her devotion to and support of Trump).

The top mentioned accounts show some dissimilarity to the top replied-to, except for Trump’s White House account and his personal account, but there are also some Twitter accounts that appear in both categories. Uniquely, a pro-democratic party Twitter handle is found in the top mentioned lists in the #MAGA hashtag. Media personalities and outlets linked with conservative and right-wing media outlets such as Fox News, Red Nation Rising Radio and Truth Feed News dominate the mentioned cluster. Therefore, in the top

mentioned category are Twitter handles that belong to senior politicians from the Republican party, media outlets and a few social media personalities dominating and influencing the cluster compared to the top replied-to findings. These are where young social media personalities, the Trump family, and media outlets influence and dominate the social interactions and the network.

In-Degree within #MAGA 3000 Hashtag (Largest to Lowest)

The figure below shows high level of interconnection. Important features like key nodes and other patterns in the network have been made more explicit by filtering the top influential nodes in the in-degree. The thicker chunk or the red section of the graph shows the top five influencers within the #MAGA hashtag, which includes Trump's White House account @potus (in-degree of 639), @realdonaldtrump, @loudobbs, @ambjohnbolton, @edrollins, followed by @rogerjstonejr, @rednationrising, @mcspocky and @donnawar8 (in-degree of 62). The largest number of arrows point to these nine nodes.

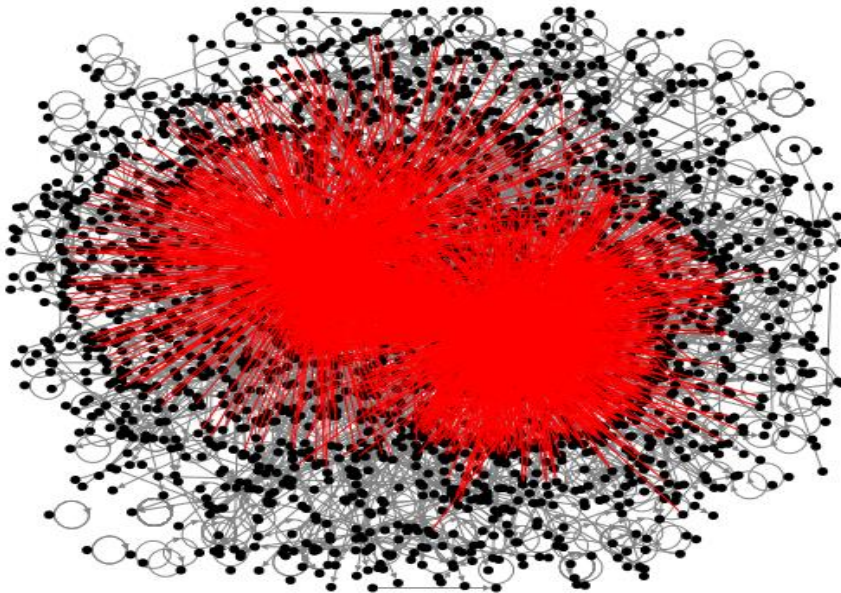


Figure 1. Raw NodeXL graph.

The number of isolates or nodes with no connection at all to anyone else seen in the graph is very few. The graph shows a higher level of in-degree centred on Trump and those who support him. The number of arrows that point towards these accounts show that they are accounts with the highest level of influence within the hashtag.

#MAGA: Out-Degree (Largest to Lowest)

Out-degree is used to measure the vertices/accounts that are engaging others, producing content, and these groups are also influential in their own right. Out-degree is calculated by counting the number of arrows pointing away from each node or account. They are the Twitter accounts that reply and mention others the most.

The above graph shows a less inter-connected, dispersed mix of out-degree vertices within the hashtag. The findings of the out-degree analysis show that vertices (nodes) such as @johnwusmc (Marine Warrior John, describes itself on Twitter as a Christian, Pro Israel, Pro Life and AmericaFirst [sic] and JesusChrist [sic], (Twitter cautions anyone who wants to visit this account that it could contain “potentially sensitive images or language”), @kriensl (known as PatrioticTrumpVoter), @alexandrablues (unfound), @jackrow (unfound), and @gijopops (unfound) were the five top influencers. These are followed by @michaldouglas9, and @tomreitmman (unfound), @loisroy72 (Lois Padgett, has no self-description but mainly retweets pro-Trump tweets), @donnacastel (known as Donna Castel) and @jimmy01824 (JimH). The vertices in the out-degree graph are less popular, unverified Twitter accounts, mostly with unclear or anonymous profile descriptions, which suggest that some of them could be automated bots. However, most of their tweets, retweets or favourites tend to show very similar political, and ideological views as Donald Trump and sometimes alt-right content.

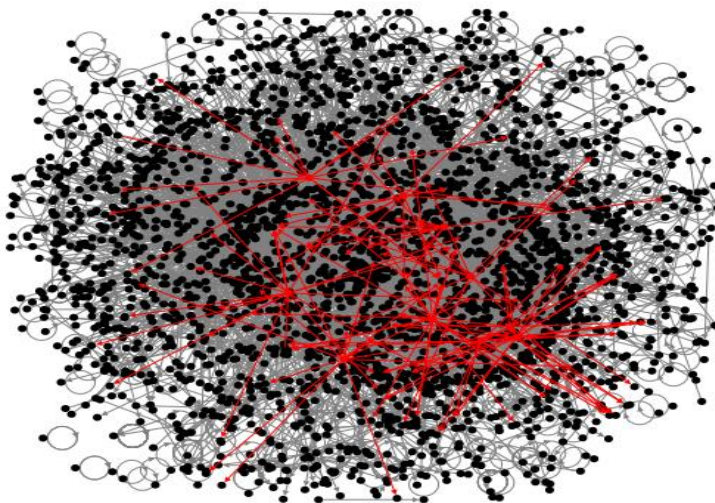


Figure 2. Raw NodeXL graph.

#MAGA: Betweenness Centrality (Largest to Lowest)

The betweenness centrality shows which nodes are important in providing a “bridge” between different parts of the network. Without these nodes the network may not have existed at all.

Table 5. The betweenness centrality nodes and their vortex

Vertex	Betweenness Centrality
@realdonaldtrump	2481775.246
@potus	1623468.324
@loudobbs	1146510.285
@mcspocky	326474.000
@kblood	324636.000
@bfraser747	241769.640
@bocavista2016	237869.140
@truthfeednews	174507.647
@rickyvaughnx2	143802.871
@alexandrablues	140527.145
@foxnews	115454.362

The above table shows the top 10 nodes that are important bridges within the network beginning from the largest to the smallest. Like the previous findings, the nodes with the largest betweenness centrality are Donald Trump’s own two accounts, Republican politicians, far right media and social media personalities. Without these nodes, the whole #MAGA social network would crumble. Nodes such as @kblood (Kate Blood, a Trump critic), @bfraser747 (Brian Fraser, a Trump supporter), and @rickyvaughnx2 (Ricky Vaughn, an alt-right pro-Trump account, which has recently been suspended by Twitter) are newer nodes which have appeared in the top part of the graph for the first time in the network analysis so far. The Trump critic node @kblood and pro-Democrats like @mcspocky also keep the interconnection and the discourse alive but they are minorities within this graph.

On the other hand, the top three Tweeters within the #MAGA hashtag are Phil De Carolis (@phildecarolis, with 981,483 total tweets), FIGHT THE RESIST (@radicalrw with 541,689 total tweets) and MissyJo79 (missyJo79 with 502,850 total tweets). The review of the top 12 tweeting vertices that used the #MAGA hashtag showed that most of the accounts were anonymous accounts except the fourth top vertex, the *Huffington Post*. A review of the top 12 tweeting vertices within the #MAGA hashtag also show that the accounts mainly describe themselves as pro-Trump, conservative, Christian, veterans (patriots), mothers and grandmothers, and having anti-Muslim/Sharia and anti- “illegal” immigrant views. These common themes show that these topics could also be the most dominant types of topics that these users tweeted about.

Sentiment Analysis

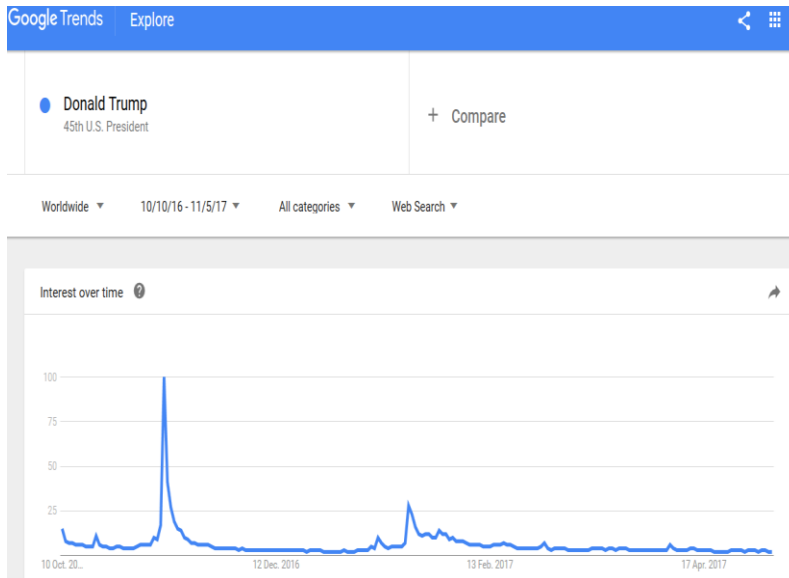


Figure 3. Google trend snapshot

The Google Trend snapshot above shows the number of web searches for Donald Trump within eight months that is, from October 10, 2016 to May 11, 2017. As the graph shows, Trump was most searched online on November 9, 2016 (a day after the voting when election results were announced) nearly hitting the 100 percent mark. Since then, the number of web searches for Trump worldwide has plummeted, reaching the lowest mark, two percent, in the first week of June 2017. The interest over time has rock bottomed. In terms of regional interest, the Google Trends finding shows that Trump has been the most searched in the United States, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. It is very interesting that Ireland is the country with the third highest number of web searches for Donald Trump after the US and Canada. Google Trends, however, states that a tiny country where 80% of the queries are for Trump or another term will get twice the score of a very large country where only 40% of the queries are for Trump or another term. These Google Trend results do not match our findings of Donald Trump on social media. The audiences, tweets and replies to his posts are increasing in number daily. This may indicate the increasing use of bots but it needs further technical investigation.

Donald Trump's Twitter handle @realdonaldtrump has been analysed using *socialbearing.com*, the open access website for finding, filtering and sorting tweets or people based on engagement, influence, location, and sentiment. The analysis (Appendix 1) is from October 20, 2016 to May 12, 2017 based on 204 days of 1199 original tweets by Donald Trump, which reached 29,135,245 people. The tweets created impressions on "an audience of 34,641,849,277" and his tweets were retweeted 21,940,820 times. He tweeted 11.73 times per day. On a five-scale measurement of the sentiment of his tweets, 25.3

percent of his tweets were “Great,” 21.6 percent were “Good,” 27 percent were “Neutral,” 14.7 percent were “Bad” and 11.4 percent were “Terrible.” If added up, his “Bad” and “Terrible” tweets, the total, 26.1 percent, is more than either his “Great” or “Good” tweets. In terms of the types of his tweets, 93.7 percent of his tweets were original tweets, less than the six percent were retweets and replies, meaning Trump does not interact or communicate with his Twitter followers or responders. The thematic review shows that Trump often retweets or communicates with his own sons and daughters on Twitter. #draintheswamp and #MAGA were the most common hashtags used by Trump in addition to #crookedhillary and #fakenews. Trump also mentioned @nytimes, @whitehouse, @cnn and @foxnews more times, referring to them as fake News media rather than mentioning them as credible sources.

The above results can be compared with Trump’s tweets since his election from January 18, 2017 to May 15, 2017, that is the last 117 days or 5.03 months (Appendix 2). Within this period, Trump tweeted 600 tweets and reached a similar number of people as the previous one, 29,410,710, and created an impression on 17,381,732,029 audiences and was retweeted 11,562,946 times. The sentiment analysis for this period shows that 26.3 percent of his tweets were “Great,” 22.3 percent “Good,” 24.3 percent “Neutral,” and 13.8 and 13.2 percent “Bad” and “Terrible” respectively. The aggregated 27 percent of the “Bad” and “Terrible” tweets were larger than his “Neutral,” “Good” or “Great” tweets. 93 percent of his tweets were original tweets and less than seven percent were retweets and replies. The most commonly appearing word in his tweets was “great” and the most common hashtags at this period were “#MAGA, #and #obamacare.”

Table 6. Using the NodeXL Pro software, the sentiments within a dataset of 3000 the #MAGA hashtag as analysed

Top Words in Tweet in Entire Graph	Entire Graph Count
Words in Sentiment List#1: Positive	1969
Words in Sentiment List#2: Negative	2519
Words in Sentiment List#3: (Add your own word list)	0
Non-categorized Words	50958
Total Words	55446
MAGA	3120
Rt	2068
Potus	1051
Trump	936
Loudobbs	723

Out of the total 55446 tweets within the dataset, which the software analysed, the majority of the words were not categorized within either the positive or the negative sentiments. This is understandable since most of the words on Twitter or within this hashtag are acronyms or abbreviations, which cannot be analysed by the software for tone. Out of the 4488 words the system analysed, the majority (over 56%) of the words have a negative sentiment, while 1969 (43%) of the words have a positive sentiment. The #MAGA hashtag is a cluster of tweets tweeted by anyone using this specific hashtag ranging from pro to anti-Trump, to American to Asian. The software for the sentiment analysis counts the co-occurrences of the words near each other and decides the sentiments of the tweets; hence, to grasp and unpack the historical, socio-cultural and contextual meanings of the tweets, the findings of the CDA are presented next.

The Discourses of Trump's Top 20 Tweets

Trump's top 20 most favoured tweets within the one year of his administration were first content analysed based on tone and categories. The tweets were selected and analysed based on Galtung's (1998) linguistic sensitivity framework from his top 20 viral tweets in 2016 and 2017.

Table 7. Trump's top 20 tweets

Top 20 Tweets	Election	Security/Terro	Immigration	Sport	Other	Negative	Positive	Neutral	Explainer
Tone						8	4	8	The neutral category includes Tweets that are not sentimental, cannot be grouped as positive or negative, or can be both.
Category	9	4	2	1	4				

As the above table shows, the majority (9) of the categories of Donald Trump's tweets concerned the election, followed by security or terror and then other topics such as immigration and sports. In terms of the tone of Trump's selected tweets, eight of his tweets were tallied as neutral and another eight were also tallied as negative while only four were positive in tone. The tallying was based on the objective reading of the coder (the researcher) based on the reading of Johan Galtung's (1998) conflict sensitivity model and Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework.

Trump's most favoured tweets within the period (January 2016 to June 2017), were more liked than his previous tweets because perhaps they manifestly portrayed a positive

message during positive events. His top 20 most favoured or viral tweets in 2016 and 2017 focused on unity, celebration of days, immigration and more on terror or national security. The following four tweets were among the most viral tweets by Trump in 2016 and 2017. They are selected as cases to show the contrasts of Trump's top tweets. The first two tweets were posted on the day Trump won the election while the latter two tweets were posted for the New Year and during the protest organised after his election. The tone of these four tweets can be categorised as neutral because they contain a mildly negative and openly positive message or none.



Figure 4. An example of Trump's tweets

The above tweet, posted on the night of the election, racked up one of the top favourites that Donald Trump ever obtained for his Tweets. Trump begins with very positive, optimistic and comparative words. Unlike the customary association of an evening with lack of beauty, colourfulness or importance, Trump in this tweet proclaims the evening as a "beautiful and important" night, connoting the splendour of an evening especially when he wins an election. The following line in this same tweet is a double entendre, when he manifestly praises and vows to remember "the man and woman" possibly referring to America's veterans and founders (the men and the women rather than a particular woman or man as Trump's tweets seems to refer to), who sacrificed their lives to protect and bring the States to their present. However, the first verb in the sentence, "forgotten," and the last adverb, "again," give the tweet a negative tone since Trump is claiming that these men and women have already been forgotten by previous governments and presidents, perhaps especially his predecessor Barack Obama, and reaffirms that he will make sure that they will not be forgotten again. This line aggrandises Trump, and yet blames, and chastises a section of an unidentified US community. Yet, the last sentence of the thread echoes a message of unity again: "we will all come together as never before." Therefore, Trump's top tweet has not communicated a fully positive and uniting message but lumped a uniting, positive message with divisive and blaming rhetoric. It praises himself and shows a promise to his supporters while antagonising and excluding those who have "forgotten the man and woman."

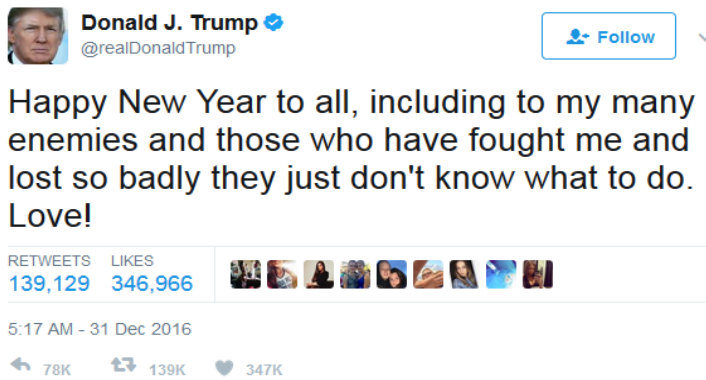


Figure 5. Trump’s happy new year tweet

The above tweet by Donald Trump, posted on December 31, 2016, the eve of 2017, is another example of the dominance of oxymoronic messages in Trump’s top 20 tweets, except perhaps for Tweets such as “MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!” Or “HAPPY PRESIDENTS DAY - MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!,” which could perhaps be considered as relatively positive or neutral. Trump begins by wishing a happy new year to “all” suggesting that he is not isolating any group or section of the society. In the same line, he particularises a group that he also wants to wish a happy new year, his “enemies.” A very uncommon word for politicians, who promise to work for and with all. Galtung (1998) suggests the avoidance of such words in public communication. Trump is clearly drawing a line between “us” and “them,” which Van Dijk (1993) calls *polarisation*. The addition of this word and later on the phrases “fought me and lost badly” or “they just do not know what to do,” reinforce the negative tone of the tweet as well as suggesting that Trump is “undefeatable.” In other words, the followings negative, ridiculing and bashing words exclude these sectors of society from the list; what Galtung (1998) describes as “victimizing language.” Intriguingly, as he finishes this sentence, Trump adds another noun “Love” turning the whole tweet into a situation of love and hate. It is especially unclear and mystifying whom Trump loves when he sends a message of self-glory and dehumanises those he “defeated.”

The above two tweets are categorised as neutral tweets although they sound like tweets with a positive sentiment; yet they are laced with negative and cynical discourses. Some of his negative tweets, are also categorised as insensitive for their use of nonprofessional or non-media words, at times with threatening content. The next tweet by Trump has been among the 20 most favoured Tweets within the previous 12 months. Trump sent this tweet on June 4, 2017, immediately after the June 3, 2017 terror attack in the Southwark district of London, England, when a van was driven into a crowd on London Bridge, killing pedestrians. As appropriate as it was to send out messages of condolences and calls for actions, Trump’s tweet contained what looked like an illegal and conflict-insensitive calls for action.

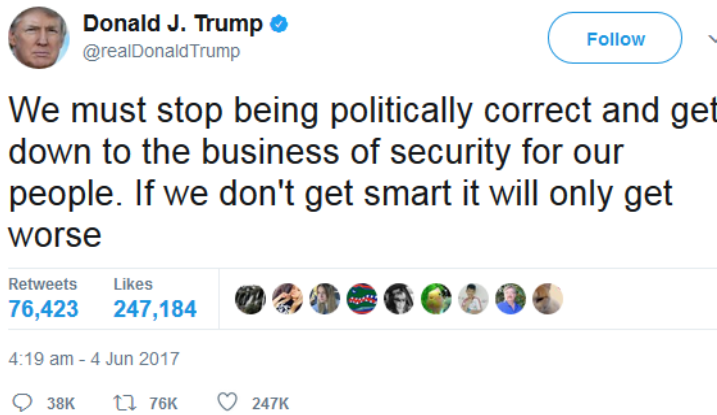


Figure 6. Trump’s call for action tweet

Trump did tweet a few other tweets regarding the incident but it was these particular tweets that received the most likes and retweets. The moral and the call of the above tweet is the “stopping of political correctness.” Trump uses the auxiliary verb “must” to command the undefined “we” to be politically incorrect. Although said during the context of a terror incident in London, and relating it to “security,” Trump was not specific about where, when and against whom “we” must stop being politically correct. Given the incident, geography and timing of the incident, this tweet of Donald Trump was one of the most favoured.

The Oxford Dictionary defines political correctness (PC) as “the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against.” Therefore, political correctness is about being respectful, culturally sensitive and conflict-sensitive to others, particularly those who are different from *us* such as minorities, racial, sexual, religious, gender, ethnic and political groups. In urging for political incorrectness, Trump is at the same time calling the “we” to insult, harass, name, exclude, and marginalise; hence, acting in the same manner. His tweet and the replies to this tweet call for the normality of such expressions and actions. The tweet also connotes being politically insensitive with being “smart” at preventing more terror incidents from happening. Often times, similar rhetoric from non-state actors or dissidents would have been marked “violent extremist or radicalizing” and labelled conflict-inciting. However, in the case of Donald Trump, it is only treated as the official views of *an angry elected political authority* (emphasis added). The tweet suggests that those who are politically correct, emphatic or respectful of the “other” are not smart and responsible for the rise of terror incidents.

The next tweet by Trump, posted on February 2, 2017, is also among his top tweets with the highest number of favourites. The tweet shows an abuse of power, support for or promotion of an inflammatory activist Milo and the conflation of hate speech with free speech.

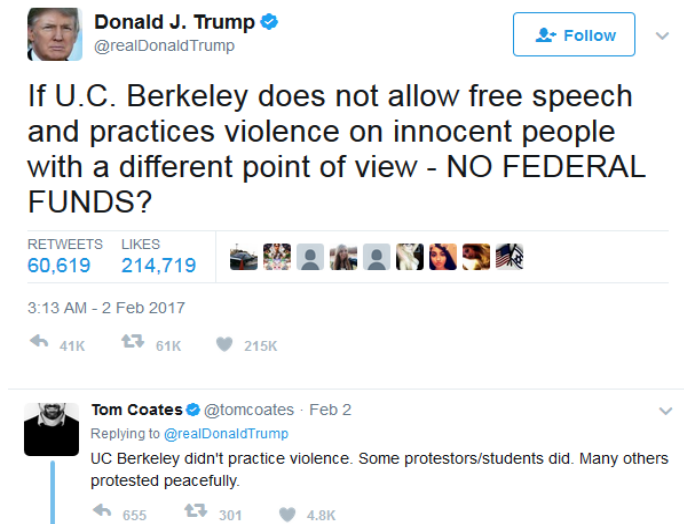


Figure 7. Trump's free speech tweet

The above tweet refers to the incident at the University of Berkeley involving Milo Yiannopoulos, a media personality and public speaker. Milo is often accused of making conflict-insensitive speeches and offensive remarks against feminism, Islam, social justice, and political correctness. He was born in 1984 and was raised in Kent, UK. He is of mixed British, Irish, and Greek heritage. On February 1, 2017, Yiannopoulos was set to speak at the University of California, Berkeley; the event was cancelled after protests started against and for the event. Twitter banned Yiannopoulos in July 2016 for “prohibiting, participating in or inciting targeted abuse of individuals” (Ohlheiser, 2016). Following the cancellation, Trump tweeted a what sounded like biased tweet siding with Milo Yiannopoulos. Trump described Yiannopoulos and his supporters as “innocent people with a different point of view” implying that the university administration and the over one thousand protesters who called for the cancellation of the event were “guilty people.” It is not only labelling the university and the protesters but also threatening them that makes Trump's tweet conflict-insensitive and abusive of power. Trump warningly asks if funds should be cut for the university given the cancellation of the event. Trump seems also to conflate hate speech with free speech when he says, “If UC does not allow free speech.”

Another hidden message in the text and somewhat accusing is that Trump's tweet appears to allege that the U.C. Berkeley “practices violence against innocent people.” The Critical Discourse Analysis of a sample of Trump's most favoured top 20 tweets shows that his tweets contained paradoxical messages that manifested positive messages but were laced with negative words and discourse.

THE TRUMP EFFECT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The first research question broached the potential of tweets and vertices within the #Maga to incite conflict and violence on others emanating from social influence. Six of the top domains in #Maga excluding Fox News were digital-born new alt-right, conspiratorial and extreme media outlets. During the time of data collection and analyses, Donald Trump, his daughter Ivanka Trump, Trump's WhiteHousepotus account, extreme social media activists and authors like Mike Chernovich in addition to some Pro-Trump Republican politicians were the most replied to. The top 10 mentioned and in-degree findings also showed that Donald Trump, alt-right or conservative media and social media activists, and Republican politicians' accounts such as @potus, @loudobbs (Lou Donns), @realdonaldtrump, @ambjohnbolton (John Bolton), @edrollins, @rogerjstonejr (Roger Jason Stone Jr.), Truthfeednews and @rednationrising (Red Nation Rising) were the most influential within the dataset. The top 10 out-degree influencers were mostly anonymous vertices with a Pro-Trump, alt-right self-presentation and tweets. In the top 10 vertices, there was only one pro-Democratic Party node found. Newman et al. (2017:16) suggests, "following politicians on social media may be contributing to greater polarisation."

From Kelman's (1958) social influence framework, the dimension that is least visible in the findings is compliance. The types of characteristics observed in compliance such as avoiding punishment and disapproval might only be visible after the person has entered the network. Trump's followers within the #Maga dataset took over the roles of Donald Trump by changing their profile pictures, descriptions and consistently retweeting or echoing Trump's campaigns, tweets and messages. His followers are observably convinced in their responses and their relationship is a desired one confirming the identification aspect of social influence.

Similarly, features of internalisation are observed in the contents and visual findings of the data. Trump's #Maga network show ideas and tweets that are rewarding and is congruent with their value systems, perhaps specifically, of the extreme right. Their consistency, activities and tightly-knit network indicate that they find Trump's policies and personality as the solutions to the problems in their country and beyond. Hence, once the node (user) has entered the specific echo chamber, which the node identifies with and internalises, the person finds the activities, contents and ideas rewarding; then could even resort to actions, including violent ones, which the person thinks could solve their problems. The node finds it difficult to leave therefore complies with everyone else. In one particular case, Kelman's three stages of combined function of influence acceptance, according to at least News media interview data, are observed. In the US based News Website *Buzz Feed* one of their interviewees, Nik Lentz, was quoted saying that he was drawn to Trump's replies section after he saw "they were dominated by liberal-leaning verified accounts castigating Trump." As Kelman (1958) put it, Nik has taken over the role

of the other (Donald Trump), which he adopts “because it is associated with the desired relationship” (Kelman, 1958).

The second research question asked what the sentiments of Donald Trump’s most recent tweets showed. On a five-scale measurement of the sentiment of his 1199 original tweets, it was found that tweets marked as “bad and terrible” in aggregate were greater than tweets that were marked as “great or good.” The aggregate of his good and great tweets was 46.9 percent, which is still not a majority. Similarly, the post-election January to May 2017-sentiment analysis of Trump’s tweets did not find a positive or negative majority, both under 50 percent. However, the assessable #Maga vertices were in over 56 percent of the cases negative. This finding contrasts the finding by Balsely (2016), who found that most of Trump’s tweets had a positive tone. Trump’s Twitter activity is more of a top-down linear communication, where tweets only flow out from his side but he does not reply, retweet or interact with his audiences. The analysis of the findings from the sentiment analysis would be more meaningful in the context of a comparative and supplementary analysis of the CDA and SNA findings.

The third research question probed the main themes in Donald Trump’s top 20 tweets within the past year. The CDA findings showed that two main types of discourses emerge from these tweets: the double-edged and inflammatory themes. From his top tweets, eight were negative while the rest eight were neutral when just four were categorised as positive. Tweets were categorised as neutral for containing primarily both negative and positive tones, or neither of the two. Double-edged themes are tweets, which contained positive, uniting messages along with negative, divisive or disparaging messages. The inflammatory discourse emphasised attacking, othering, threatening and at times violence-inciting messages. The quantitative data of the top 20 tweets in terms of their likes and replies or mentions indicates that Trump or his team have mastered the virality skills and approach discussed by Joyce & Kraut (2006), tweets that contained high-arousal emotions went viral. van Dijk’s (1998) understanding of a text that a CDA would unravel such as “discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias” are exhibited in Donald Trump’s sampled top tweets.

Congruently, Fuch’s (2017) three modes of sociality are also apparent within Trump’s #Maga network, who connect each other by using Twitter and #Maga as their mediating systems of *cognition*, they are also in an objective mutual relationship fulfilling the second mode of sociality that is *communication*. Finally, the communication of knowledge and information has resulted in *cooperation* among his followers online and possibly offline too. In terms of the echo chamber analysis of the #Maga network, the tweets, the in-betweenness, top domains shared, and the in-degree findings reveal that Trump’s #Maga network typically has the characteristics of an echo chamber. The main participants of the #Maga network dominantly share, discuss and spread views that were researched by Exley (2017) in the Alt-right movement. The #Maga network is homogenous, the nodes listen or share their own views or ideas and there was at least one node from the Democratic camp

present in this hashtag reinforcing the echo chamber theory. Essentially, the influences here are being compared in terms of their digital impersonation rather than real life examination of Trump's fans, followers and #Maga network and their real personality. Their digital appearance, photographs, descriptions and mannerisms are only taken into consideration along with the SNA findings.

CONCLUSION

Apparently, the SNA found that Trump is the most influential within the #Maga social media network, particularly. This means his potential to cause a social influence is also enormous. Judging by the conspiratorial and extreme nature of the network (within the sampled 3000 tweets), the main type of domains shared and the homogenizing nature of Trump's Twitter network, the general discourse and trends of the #Maga echo chamber might be described as "radicalising."^{†††} Trump is a social influencer within the network.

On November 15, 2016, *buzzfeed.com*, listed 28 reported racist and violent incidents (such as racism, misogyny, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Semitism, and anti-immigrant sentiment and attacks) six days after Donald Trump's victory. The actual incidents were linked to Trump's election, social media and generally his rhetoric on the mass media. All 19 of the incidents referenced Trump or the election such as MAGA as their justifications or impetus to act. In the month following his election, November 9 to December 12, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) recorded 1,094 Bias-Related Incidents. The Southern Poverty Law Center also attributed this rise to the rhetoric that has emerged from Trump's campaign, as well as his presidency, mostly communicated via his social media posts. Similarly, *ThinkProgress*, a blog project of the Center for American Progress (CAP) recorded 261 hate incidents from November 9, 2016 to February 2017 out of which 109 (42 percent) of the incidents included specific references to Trump, his election, or his policies. The Law Center calls this rise of harassment and violence against racial and religious minorities connected with Trump and his presidency, "the Trump effect." Did the gradual normalisation of the rhetoric and the ascendance to power of Donald Trump and far right leaders and groups in the Western world contribute to the terror attack against Muslim worshippers at Finsbury Park Mosque, London, UK on June 19, 2017, which Trump has not tweeted about until the writing of this paper, in the end of June 2017? Did it lead to the shooting and stabbing of Jo Cox, the late British Labour Party politician

^{†††}A broader but relevant definition of radicalisation in this context is the definition by Alex P. Schmid (2013:18) "an individual or collective (group) process whereby, usually in a situation of political polarisation, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in confrontational tactics of conflict-waging. These can include either (i) the use of (non-violent) pressure and coercion, (ii) various forms of political violence other than terrorism or (iii) acts of violent extremism in the form of terrorism and war crimes." Schmid also argues that radicalization does not only come from non-state actors but states could also radicalise.

by a man associated with far-right organisations or to the August 12, 2017 events in Charlottesville^{***}, USA? The negative effect could not only be calculated in terms of physical violence but also in terms of the structural violence or the negative peace (Galtung, 1996). This piece of study cannot certainly reach at that level of causation conclusion due to limitations in the research methodology, triangulation and data.

Therefore, based on the research findings in this study and also the reviews by the rights centres and the media in the US, we may conclude that Trump's discourses, messages and Presidency may have contributed to the rise of hateful and violent incidents and groups. However, although we cannot directly connect this recorded rise to Trump's social media messages and the discourses there per se, the readings suggest that Trump's conflict insensitive and possibly violence-inciting social media/Twitter posts and interactions, are part of the larger whole "rhetoric." If most of these vertices identify with Donald Trump's persona and rhetoric exhibiting signs of digital social influence, the potential of these users to apply Trump's rhetoric offline also increases.^{§§§} Althoff et al. (2016: 1) finds a causal relationship between online social interaction and offline actions "creation of new social connections increases user online in-application activity by 30%, user retention by 17%, and user offline real-world physical activity by 7% (about 400 steps per day) and social influence accounts for 55% of the observed changes in user behaviour."

One of the limitations of this study is that the #Maga dataset captured only 3000 tweets from, perhaps several millions of tweets that could be found within this hashtag. 3000 #Maga tweets could only capture a fraction of the tweets, tweeted a day or few days before the data collection, based on the density and speed of #Maga tweets in that period. Secondly, all the methods used in this research would have been better if it had included a large dataset for the sentiment, the CDA and the SNA. In addition, interviews, ethnographic or advanced computing methods would also have strengthened the findings.

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^{***} Several far-right, alt-right and supremacist groups organised the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 13, 2017 and counter protesters met them. A car allegedly belonging to the "Unite the Right" groups run into the counter protesters killing a 32-year-old woman and injuring at least 19 others.

^{§§§} An essay on the Washington Post on Sep. 26, 2016 by Jonathon Morhan stated that individuals linked to ideologically extremist Alt Right nationalists were responsible for repeated incidents of "violence online and offline." It lists the hacking of Leslie Jones's website, the killing of a Lebanese man in Tulsa in 2016, the stabbing of a mix-raced couple in Olympia, Wash., in 2016 and the mass shooting at a black church in Charleston, S.C in 2015. The author also draws on the process in which Jihadist extremists turn from normal to extremist online, called "path to radicalisation" to learn how it can extended to study the Alt-right.

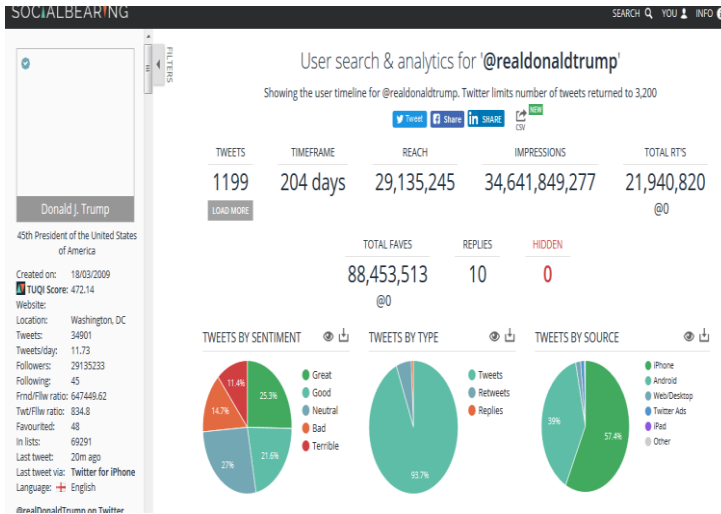
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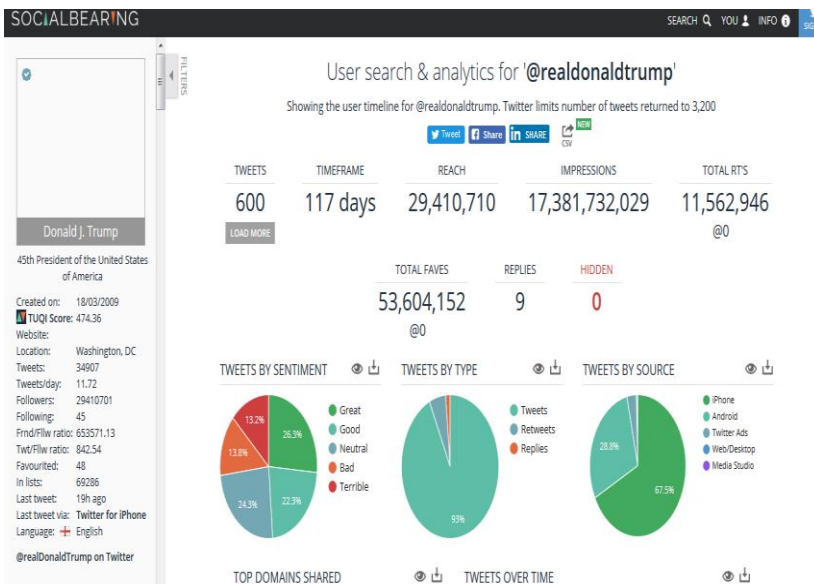
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APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2



Chapter 4

**PUBLIC SPHERE, COUNTERPUBLICS,
AND THE MANAGED PUBLIC:
THE USE OF TWITTER AS COMPLEMENTARY PRESS
ON THE DISAPPEARANCE
OF MALAYSIA AIRLINES FLIGHT MH370**

Shushu Li

School of Education, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

ABSTRACT

On the 8th of March 2014, Malaysian Airlines Flight 370 disappeared while flying from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia to Beijing, in the People's Republic of China. At the time of publication of this chapter, no one knows the truth of its disappearance. Mainstream media, alternative media and social media all played an essential role in transmitting relevant information in the initial stage. This study applies social theories such as Habermas' (1989) public sphere, Negt and Kluge's (1972) counterpublics and Coleman and Ross' (2010) managed public to compare and contrast how these three types of media disseminated news. Through the below discussion, the project shows that mainstream media, alternative media, and social media essentially complement each other.

Keywords: Twitter, MH370, social media, alternative media, mainstream media, disaster, audience, elusiveness, inclusiveness

INTRODUCTION

On the 8th of March 2014, the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared off the radar. It was flying from Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Malaysia to Beijing Capital

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International Airport, in the People's Republic of China. On the 24th of March, the Malaysian government announced that the flight had crashed into the Southern Indian Ocean. All 277 passengers and 12 crew members died, two-thirds of whom were Chinese. The disappearance of MH370 was followed by an investigation of the flight's Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah on 16 March by the Malaysian authorities. On the 24th of March, the Malaysian government announced the ending of the investigation into the demise of MH370. Up until the moment of publication of this chapter, no valid reason for its disappearance has been officially established. This has resulted in numerous conspiracy theories on the subject.

Mainstream media, alternative media and social media all played essential roles in transmitting relevant information at the initial stage of the incident when it hit the headlines. However, because of the different focus and features of these three types of media, information released by them lead to different reactions to the coverage. It has been argued that audiences of mainstream media are passive, since they have few chances to reply to news that is sent to them: "the person sitting quietly on the sofa watching television...passive couch potatoes" (Livingstone 2003, 20). In contrast, readers of social media play an active role (Woodford et al. 2017). Different still, audiences of alternative media are situated in between: neither passively receiving nor being able to reach the levels of active production and consumption of news of social media audiences (Downing 2003, 639-640).

In comparing this different coverage on the same incidence, it is noticeable that the traditional position of spectators gradually changes from mainstream media, alternative media, and to social media. Mainstream media is used to report different types of news: things that touch upon a large number of people and existing thoughts (Chomsky 1997). It is commonly described as official, so mainstream news tends to attach more importance to voices of authority and backgrounds ordinary people (Mesikämnen 2016, 733). Alternative media are different from the dominant mainstream media as regards media cooperation, content and distribution (Downing 2000), but they share some similarities with mainstream media. For example, alternative media also disseminate news through Internet, video, radio and so on. However, unlike mainstream media, where the tone is mainly controlled by the news producer, alternative media function as a bridge to balance the power that respectively news producers and audiences have (Sandoval 2009, 7). In doing this, it not only emphasizes relevant official organizations but also leaves a space for audiences to speak. Aside from including ordinary people in the coverage as an essential source, alternative media tend to also encourage its audiences to provide feedback, which makes the conversation 'dialogic' (Downing 2003, 633).

It can be argued that both mainstream and alternative media are limited when it comes to timeliness and spatiality, meaning that news reports from these two types of media can quickly vanish with the passage of time, and their reports can only reach limited audiences according to geographical location. However, the advent of social media remedies these

limitations and at the same time provides new features to the mass media. Unlike mainstream media and alternative media, social media overcomes the barriers of time and space, which enables its news circulation to be reachable by audiences from all over the world. It is the specific form of social media that is mediated by the Internet, through computers or mobile devices, that is different from both the mainstream media and the alternative media and that accelerates the circulation and communication of ideas. This advantage of social media invites more participants. In addition, social media is to some extent a “demotic turn” (Murthy 2012, 1065), meaning that traditional audiences are now not only the recipients but also the producers of news, who issue their own stories. “Ordinary people are able to “break’ news”, produce media content, or voice their opinions publicly” (2012, 1065).

RESEARCH OBJECTS

This project aims to discuss how social media worked as a supplementary stream of information for the mainstream and alternative media coverage of the initial phase of the incident. Mainly, the research focuses on how social media shifts audiences from a passive position in mainstream media, to an active role in social media. In addition, it considers how alternative media, in turn, mediate and balance the gap. Further, this study divides the initial coverage of the incident in three events: first, the disappearance of the flight on the 8th of March; second, the investigation of Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah on the 16th of March; and finally, the official announcement ending the investigation of the flight on 24 March. By comparing and contrasting the coverage of these three events, this article shows that the three types of media have a different way of communicating with, and informing their audiences. The study also reflects on the social and political impact of this phenomenon, and analyzes the authenticity of the news reports in the case of the third event, i.e., the announcement of the ending of the investigation.

Based on the preceding discussion, how social media has the potential to reconstruct and even reverse the power relation between producer and audience. For the discussion of social media coverage, sources from Twitter about the three events above have been analyzed, and posts from Weibo (a Chinese social media platform that is similar to Twitter) have also been selected. That choice was made because most of the victims were Chinese citizens. To show the unique feature of social media that is represented by Twitter, quotes from mainstream media in the form of BBC, and the alternative media outlet Alternet^{****} have been compared. Through comparing and contrasting mainstream media, alternative

**** Alternet does not keep its posts online perpetually, so its original stories have been cleared since 2014. References to alternative sources that word-for-word repeat the Alternet stories have been provided.

media, and social media, the study aims to show that they essentially complement each other.

LITERATURE

“Worldwide, Facebook has 2 billion users, YouTube has 1.5 billion, WhatsApp 1.2 billion, Instagram 700 million, Twitter 328 million and the Chinese WeChat 889 million” (Margetts 2019, 108). The high penetration of social media turns ordinary people into producers of news, enabling some of these platforms to function as an important initial source for mainstream media and alternative media in case of an emergency (Bruno, 2011). When encountering an incident, no matter whether it is a natural disaster or an accident caused by human error, users who take photos can quickly post the images with a few words on social media. This means mainstream media and alternative media can subsequently find cheap and easily accessible eye-witness reports and on-the-scene footage (Murthy and Longwell 2012, 839).

Due to the geographical location of natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis, journalists reporting for mainstream and alternative media are not able to be on site in a timely fashion. More often than stretching budgets to send out teams, mainstream and alternative media outlets draw on user-generated content from social media as a first source for their news coverage (Murthy 2011, 782). Even after these incidents, social media plays the role of “an important source of information for some individuals during the aftermath of disasters” (Murthy and Longwell 2012, 837).

“The implications of social media are significant for mass emergency events” (Palen et al. 2010, 13), and in the last decade Twitter has functioned particularly well in different emergencies around the world due to its public nature. For example, the wildfires in Southern California in the October of 2007 “were perhaps the first natural disaster that put Twitter on the map” (Murthy and Longwell 2012, 839). When other media channels were not able to reach citizens for updates on the wildfires, it was possible for official as well as ordinary users of the platform to advise people of the road situation, evacuation, direction of the fire, and where to stay. In this case, Twitter functioned to protect citizens from the wildfire, and its accessibility via mobile devices enabled people to move around rather than to stay in front of their televisions or computers to be informed of the updated situation. Because of its flexibility, it is not only convenient for users to receive information but also to post pictures or words message. For example, in 2009, the US Airways flight 1549 sank into the Hudson River in New York, and the wide use of Twitter by the public to talk about the accident “legitimized the site as a journalistic space” (Murthy and Longwell 2012, 839). Particularly, a photo taken by a witness, Janis Krums, was circulated on Twitter before any

images were shown on mainstream media. Some printed media then purchased the distribution rights to this picture (2012, 839).

Twitter discussions regarding a natural disaster or human-error incident do not stop when the fire is put out, or a missing flight is found. In 2010, the aftermath of the flood in Pakistan was listed as a “catastrophe” by the United Nations (Murthy and Longwell 2012, 838). This natural disaster quickly became a Top 10 global trending topic of Twitter and was placed as the third hot topic on Twitter’s News Events of the year (2012, 838). In other words, a local incident was catapulted onto the global scene by Twitter because the “digitization revolutionized the possibility of and capacity for the production and distribution of media content” (MjØs 2013, 27). In 2011, tweets about a 5.8 magnitude earthquake on the east coast of the United States served as a “distributed sensor system” and “human sensor networks” (Crooks et al. 2013, 142). Although this kind of sensor system was different from “typical sensors that always operate on specific bands of the spectrums, or collect specific types of measurements, humans operate in a wide range of the socio-cultural spectrum, commenting in one message on a nature phenomenon” (2013, 126). Besides, any official sensor system would be incapable of covering enough ground, as well as costly to implement, whereas human sensor networks are on the up with the seemingly ever increasing social density online and the use of smart phones (2013,142). In 2014, another flood hit Malaysia. Twitter not only enabled users to express their emotions but also provided updated information about the flood. “For the emotional category, the usual content would be the community expressing support or their concern and pray for the victims and for the informational category, spreading information and let public knows the updates on the flood event” (Supian et al.. 2017, 3).

The platform is used by individual users and organizations alike. In times of crisis, popular non-governmental organizations like the Red Cross may place updates and information on Twitter, including (Tucker 2011, 18). Twitter has grown from a platform for individual users to be employed as a political and commercial tool. Twitter, like other social networking sites, played a part in the 2016 US presidential election (Bovet and Makse 2019, 2). Though initially, Twitter and other social media platforms were designed for personal use, the heightened circulation and production of information has revealed their commercial and political potential. Companies have shot up that specialize in commercially mining data and presenting consumer-oriented analyses for marketing purposes. Indeed, “Social Media Management has become an issue for every media company with a renewed ‘skill set’ - specialized knowledge for the digital products and production and for marketing and target groups” (Friedrichsen and Mühl-Benninghaus 2012, 5). Their customers range from commercial enterprise to academics and celebrities. After analyzing the lifestyle preferences, opinions and social links of ordinary users, these digital companies help their customers develop targeted advertising. Unlike traditional

advertisement, this is specific and targeted. These corporations follow a Capitalist logic, and are not necessarily bound by ethics.

Many existing studies on social media, including Twitter, are based on quantitative methods and automated analyses. Arguably, there may be a lack of social theory to contextualize results in such studies. Studies that approach the symbiosis of mainstream, alternative and social media in a theoretical manner are far and few between. When research does examine the interplay among these different types of media through the use of case studies, the cases are used as examples rather than data samples.

This project combines a case study with social theory because it aims to examine how Twitter is used alternatively and supplementary to mainstream and alternative media. In addition, it considers the use of mainstream and alternative media on par with social media. If this study were to focus on Twitter exclusively, it would not be able to determine how Twitter is different, and what the nature is of the relation between the three types of media. This project selects an air crash in 2014 to see how Twitter was used in the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 37 as an alternative and supplementary outlet, compared with mainstream and alternative media. The theoretical framework that is brought to bear on the comparing and contrasting of the three types of media is Habermas' (1989) public sphere, Negt and Kluge's (1972) counterpublics and Coleman and Ross' (2010) managed public. These theories will be drawn on in each section to show their different characteristics in terms of effectiveness in the communication of information to audiences, potential social and political impact, and authenticity.

METHODS AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

Twitter will not be considered as a social media platform onto itself. Rather, it is by contextualizing it with the use that was made of mainstream media, alternative media and social media that this study aims to make sense of the initial stage of the disappearance of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in 2014.

First, Habermas' (1989) public sphere is drawn on to show the varying effectiveness of the three types of media in the communication of information to their audiences in the first event, the disappearance of the flight on 8 March; second, Negt and Kluge's (1972) counterpublics are referred to in the discussion of the news coverage by the three types of media about the second event, the investigation of the Captain Zaharie Ahmad Shah, in order to consider its social and political impact; and finally, Coleman and Ross's (2010) concept of the managed public has been used to analyze the level of authenticity in the coverage of the third event, the ending of the investigation, which was announced on 24 March. The reason for the application of these sociological theories is to analogically see how communication changes from a real life and off-line realm into a virtual and online realm.

First, the public sphere was initially conceptualized by German sociologist Habermas (1989) to analyze “the bourgeois public sphere developed out of a feudal system” (Stevenson 2002, 48). Later Habermas developed the concept and incorporated it into his study of the mass media. According to Habermas et al. (1964, 49) “by ‘the public sphere’ we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens.” In this sense, a public sphere is a place or a conversation in which people can enter to share their ideas freely. In studying the public sphere that is formed by meetings that took place across Europe in coffee houses from 1680 and 1730, he argues that the membership of a public sphere is exclusive (Stevenson 2002, 49). The exclusiveness of the bourgeois public sphere was mainly a result of individual social status and wealth. Mainstream media, alternative media, and social media also include and exclude in different manners, though this is based on different criteria instead of solely relying on an individual’s social status and wealth. In this regard, this terminology of the public sphere could also distinguish today’s three main media regarding their different effectiveness in transmitting information to audiences.

Second, the idea of counterpublics was originally proposed by Negt and Kluge (1972) in their *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. In order to “challenge the bourgeois dominated public sphere of Habermasian historiography, the term counterpublics was intended as a means of re-admitting the working class to its rightful place within the public” (Coleman and Ross 2010, 72). Thus, counterpublics sidestep the exclusiveness of membership in the public sphere and potentially give subaltern groups equality. According to Asen (2012, 425) who further developed this theory, “Counterpublics emerge as a kind of public within a public sphere conceived as multiplicity.” In this sense, there exist diverse powers, even in a single public sphere. Besides, counterpublics have the function to connect “the communicative flows of a multiple public sphere” (Asen 2012, 425). To use counterpublics in the comparison of the three kinds of media is to see how the three differ from but also supplement each other in respect of delivering power and transparency to their audiences, which leads to a different social and political impact.

Third, according to Ang (1991, 17-18), mass media is different from other social institutions such as family and school because mass media is unable to force people to become their audiences. This resignation of mass media originates from the spatial distance between itself and its audiences. For operating distant audiences, journalists have to manage his/her public sphere by including and excluding membership, in which s/he selects the target audiences and involves typical voices as sources. To resort to the managed public (Coleman and Ross 2010, 48) in the study is to analyze how the three types of media manipulate their membership and to find the bias.

ANALYSIS

Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness: Different Effectiveness in the Communication of Information to Audiences in the Event of MH370's Disappearance on 8th March

A public sphere is a place or a conversation in which people can enter to share their ideas. Mass media such as newspapers, television, magazines, radio and television in the 1960s created their media public spheres (Habermas et al. 1964, 49), and so do today's mainstream media, alternative media, and social media. After the MH370 disappearance happened, the three types of media covered this event. In this process, they structured three different public spheres. As mentioned above, Habermas (1989) understood the public sphere to be both inclusive and exclusive in its membership. Analogically, there also exists such a binary relationship in the public sphere developed by the three kinds of media under investigation. The cause of inclusiveness and exclusiveness here lies with the different capacity of these three types of media to be effective in communicating information to their audiences.

In mainstream media, news tends to be officially and professionally delivered to audiences. For audiences, the story is received in a top-down, one-way manner, as they have little chance to respond to the journalist or to communicate with other members of the audience. Only the speaker has the agency of addressing others and expressing her or himself. Take BBC's coverage of the disappearance of the plane on 8 March titled *Malaysia Airlines flight to Beijing vanishes* as an example. It foregrounds official voices by first addressing the attitudes of Malaysian Airlines, Malaysia's transport minister, and the military department, but places the situation of passengers and relatives at the end of the story.

"Being alternative in this sense means addressing imbalances of power and social, economic and cultural inequalities" (Fenton 2016: 10-11). Thus, alternative media would touch upon bureaucratic concerns as well as the involvement of ordinary people, or exclusively write about the public reaction. For example, the same story on alternative media outlet Alternet and Inquirer.net foreground the human-interest aspect as it titles its story *Tears and fury as relatives wait for news of airliner* (Connor 2014). The title focuses on the emotional real-life experiences of relatives, rather than foregrounding official voices. Nevertheless, readers can only have a limited amount of input in the story: even when their voices and emotions are in some way included in the news, their feedback only is taken into account to some extent.

When it comes to social media, all netizens become producers (Bruns 2005). Johari, whose mother was on the plane, tweeted "Yaallahim really afraid of losing my mom, u hear me yaallah." The Captain's daughter tweeted "God loves you more, daddy... God loves them more." This kind of information about the event allows audiences access to real

voices, instead of indirectly learning about their situation from other sources. More critically, users can be participants in the public sphere as they can comment on these posts, and add their own voices to the discussion. Therefore, social media seems to create a more democratic public sphere compared to mainstream and alternative media. Here arguably everyone can watch, listen, and speak.

Manipulate the Voice: The Manifestation of Social and Political Impact in an Investigation on the Captain on 16 March

Since each medium forms its public sphere, the feature of counterpublics can be applied to the study of mainstream media, alternative media, and social media. The relatively powerless position of audiences was traditionally most noticeable in mainstream media since “mainstream media generally aim to maximize audiences though pack journalism that is conventional and formulaic” (Kenix 2011, 19). Those excluded voices started to search for other ways to be heard, and some people began to run their own media outlets to the extent that “we may well be seeing a burgeoning of alternative media in the digital age” (Fenton 2016, 10). Since “mainstream media are extremely reluctant to give much visibility to organizations which challenge or even threaten the political frames of the media agenda” (Coleman and Ross 2010, 74), alternative media builds a bridge that links social life and political life. Social media has been heralded as a democratizing force for communication as “there can be hardly a country in the world that has not experienced widespread demonstration protest or campaigning for political change taking place on social media” (Margetts 2019, 109). As mentioned above, social media were initially aimed at facilitating communication amongst ordinary people. This is underscored by Criado et al. (2018, 6): “social media are seen as communication technologies, usually bi-directional, designed for social relations.” We could therefore argue that mainstream media are the strongest sources for political and official voices, whereas social media mostly facilitates social and civil communication in society. Alternative media stand as an in-between.

MH370’s disappearance on 8 March was followed by an investigation of the captain on the 16th of March. The BBC’s coverage *Missing Malaysia plane: Investigators study pilots’ background* on 16 March placed the pilot of MH370 under suspicion (Gardner 2014). The story revolved around the background, recent activities and abnormal behaviors of the captain. Although it did not directly cover the Malaysian government’s current situation, the source of the information was the government. As a result, this report adversely influenced the Malaysian government’s profile. After the reporting of the investigation into the captain, there was a backlash against the government. Since the public sphere in mainstream media seldom allows audiences to speak back, people turned to social media and alternative media. For example, the Malaysian government was

targeted on social media platforms like Weibo, where most Chinese users blamed the government's irresponsibility and urged it to cover a larger area in their search.

In China, people condemned the Malaysian government through Weibo, the Chinese social media platform that is similar to Twitter. A netizen from Weibo called Ph4c30 posted, "I don't think the Captain is a bad person. He may be wronged! The Malaysian government is useless!" This person also got many followers who in turn insulted the government. Apart from criticizing the government, a family picture was posted to Twitter regarding the same. The Captain's daughter tweeted "Daddy. You're all over the news and papers. Come home fast, so you could read them! Don't you feel excited?" Although his daughter only used several words to indicate that authorities were investigating her father, the message emotionally touched other users. One of her friends ZharifRafiq posted that "Hi Guys, Please pray for my friend's AishahZaharie Dad. The pilot of MH 370. Stay strong aunty and family." Similarly, users of Twitter from all over the world, and users of Weibo in China started posting messages of support, including text and images appealing to pray for the captain.

In this sense, social media is a much more suitable channel for communication emotion and affect. As an alternative media, *Alternet* and *Uhurus Times* (Hewitt 2014) also reported the same incident on 17 March. The story was titled *Malaysian plane probe spotlights cockpit crew*. This report was more comprehensive than the mainstream media's take discussed above. It reported the different perspectives, giving the point of view of the Malaysian authorities as well as the relatives' reactions. Through their reporting, *Alternet* serves as the counterpublics for both mainstream media's public sphere and social media's public sphere.

Nevertheless, with the improvement of media development, both mainstream media and social media also share features of counterpublics now. For example, in the BBC's online news reporting, there is an 'Analysis and Comments' section providing a space for an editorial point of view. In terms of social media, both the Malaysian authorities and Malaysian Airlines created their account for users to talk with them publicly.

Voice Selection: Authenticity and Bias of the Announcement of the Flight's Ending on 24th March

Coleman and Ross's (2010) notion of the managed public, as set out in *The Media and the Public*, serves to appraise the reliability of the coverage by the three kinds of media. Due to traditional mass media's top-down approach *vis-à-vis* audiences, the public may resort to the power to punish "deceptive, condescending, dull, or opaque content producers" (Coleman and Ross 2010, 48). Apart from resorting to "prurience, sensationalism, [and] celebrity-chasing" (2010, 45) to meet audiences' needs, media professionals attach much importance to the credibility of their products, or they might be

ignored as a punishment by their audiences due to being unreliable. “Along those lines, it is relevant that sources that were considered to be more reliable had higher numbers of Twitter followers and Facebook likes” (Rendon et al. 2018, 1048). Because mainstream media does not readily allow audiences to talk back, they exclude their membership from the public sphere. In order to demonstrate the authenticity of their news product and its relevance, they may invite some members of the public to participate in their reporting. But this means that “the breath and diversity of public voice is narrowed through source selection” (Coleman and Ross 2010, 49). As Broder (1975) mentions, “the basic work of every journalist is deciding what to leave out [...] Selectivity is the essence of modern journalism” (258). This suggests that who is permitted to talk in the news is as important as what is chosen to be reported on (Coleman and Ross 2010, 50).

In traditional news reporting, people from all walks of life could potentially be selected to participate or do vox pops in news relevant to them. However, ordinary citizens are not presented in the media to the same extent as government officers (Richardson 2001, 144). This hierarchy, and preference for sources that are authoritative and credible, has been key to journalistic professional practices since the 1970s (Nisbet and Lewenstein 2002, 362), and still exists today. Today’s mainstream, alternative and social media have different candidates to speak in their news because of their different membership selection for their public spheres. This also means that different source selection leads to differentiation in terms of accuracy and reliability. For mainstream media, professionals tend to cover “a broadly conservative set of criteria relating to source credibility which results in the privileging of official rather than dissident voices” (Coleman and Ross 2010, 50).

For example, the BBC coverage of the official announcement of the end of the investigation into MH370’s disappearance on the 24th of March uses Malaysia’s Prime Minister Najib Razak’s words as a source to begin the story. He wrote “Najib Razak said this was the conclusion of fresh analysis of satellite data tracking the flight” (Sudworth 2014a). The purpose of using this statement lies in the credibility and authoritative voice of the prime minister, making the message more acceptable to audiences. Following this, the journalist includes a text message from the Malaysian government sent to the victims’ relatives to inform them of the sad outcome. He quotes Mr. Najib’s words again to show this conclusion is drawn from British satellite firm Inmarsat. To respond to the prime minister, the journalist uses a relative’s words as another source “We accept the news of the tragedy. It is fate” (Sudworth 2014b). This single voice included in this story may be aimed at representing a general sentiment. In the second half of the story, the journalist uses sources from Inmarsat, including some data. The ending of the story says that Inmarsat said that the new data had to be checked before they could be made public. This news showed a paradox between the prime minister’s action and Inmarsat’s attitude, which casts doubt on the Malaysian government’s statement and outcome of the search.

Today’s 24/7 news cycle encourages journalists to use and repeat familiar sources (Coleman and Ross 2010, 50), which makes some sources appear in both mass media and

alternative media. For example, in *Alternet* and *Hdhod*'s coverage of this story *Malaysia says missing jet crashed at sea* (Jegathesan 2014), coverage of this story, the reporter uses almost all quotes from BBC's online news coverage. However, since its exclusiveness of membership is not as strict as that of the mainstream media, it also invited a wider range of voices such as relatives and aviation consultants. Unlike the reporter of the BBC, the reporter of *Alternet* added his personal view. Since alternative media play the role of counterpublic for mainstream media and social media, it links the conversations in mainstream media's public sphere and social media's public sphere. In this sense, some voices heard in the alternative media are also from the social media public sphere.

In social media, where all netizens have the chance to post their thoughts and share their emotions, there is no need to invite other voices as users can directly communicate with each other. On Weibo, a user called Tiantianlundi posted: "Why can they clearly announce MH370's location without finding the wreckage and black box. The flight must be shot down by their military!" Although social media has the most democratic public sphere, their coverage of events is least detached since it is full of subjective ideas and lacks source references. Therefore, though mainstream media only includes a limited range of voices, it arguably selects the most representative people to feature in their stories and in doing this establishes their products as reliable and authoritative. However, authoritativeness does not mean 'the truth', but a more detached and undisputed angle.

CONCLUSION

Social media is wildly used by people across the globe, which is arguably linked to its ease of use as regards mobile portability. Indeed, without geographical limitation, news can be spread in a broader sphere. Twitter, which was originally designed for people to exchange news and life experiences, now is developing into a multi-functional platform. It can not only be used as a communication tool but also as an advertising tool or place for breaking news. This study has focused on Twitter's use in times of crisis, and particularly how it is used differently from mainstream and alternative media outlets following a disaster. To develop this discussion, the study focused on the case of flight MH370's disappearance in 2014.

From the above comparison and contrast of coverage on mainstream media (BBC), alternative media (*Alternet*) and social media (Twitter and Weibo) on the initial stages of reporting on MH370's disappearance, their differences are theorised in terms of the public sphere, counterpublics, and the managed public. Specifically, the social media platform Twitter constitutes a public sphere with the most democratic potential, as it is an arena that is marked by public conversations. It welcomes everyone to listen, watch, speak and post their views and experiences. In the case of MH370's disappearance, users opined against the Malaysian government, vented their emotions, and shared their personal experiences

on both Twitter and Weibo. This communicative activity matches the original intentions of those who founded the two social media platforms, as these were aimed at enabling individuals to “respond to the question ‘What’s happening?’” (Murthy 2013: X).

Alternative media, which function as counterpublics for mainstream and social media, bridge the gap between how the latter operate. In Alternet’s coverage on the same issue, journalists focused not on official voices and political concerns only, but rather also took public opinion into account, and added their own judgment. Since alternative media was born from the extreme exclusiveness of membership in mainstream media (Fenton 2016, 10), it tends to give more rooms for those unheard voices.

Mainstream media, in which the most managed public exists, is most credible due to its exclusion in order to have authoritative sources, and professional selection and craft. In BBC coverage on this air crash, reporters gave little space to ordinary people, only allowing a ‘representative’ voice to speak for all, and audiences can of course not reply. The analysis of these three types of media found that they complement each other, which is why they can coexist as today’s mass media.

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Chapter 5

**TRUMP’S TWEETS: COMPUTER-MEDIATED
COMMUNICATION CUES AS INDICATORS
FOR PARALINGUISTIC DIGITAL AFFORDANCES ON
POLITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA**

Christa L. Jennings

Department of Communication, Purdue University,
Fort Wayne, Indiana, US

ABSTRACT

The prevalence of social media in political campaigns presents an emergent, varied, and context-dependent medium for the analysis of computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues. With much of CMC cues literature focusing on chronemics and emoticons within text-based messaging services, this research examined lesser-known cues within the context of political social media. Through quantitative content analysis, the study examined the use of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering in Trump’s campaign tweets on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign. Investigation of messaging resonance drew on an emergent area of social media study, paralinguistic digital affordances (PDAs), which pertains to the use of a single-click to like, share, or upvote social media content. Bringing together CMC cues and PDAs for the first time, this study hypothesized Donald Trump’s use of CMC cues would produce increased PDAs in comparison to tweets without the specified CMC cues. Results showed statistical significance in the relationship between investigated CMC cues and PDAs. Findings lay the foundation for additional research on digital paralinguistics on social media, particularly with respect to understanding the impact of digital paralinguistics on the political process.

Keywords: computer-mediated communication, paralinguistic digital affordances, political social media, nonverbal communication, Twitter

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INTRODUCTION

The current U.S. investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign highlights the increased prominence of social media in political communication. It also revisits provocative discourse about the increasing power wielded by social media and its potential for influencing the political process. Currently in the United States, 69% of Americans report regular use of social media and 67% consume at least some of their news from social network sites (Poushter et al. 2018; Shearer and Gottfried 2017). The present climate invites consideration of computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues uses on social media. New insights about CMC cues on social media offer the potential for increased understanding about the relationship between CMC cues and messaging impact, as well as insights on the capacity for social media to influence the political process.

Much of the CMC cues' scholarship emphasizes chronemics (Döring and Pöschl 2008; Kalman and Rafaeli 2011) and emoticons (Hancock et al. 2007; Walther and D'Addario 2001) within text-based messaging platforms such as email, short-messaging service (SMS), and instant messaging (IM) (Kim et al. 2014). While some research has explored haptics, punctuation, all uppercase lettering, lexical surrogates, and letter repetitions, the literature on these cues is scant and remains primarily situated within text-based messaging services (Kalman and Gergel 2014; Vandergriff 2013). Emergent paralinguistic digital affordances (PDAs) research investigates single-click user responses to social media posts, such as likes, favorites, or upvotes (Wohn et al. 2016). Recent PDA literature suggests PDAs function as indicators of social support and relational closeness (Carr et al. 2016; Walther and Ramirez 2009). The prevalence of social media in the political process occasions the expansion of a narrowed focus in CMC cues study and offers the prospect of a contribution to PDA research. This suggests new avenues of research. The literature is yet to explore a potential connection between CMC cues and PDAs, particularly of unique paralinguistic uses and digital affordances. Investigation into the ways punctuation and capitalization CMC cues are used within the context of political campaigns on social media, and the potential relationship to PDAs, fill an existing gap in scholarship.

Investigation of all capital lettering and exclamatory punctuation CMC cues within the context of political social media offers insights about relatively unexplored cues. With the bulk of CMC cues research focusing on chronemics and emoticons, little is known about the impact of all capital lettering and punctuation on messaging and sender-receiver response. Further, it offers the potential for new understanding about the impact of digital paralinguistic on political campaigning, constituent responsiveness to nonverbal campaign messaging, and the potential for social media to influence the political process. This study examines CMC cues uses on political social media by Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. In particular, the study investigates the exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering used by Trump on social network site Twitter during the campaign. Examples of CMC cues used on social media by a presidential candidate are apparent in

the following tweets: “Wow, Twitter, Google and Facebook are burying the FBI criminal investigation of Clinton. Very dishonest media!” (Trump Twitter, October 30, 2016). “MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!” (Trump Twitter, November 5, 2016). “The only thing that can stop this corrupt machine is YOU. The only force strong enough to save our country is US. #VoteTrumpPence16,” (Trump Twitter, November 4, 2016), and “This election is absolutely being rigged by dishonest and distorted media pushing Crooked Hilary – but also at many polling places – SAD,” (Trump Twitter, October 16, 2016).

Donald Trump’s frequent use of all uppercase lettering and exclamatory punctuation on Twitter during the 2016 U.S. presidential election was unlike any political social media use to date. Examination of Trump’s use of digital paralanguage on Twitter during the 2016 presidential campaign offers new understanding about the function of CMC cues within the context of political social media and its implications for the political process. Areas salient to Trump’s use of CMC cues on Twitter begin with discussion about the significance of computer-mediated communication cues uses on social media, followed by an investigation of the emergent field of PDA study, and conclude with a brief review of political social media scholarship as the foreground for Trump’s use of CMC cues on Twitter.

Computer-Mediated Communication Cues and Twitter

Computer-mediated communication cues are subtle, highly variable, and context-dependent nonverbal messages that afford augmented meaning and enhance message content through emoticons, punctuation marks, asterisks, all uppercase lettering, chronemics, and letter repetitions (Kalman and Gergle 2010). CMC cues are an important and widely researched area of nonverbal communication (Antonijevic 2008; Kalman and Gergle 2014; Vandergriff 2013) with much of the literature focusing on chronemics (Döring and Pöschl 2008; Kalman and Rafaeli 2011; Walther and Tidwell 1995) and emoticons (Derks et al. 2007; Hancock et al. 2007; Walther and D’Addario 2001). The study of chronemics refers to “time related messages and the ways in which the temporal aspects of messaging influence communication” (Kalman and Gergle 2014, 188). Exploration of chronemics in digital communication highlights the impact of response latency and message timing on receiver perceptions of the sender (Kalman and Gergle 2014). In addition to an interest in chronemics, the literature highlights the role of emoticons as influencing message interpretation (Hancock 2004, 450). Emoticons or emojis are expressions of emotion through the use of graphical icons representing the human face (Kalman and Gergle 2014).

The research emphasis on chronemics and emoticons revolves around uses within email, SMS, and IM, as mentioned above (Kim et al. 2014). However, recent progression in CMC cues research includes exploration of video-based computer-mediated spaces such

as Skype and FaceTime (Kim et al. 2014). Studies on CMC cues in virtual spaces investigates emotional display behaviour (Kim, et al. 2014), sender/receiver perceptions (Döring and Pöschl 2008; Walther and Tidwell 1995), and message interpretation (Derks et al. 2007; Walther and D'Addario 2001). Like verbal communication, interpretation of CMC cues is highly context-dependent (Vandergriff 2013). A recent case study on social media self-disclosure behaviors suggests limited cue availability on digital platforms restricts the amount of data carried by the medium, permitting users to be less inhibited and allowing for more strategic self-presentation (Yang et al. 2014). As a result, different social network sites are useful at different stages of relational development. Within the context of a presidential campaign, these findings suggest social network site selection and preferred CMC cues uses may be connected to candidates' self-presentation goals.

Research of little-known CMC cues findings suggests uses of all capital lettering and exclamatory punctuation generate sender-receiver intimacy by nature of social media conventions for relationship building. The conversational nature of social network site communication has elicited the description of text-based CMC as a 'written-spoken' hybrid wherein text-based interactions emulate face-to-face conversations in a unique blend of written, spoken, and CMC conventions (Schandorf 2012). Previously addressed as mediated forms of 'emotional grooming,' paralinguistic conventions in social media communication function in part as 'expressive gestures,' to indicate emotion or state of mind, and 'rhythmic gestures' that explicitly punctuate structural aspects of discourse (Schandorf 2012). Particularly, punctuation uses are argued to function as "markers for illocutionary force and perlocutionary intention - communicative adaptations to the textual medium - rather than simple one-to-one iconic mappings to physical expressions" (Schandorf 2012, 324). All capital lettering is considered transcription of vocal gestures, allusion to emotion, or interjection. Both punctuation and capitalization are said to invite audience identification and solidarity necessitating empathy and social reinforcement of both sender and message (Schandorf 2012). In a sense, exclamatory punctuation and all capital lettering uses within the context of political social media function as paralinguistic rhetorical pathos appeals, which generate message's receiver support.

Paralinguistic Digital Affordances

With more than 211 million social media users within the United States, social network sites host billions of content items with which users interact on platform contingent tools (Hays et al. 2016; Social Media Statistics and Facts 2018). Paralinguistic digital affordances (PDAs) are a social media technical tool that facilitates user engagement of messaging through a single-click, such as a like, favorite, or upvote (Hayes et al. 2016). Paralinguistic digital affordances are largely context-based and sent and interpreted in a variety of ways. Research in the field is minimal, in part, due to the fairly recent

development of social media platforms and limited literature concerning paralanguage within social network sites.

Within PDA research, primary attention concerns the use of PDAs as indicators of social support (Carr et al. 2016; Wohn et al. 2016) and perceived relational closeness (Sumner et al. 2017; Walther and Ramirez 2009). *Social support* describes an individual's perceptions of being cared for and belonging to a community based on the observed actions or information about the sender (Carr et al. 2016; Cobb 1976). Carr et al. (2016) explored the nature of perceived social support, finding individuals interpret the same PDA cue "as differing in its social supportiveness considering their relationship with the sender, the sender's perceived intention, and their own goals when posting the initial message" (2016, 392). In addition, PDAs are perceived as socially supportive "even without implicit meaning associated with them" (Wohn et al. 2016, 562). These findings suggest that PDAs as indicators of social support serve as affirmation of, or encouragement for, the original message sender, as well as indicating membership within a community or network for the PDA sender.

A second area of PDA investigation explores perceived relational closeness. *Relational closeness* is described as having ties to those whom an individual feels strongly connected to (Carr et al. 2016). Activated by a single click, the meaning behind paralinguistic digital affordances can be complex and rich within their respective social medium (Hayes et al. 2016). A way to understand this concept is through Sumner et al. (2017) study, which found that the Facebook like button operated as a social cue that allows users to convey various meanings while simultaneously enacting multiple interpersonal functions. Specifically, the use of the like button functions to communicate relational closeness to the post's author, strengthens the community of the PDA user, and achieves self-presentation goals.

Though the PDAs function differently across various social network sites, emergent research suggests that they serve as a barometer of message acceptance or support. Use of a single-click to like, favorite, or retweet content signals implicit support of the message and/or the sender, and in many cases furthers message dissemination. In the case of Twitter, its threshold for PDAs is considered higher than other platforms. This is thought to be due partly to the post character limit, which affords easy comprehension of entire messages. As a result, content must be considered "good," defined as funny, thought provoking, or ironic, to elicit PDAs (Hayes et al. 2016 177). In comparison, Facebook PDAs are considered more reactionary with users, demonstrating a lower threshold for adoption. Users are likely to skim Facebook content rather than absorb messaging and tend to quickly like a photo or post with the intent of lending support or reinforcing relational bonds (Hayes et al. 2016). The higher threshold for PDAs on Twitter suggests favorited or retweeted messages may hold more meaning. This finding is of particular interest as we consider the impact of punctuation and all capital lettering CMC cues in favorited and retweeted political campaign tweets.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump received numerous favorites and retweets of posts on his personal Twitter account, some receiving significantly more than others. In light of PDAs as indicators of social support and perceived relational closeness, and the higher threshold for PDAs on Twitter, user adoption of PDAs may signal support of specific messages. A tangible example of this is observed in tweets deployed by Trump on election day, 8 November 2016. Around noon EDT Trump tweeted, “TODAY WE MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!” which received 923,479 PDAs (Trump Twitter 2016). In comparison, a tweet posted three hours later stating, “VOTE TODAY!” only received 97,983 PDAs (Trump Twitter 2016). The support shown to specific tweets as indicated by corresponding PDAs activates the dissemination of preferred messaging. Examination of PDAs as indicators of political influence or favor affords insights into the potential for online campaign messaging circulation and offers new understandings about the impact of social media on the political process.

Political Social Media Use and the Emergence of Twitter

‘Social network sites’ are defined by Boyd and Ellison (2008) as individual web-based services that permit users to (1) construct public or semi-public profiles within a confined system, (2) create a list of other users to whom they are connected, and (3) view one’s own and others’ connections. ‘Social media’ are internet-based “persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content,” (Carr and Hayes 2015, 7). These working definitions provide an appropriate frame for understanding the usefulness of social media as a whole, while creating differentiation between the entirety of social media and the singular reference to individual platforms.

Studies on the use of social media in political campaigns are limited in focus. These studies have primarily concentrated on the measurable roles of social media in political campaigns and typically fall within one of three categories: the shift from traditional media to new media (Pew Research 2008/2012; Winslow 2011), the connection between social media campaigning and voter candidate selection (Daou 2008; Winslow 2011), and the role of social media campaigning in creating community and motivating followers (Conway et al. 2015; Daou 2008; Gross and Johnson 2016; Pew Research 2012). The traditional media forms of print, radio, and television used to communicate with constituents were eclipsed by computer-mediated communication during the 2004 and 2008 presidential campaigns (Conway et al. 2015; Daou 2008; Winslow 2011). Leading up to the 2012 presidential campaign, research interest shifted to measuring political social media influence on voter candidate selection (Conway et al. 2015; Daou 2008; Gross and Johnson 2016; Pew Research 2008/2012; Winslow 2011). The literature highlights the significant impact of social media on the political communication landscape, as the open

forum of social media affords unimpeded and unfiltered public opinion expression (Daou 2008).

Obama's unprecedented 2012 social media campaign deployed social networking sites as tools for community building and mobilization, thus prompting another shift in research attention (Bode and Dalrymple 2016; Conway et al. 2015; Daou 2008; Gross and Johnson 2016; Pew Research 2012). Currently, social media scholarship is investigating the changes brought about by Trump's use of Twitter during the 2016 presidential campaign (Guthey 2016; Ott 2017; Wells et al. 2016). Specifically, political social media scholarship is exploring the evolving nature of Twitter through examination of the site as a tool of debased discourse, a platform for populist rhetoric, and an instrument of power (Kreis 2017; Montgomery 2017; Ott 2017). One aspect of Twitter's particular discursive style is the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, hyperbole, and ad hominem attack to provoke visceral responses from the audience (Sobieraj and Berry 2011, 20). Hence, Twitter has developed a reputation as a platform that "destroys dialog and deliberation, fosters farce and fanaticism, and contributes to callousness and contempt" (Ott 2017, 60). It may be that the intrinsically aggressive nature of Twitter is part of its appeal.

Twitter has become more consequential for political reporters than any other form of social media (Parmelee 2013). Amid the rise of social network site use in politics, Twitter takes center stage in the fight for new media dominance. Its unique ability to inform journalists and traditional media makes Twitter a formidable resource for political agenda-building and media narrative shaping during presidential election campaigns. The platform's appeal to politicians and news media is due, in part, to the symbiotic relationship that exists between agendas in Twitter posts and traditional news (Wells et al. 2016). "Twitter's 140-character limit acts as a liberating constraint, leading candidates to issue sound bites ready for potential distribution not only online, but through conventional media, as tweets become news," (Gross and Johnson 2016, 748) though of course the limit was changed in 2017 to 280 characters. Social media political campaigns may exercise performative power to influence situational definitions through timely, meaningful, and rhetorically effective communicative action and inaction (Kreiss 2016). Twitter's emergence as a powerful tool in campaign messaging and its ability to dictate mainstream news stories make it a desirable platform for a political candidate.

Recent political social media literature shows that the ways in which Twitter is intertwined with news media are rapidly increasing. A pervasive tool in political campaigns, Twitter is a suitable platform for exploration of CMC cues uses. Examination of Trump's Twitter feed during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign offers unique insights as he personally managed his account throughout the race (Ott 2017; Tsur et al. 2016). Trump's choice to personally interact with the Twittersphere, outside the purview of public relations officials or campaign staffers, permitted him to assert unfiltered verbal and nonverbal messaging. His extensive use of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering sheds light on digital paralanguage uses in social media communication.

This project examines the function of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering CMC cues within the context of political social media, as measured by instances of corresponding paralinguistic digital affordances. The study brings the fields of CMC cues and PDAs together for the first time in order to investigate the impact of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering on messaging within the context of political social media. Using archival Twitter data from Trump's personal account, @realDonaldTrump, the following hypothesis was tested: Trump's use of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering CMC cues in Twitter tweets during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign resulted in significantly more paralinguistic digital affordances in comparison to tweets without these cues. Study variables were operationalized as follows: first, Trump's use: Trump's posting of tweets during the 2016 presidential campaign on his personal account, @realDonaldTrump; second, exclamatory punctuation is described as the use of exclamation punctuation in tweets; third, all uppercase lettering is defined as the use of all capital letters to form a word or phrase sans the use of acronyms; fourth, computer-mediated communication cues are described as the use of the nonverbal indicators of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering in a tweet; and finally, paralinguistic digital affordances refer to a one-click indicator of social support or relational closeness as represented by a retweet, or favorite of an individual tweet.

METHODS

This study is a descriptive content analysis, investigating the frequencies of use of specific CMC cues on social media by a presidential candidate and the relationship of these cues' occurrence with PDAs. Content analysis of Trump's use of CMC cues on Twitter contributes to our understanding of the potential influence of CMC cues within the context of political social media.

Procedure

The researcher contacted Export Tweet, a subsidiary of Markitics Analytics Ltd., to obtain archived Twitter feed data. Markitics is a specialist digital analytics research firm that utilizes a variety of quantitative techniques to obtain and analyze large amounts of digital data. Export Tweet is a web-based data analytics tool providing comprehensive reporting and statistical Twitter data. The company provides in-depth analysis of Twitter brands, products, and individuals through finely tuned algorithms. Upon payment of a fee, the researcher was provided with four data analytics reports pertaining to Trump's Twitter feed: a User Analysis Report, a Tweet Analysis Report, a Followers Analysis Report, and a Following Analysis Report. These reports provide exhaustive data and comprehensive

reporting on Trump's user profile, his tweets, replies, favorites, and followership for March 2016 to January 2017. It is from these reports and their accompanying spreadsheets that the data for this project was obtained.

Tweets selected for content analysis are comprised of all posts published to Trump's Twitter page, @realDonaldTrump, during the four weeks leading up to election day 2016 (10 October, 2016–8 November, 2016). This timeframe marked the period of publicly recognized increase in campaign efforts prior to a presidential election. The number of tweets posted during this period totalled 515. Of the total tweets, 54 were retweets from other accounts and were therefore excluded from the study. The remaining data set, comprising 461 tweets, was organized within Excel and the researcher used automated functions or formulas to (1) count the number of tweets containing exclamation points, (2) count the number of tweets containing emoticons, (3) sum retweets for posts containing all capital lettering or exclamatory punctuation CMC cues, (4) sum favorites of tweets containing CMC cues, (5) sum retweets for posts without CMC cues, (6) sum favorites of tweets without CMC cues, (7) sum favorites and retweets for posts containing CMC cues, and (8) sum favorites and tweets for posts without CMC cues. When the instances were counted and summed, the researcher manually reviewed all tweets to isolate posts containing words in all uppercase lettering. The data was reviewed eight times over a period of six weeks to ensure accuracy. The posts containing all uppercase lettering were identified in an adjacent column with a '1' and conditionally formatted. This conditional formatting served as the source for the count of tweets containing all uppercase lettering. The 461 tweet sample data set produced 14,512,701 Favorites and 6,306,630 Retweets. A total of 11 tweets in the data set included emoticons. These tweets also contained specified punctuation or capitalization CMC cues and were included in the study based on the presence of hypothesis variables.

Coding

Dataset analysis involved coding each unit of measure by applying Microsoft Excel formulas and functions. Coding was conducted using both user-defined calculations (formulas) and built-in calculations (functions) as described in the above procedure section of this study. Each unit is comprised of an individual tweet. The descriptive coding categories were designed in accordance with the project hypothesis and established definitions of CMC cues within the literature. They include *exclamatory punctuation* and *all uppercase lettering*. *Exclamatory punctuation* describes the use of one or more exclamation points within a tweet. *All uppercase lettering* refers to the use of all capital letters for a specific word(s) or phrase within each unit. Where multiple qualifiers were present within a unit of response, all applicable categories were assigned. Coding was

conducted using both manual and automated Excel formulas as described in the above Procedure section of this study.

RESULTS

The hypothesis predicted Trump's use of exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering CMC cues in Twitter tweets would result in significantly more paralinguistic digital affordances. This assertion is supported and considered to be statistically significant. Exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering CMC cues were not equally distributed in the population. The 461-tweet data set was comprised of 290 tweets containing all uppercase lettering and exclamatory punctuation cues, which produced 14,350,537 PDAs. Comparatively, the 171 tweets without the specified cues produced 6,468,794 PDAs. If there were no relationship between CMC cues and PDAs, we would expect the tweets containing specified CMC cues to have produced 63% of the 20,819,331 total PDAs. However, this is not the case: tweets containing specified cues comprise 68.9% of PDAs. In fact, a two-tailed Chi-square test yielded a $X^2 = (1) = 313,959$ and $p < .0001$, strongly supporting the relationship between the use of all caps and exclamation punctuation and PDAs.

Table 1. PDA Frequency for tweets with and without specified cues

	PDAs: Tweets with Cues	PDAs: Tweets Without Cues
Observed Frequency	14,350,537	6,468,794
Expected Frequency	13,116,178.53	7,703,152.47

DISCUSSION

The data collected in this study quantitatively showed a statistically significant association between exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering CMC cues and more PDAs within the context of political social media. Content analysis of Trump's tweets during the four weeks leading up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election revealed increased PDAs, signaling sender perceived social support and relational closeness. While the study does not afford a direct cause-effect relationship, findings highlight the potential impact of CMC cues within political social media. The relationship between Trump's use of CMC cues and increased PDAs in this study suggests intentional punctuation and capitalization uses on social media by political candidates may increase rapport between constituents and candidates. Further, exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering uses on political social media potentially contribute to increased dissemination of campaign messaging

online due to the impact of PDAs on message circulation. These findings are consistent with previous scholarship about the ability of political social media to build community and mobilize constituents (Bode and Dalrymple 2016; Conway et al. 2015; Daou 2008; Gross and Johnson 2016; Pew Research 2012). The implications for communication, digital paralanguage, and the political process are far reaching and warrant further investigation.

Results of the study should be interpreted with caution due to potential coding limitations. In addition to automated functionality, the study required manual coding to categorize and manage aspects of a significant data set. While the dataset provided ample information for the study, the possibility exists for researcher error in the coding of all uppercase lettering tweets. Future studies would benefit from acquiring software designed to automate the detection of all uppercase lettering of a word or phrase within an individual tweet, thus eliminating the potential for data errors. Despite the presumption that tweets from Trump's personal account were indeed authored by Trump himself, it is not possible to verify that every tweet posted on his account was written by him. It is important to note that this study focused on exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering CMC cues. While the aim of the study included an interest in increasing knowledge about little known cues, future studies to include all CMC cues may result in more generalizable findings.

Bringing together CMC cues and PDAs offers the potential for a new wave of study in digital paralanguage scholarship. This previously unexplored convergence lays the groundwork for future exploration of the impact of digital paralanguage within varied social media contexts. Trump's unconventional uses of social media during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign potentially serves as a blueprint for future candidates wishing to directly and effectively engage the electorate with impactful campaign messaging. Further assessment of CMC cues on political social media may contribute to our understanding of how internet-mediated paralanguage uniquely interplays with sender, receiver, and message. Future studies would benefit from further exploration of the role of CMC cues in political messaging, particularly as pertains to the phenomenon of fake news. Investigation of digital paralanguage uses in social media posts known to be 'alternative truths' or 'fake news' offers understanding about the impact of nonverbal communication on narrative building. Gaining new understanding about the influence of paralanguage on social messaging may offer insights into the role of political social media messaging as contributing to the current phenomenon of alternative truth.

CONCLUSION

Descriptive content analysis of Trump's tweets containing all uppercase lettering and exclamatory punctuation CMC cues during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign contributes to our understanding of social media and its potential influence in the political

process. Specifically, this study establishes a statistically significant association between computer-mediated communication cues and paralinguistic digital affordances within the context of political social media. The efficacy of the study is in its findings, which suggest CMC cues contribute to message resonance, as indicated by the social support and relational closeness signaled by PDAs. CMC cues uses on political social media afford examination of a unique intersection between sender, receiver, and message. With exclamatory punctuation and all uppercase lettering largely unexplored within CMC cues research, this study offers insights into the impact of paralanguage on political social media campaigning. Increasing our understanding of these areas is of great importance as the U.S. seeks to better comprehend the role of social media in politics. Future research would benefit from gaining an understanding of the role of nonverbal cues in social messaging as pertains to election outcomes. Twenty-first century social media use in presidential campaigns provides the foreground for these understandings by establishing normative patterns of political social media uses. Trump's deviation from conventional social media use serves as an example of how social media operates in the public arena and of its role in the political process. The U.S. investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign has unearthed the use of Internet bots on social media for the purpose of influencing the American public through partisan messaging. The resulting sociopolitical climate is a significant rise in personal alienation or disaffection from governing institutions and a widening gap between conservative and liberal ideologies. This growing divide is a salient context for further exploration of the role of nonverbal messaging on political social media.

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Chapter 6

**CONSTRUCTING TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY
THROUGH TWITTER ACTIVISM:
A DISCOURSE STUDY OF #ENDFGM**

Isioma Maureen Chiluwa and Olaniyi T. Ayodele

¹Department of Languages and General Studies
Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

²Department of Political Science and International Relations
Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The use of Twitter for transnational activism and the construction of collective identity has received attention from various researchers. However, there is sparse literature on the role of Twitter discourse in the construction of transnational identities. This study examines the construction of transnational identities via the Twitter hashtag #EndFGM. Using Tarrow's (2005) concept of transnational activism and insights from assemblage theory, the study attempts a discourse analysis of 703 tweets on the Twitter hashtag, 'End Female Genital Mutilation' (#EndFGM) – an advocacy to end female genital mutilation in Africa and parts of the Middle East, where this act is commonly practised. The chapter argues that the online communication results in the emergence of new forms of identity construction, described as online transnational activists in a global revolution. The Twitter hashtag as an assemblage serves as a mediator and actor in the negotiation of transnational identity in online social movements.

Keywords: twitter, transnationalism, #EndFGM, assemblage, critical discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

Internet-mediated communication has resulted in social transformations. Various studies (e.g., Suvojit 2016) suggest that the flow of networked communities and online cultural practices mediated across Internet platforms result in a blurred boundary of groupness, which has in turn constructed a new form of identity and nationhood. Other studies have explored the role of the Internet, and particularly social network sites (SNS), in the construction of identity, social representation, and the reproduction of social and cultural practices (e.g., boyd and Ellison 2013; Sibik 2009). These studies reveal that the absence of geographical boundaries in Internet communication makes identity formation, social representation, activism and other cultural practices common (Jimenez et al. 2010).

Media activism denotes a collection of activism that uses information technology infrastructures and other electronic media to disseminate information across large audiences (Galis and Neumayer 2016). Traditional forms of media activism can be traced back to older forms of mass communication such as newspapers, TV, and radio (Galis and Neumayer 2016). In recent times, online activism as an emerging form of media activism is made possible through social media platforms such as Twitter, WeChat, Telegram, Facebook, and YouTube. They are made popular by changes in communication patterns that accompany these media such as the use of hashtags to amplify voices and spread information (Moscato 2016).

Twitter, particularly, is a useful tool for negotiating online activism through its hashtag campaigns. The hashtag assists in the spread of a particular topic within a period of time. Since its early days in 2006-2007, Twitter has gone beyond being a mere social media platform for meet and greets, to become a public, global medium that through its hashtags and other exploration tabs offers its users a platform for solidarity and advocacy (Moscato 2016). This takes place through Twitter's recorded 316 million active users with about 500 million tweets a day (Internet Live Stats 2012).

Arguably, one of the issues that has received global collective attention is the case of violence against women. Gender-based violence, as it is commonly referred to, continues to engender socio-political debate and media activism, and the use of the Internet to respond to this violence is of prime interest for this study. Female genital mutilation is considered a form of such violence against women here. It has sparked protests across social media platforms as individuals across national boundaries raise their voices in protest against this practice. While the study does not focus exclusively on the nature of female genital mutilation, it aims to identify discourse practices of Twitter movements advocating against female genital mutilation, in order to understand the platform as a tool for online activism. In addition, it looks at how these activist movements reproduce and construct a transnational identity through Twitter assemblages. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- How is local discourse of #EndFGM communicated across transnational digital space?
- How is individual identity negotiated through transnational activism?
- How do Twitter assemblages function to promote these identities?

Twitter and Transnational Activism

Transnationalism is understood as “exchange, connections and practices across borders that transcends national space as the primary point of reference and activities” (IOM 2010, 1). It generally refers to the natural forms of interactions that begin from a local space and transcends beyond geographical boundaries. Faist (2000) applied the concept to include migration studies that extend beyond the movement of people to the circulation of ideas, symbols and material culture. The fluidity of the concept, as Zirch (2005) has observed, makes it difficult to provide a clear-cut description of transnationalism. Studies on transnationalism have focused on identity (Vertovec 2001), migrations (Baubock and Faist 2010) and transnational activism within the confines of regions or a single locality (Tarrow 2005).

There is, however, an expanding focus on global discourses of transnational movements resulting in global activism. Tarrow (2005) identified three types of transnationalism: transinternational, transglocal, and transnational activism. The first type denotes a strongly organized network of individuals and groups that move local issues to global levels of governance. The second type means activism that adapts transnational discourses to local contexts. And the final type stands for activism surrounding local and international struggles, at different levels. The interaction of transnational activism with the digital networks result in transnational online activism, which is the focus of this study.

The advancement of technology, especially in communication, provides connections and relationships that enable people to alter their identity through contact with others. Vertovec (2004) observed that communication allowed by cheap telephone calls serves as a kind of social glue, connecting small scale social formations across the globe. As communication and movements merge, the rearrangement of the nation state occurs and a new socio-political belonging develops (Perez 2017). This in turn has given rise to an increase in transnational political, social, and economic activities and the rise of new forms of social movements where individuals lend their voices towards achieving a common goal through mutual embeddedness of online space and identity. Recent protests such as the Occupy movements, the Arab Spring and other online protests, for instance, employ the Internet in the spread of their campaigning. In a study of *Los Indignados*, a protest that raised concern about jobs and the economy in Spain, Benneth and Segerberg (2012) observed that the protest saw the network of local Spanish nodes and a number of international solidarity organizations made possible through social media communication.

Los Indignados, like other online protests, provided opportunity for the emergence of new forms of identity that are not bound by geographical space.

In describing these novel forms of transnational movements, Tarrow (2005, 3) conceptualizes transnational activism as new forms of actions, ways of framing domestic issues, and forms of identities that fuse domestic with international debates. Tarrow further describes transnational activism within internationalism as a means to understand the origins of global protest (2005). Internationalization thus results in a flow of relations between state and non-state actors that operate at different levels.

Social movements are social processes that allow the articulation of interest and critiques by social actors through engaging in a variety of social actions (Cammaerts 2015). They are often structured by dense, informal networks, with a motive to developing, sustaining and distributing collective identities (2015). The proliferation of social media promotes the convergence of channels of information dissemination, that is, the proliferation of particular information across various channels. In the case of trending topics online, these topics often trend across various media platforms at the same time. This form of convergence provides a nurturing context for social movements since a particular protest can be distributed across different social media platforms at the same time. Recent studies provide evidence of how social media platforms enable and enhance the orchestration of small movements and participatory coordination (Mercea and Bastos 2016) by both individuals and groups (Yadlin-Segal 2017). As Internet based communication platforms are combined in various ways, it becomes crucial to identify communicative patterns that signal collaborations and collectivity. The social actor as one of the instruments of collective action, described by Mercea and Bastos as a 'work influencer' who enables recurrent exposure to a particular issue or protest using different hashtags. These hashtags serve as sources for the transmission of their messages, opinions or activism. At the other end of the spectrum is the mediator of these sources. In this conceptualization, Twitter is a mediator that serves as a channel for the distribution and consumption of information.

As a form of social movement, transnational activism includes campaigns, cross-border movements, and a collection of participants that work to counter state actors at national and international levels. These are often guided by the ideologies and perspectives of their participants, and by similar challenges shared by these participants (Iltan and Lacey 2013). Transnational activism interacts with resources at the local level that yield collective action, which takes place in local, national and international spaces. It involves new forms of actions and ways of framing domestic issues and forms of identities that fuse local with international debates (Tarrow 2005, 3). Tarrow also conceptualized the notion of transnational activism in terms of local, national and international actions.

The bring back our girls campaign, tagged #BBOG or #bringbackourgirls, is an example of regional activism that spread from Nigeria onto the global scene, resulting in transnational collectivity. Following the abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls in northern

Nigeria in 2014, protesters and human rights activists formed a protest group and took to Twitter to seek the release of the girls, as well as challenge the government's inaction on the matter (Obi 2015). The hashtag campaign went viral on the Internet, gaining international support from the then first lady Michelle Obama and other activists and celebrities (Obi 2015). The protest that started in Nigeria as a national issue spread through Twitter, eventually garnering support from international stakeholders. The above example suggests that, indeed, transnational activism involves a range of concerns that include the movement of people and the emergence of a group of people rooted in different contexts. Such activism that involves continuous political activities that occur along transnational networks of contacts and conflicts (Tarrow 2005).

The Networked Public and the Construction of Transnational Identity

SNS serve as a networked public that allows the interaction between the individual, technology, and practice, resulting in a networked public sphere (Obi 2015). The notion of the public sphere refers to a collection of voices that come together to form a public opinion (Habermas 2015). While the previous notion of the public sphere was situated within institutions, Papacharissi (2010) observed that online contents that stem from individuals' roles in the economy, politics, civil society and culture have resulted in a collapse of the boundaries between private and public spheres. This absence of boundary has generated economic, personal, cultural and political contents that are openly distributed across borders. As a networking space, Twitter fosters the creation of a transnational public sphere. Its affordances equip individuals with the necessary tools to engage in public participation, thereby transforming them from passive spectators to creators and primary subjects.

Twitter creates a transnational identity by linking global events. For instance, Tremayne (2014) examined the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) protest in September 2011, where activists used Twitter to organize a series of protests against social inequality. In this study, the earliest Twitter messages using #OccupyWallStreet were subjected to network analysis to examine the discourses that were circulated. It also traced the movement's emergence as one among several activist movements to orchestrate a nationwide series of protests. And finally, the study examined the feature of Twitter dialogue that aided the spread of the movement. In answering these questions, Tremayne (2014) observed that Twitter as a public communicative space has technical and communicative affordances that encourage a networked public sphere. These technical affordances include the follower/following application, which is useful in the creation of networks that are not restricted by space and by Twitter hashtag (#), which aids the generation of a shared idea or issue (Chen et al. 2017; Ellison and Boyd 2013). In addition to these affordances, other

features of Twitter such as visual images and hyperlinks help to create real and concrete experiences and improve access to information.

Social network platforms promote the formation of public opinion and collective groups acting as both spaces and actors (Bourne 2017b). As actors, social networks help to disseminate information across borders. When social movements collectively frame their claims and ideas online, they express a shared membership of transnational identity by collaborating with other movements and sharing similar frames with those abroad (Bourne 2017a). While these movements may not have the scope to form a transnational public sphere, their very goal is to present ideas and exhibit features that defy boundaries. Twitter as a networked public sphere may communicate clusters according to physical space, language and nation using mechanisms such as cross-hashtagging. The latter occurs when a particular message or protest is distributed using different hashtags (Mercea and Bastos 2016). This allows engagement on a particular topic using different narratives that are specific to regions. Through these forms of engagements, Twitter and other SNS contribute in the reproduction of identity, though studies have differed on what exact forms of identity are at play in these sites (Baldauf et al. 2012). Benneth and Segerberg (2012) for instance, suggest the inclusion of a personal frame of communication when describing how online identities are reproduced. They adopt the term ‘personalized action’ to refer to individual actions and institutional loyalties that individuals engage in as a means of expressing their ideas, hopes and resentments in reaction to changes in governance or other public issues. The interaction between these personalized actions and the technology results in digital networks and a manifestation of political identifications that are based on either individual lifestyles or group orientation. Benneth and Segerberg (2012) further adopted the term ‘logic of connective action’ to describe the outcome of these personalized sets of processes that, without the framing of a collective identity, result in actions. Protest movements such as the Arab Spring for instance, began after the self-immolation of a fruit vendor in Sidi, Tunisia, and later spread to Algeria, Egypt, and other Arab regions (Dabashi 2012). This protest, which began as a consequence of the actions of one person, suggests that such actions and protest narratives can result in the formation of collective actions and group behaviors.

The notion of collective identity can however not be ignored, as individual actors through participation form a group that recognizes solidarity and collective agency (Snow 2001). In constructing identities online, Milan (2015) argued that social media are not exclusively patterned along personalized identity and connective frames, but rather amplify interactive and shared processes of collective action by providing platforms for continuous interaction. Visibility is amplified through material embodiments such as images and hyperlinks that are constantly shared to maintain relationships. Online activism involves a collection of personal identities and a sense of we-ness, provided by continuous engagements in groups that prompt juxtaposition and diffusion of identities, not restricted to any social group.

Bosch (2016) outlined the prospects of political participation and other civic engagement through the Internet, focusing on various social media platforms. Moreover, Bosch (2016) identified the potential of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and others in promoting protest behaviors among the youth. Some of these potentials include the acquisition of a wider network to reach a critical mass; the construction of transnational identities, important for protest behavior; and the creation of a hub for opinionated individuals with different perspectives, thus sparking the interest of users on different local and foreign issues.

Identity is a vital component of transnational studies. Vertovec (2001) has argued for taking account of the concept of identity when studying the dynamics of transnationalism. De Fina (2013) suggested that research on transnational identities is relevant when studying issues relating to migration and globalization. Online activism is an emerging field for political participation and civic engagements, as information distribution online provides an opportunity for networked clusters that can be used to try to mobilize the masses. When the issue of human rights is involved, the Internet, and especially social media, can be used to report on such incidents and attract global condemnation, hopefully fueling further action. As the networked society bring people closer, certain social practices and issues are at the fore of this global connectedness.

In the case of constructing a transnational identity by Iranian online protesters through the #iranianjeans hashtag, Yadin-Segal (2017) observed that prior to engaging audiences via the Internet, there were existing other physical and media spheres that were used for construction and proliferation of national cultures and identity. However, due to the use of the Internet, and especially social media, activism can flourish and hope to achieve a higher impact. This is, in part, accomplished through the construction of transnational identities.

Zappettini (2015) examined the construction of transnational identities of European citizens. The analysis revealed three different macro-strategic orientations adopted by members. These revolved around discourses of transnationalism, Europe, and identity, which included dismantling what constitutes as a nation, and the construction of new 'imagined' communities, spaces and social orders. And finally, it also involved the negotiation of different forms of European identities, expressed through transnational narratives of family, historical, and cultural connections. The author also noted the occurrence of discourses of civic participation and engagement with transnational democracy.

Theoretical Framework: Assemblage Theory

The term 'assemblage,' was originally presented by Deleuze and Guattari (2005) in their work *A thousand plateaus*. It is a term to encapsulate the highly complex social formations that exist in society (Yu 2013). Different systems are understood as follows:

“institutional organizations as assemblages of individuals, social movements as assemblages of networks communities and government as assemblages of people” (Delanda 2006, 5). These organizations interact within a social system and act both dependently and independently.

In a more recent illustration of assemblage theory, Delanda (2006) described assemblages as entities whose features are products of interactions between their parts. This implies that these assemblages may be detached from their constitutive whole and applied to other contexts. Within a social system, assemblages include both human and non-human actors that interact in a system (McFarlane and Anderson 2011). Despite the interactions between parts of an assemblage, it is important to recognize the presence of collective control and absence of hegemony in the system, which results in the equal distribution of power and agency. In the techno-human interaction we see across Twitter, human activities are shaped, fostered and limited by the nature of the technology. There is a collective interaction between the technological assemblages and social activities such as tweeting or retweeting, making them part of a system.

The notion of assemblage is further described in the forms of material/expressive roles (Delanda 2006). As material roles, they are physical embodiments and can also be expressed through language, such as nouns. They can also stabilize identities through the process of territorialization (the production of new territories) or destabilize identities by transforming to different assemblages (fragments). Delanda (2006) also described the notion of assemblage as the repeated occurrence of the same processes, being the interactions between members of the same group that might result in macro assemblages with different traits, thereby providing a link between micro and macro social processes. The activities of a particular social movement for instance, can yield different results such as the reproduction of individual and collective identities or smaller social fragments as found in the spread of the Arab uprisings and the Occupy protests. A third conceptualization of assemblage is the inclusion of expressive media that enhance assemblage through generic or linguistic resources. Within online platforms, expressive media such as social media platforms aid the expression of language and thoughts, and at the same time constitute a medium of expression.

In studying assemblages in technology, McFarlane (2009) used the term translocal assemblages to describe the notion of space and power in social movements. Translocal assemblages are made of social movements that exchange ideas, knowledge and resources across social network platforms, and are described as material, collective and discursive relationships. Twitter activist movements are therefore described as translocal assemblages that share ideas, knowledge and practices from a local to a global level. Langois (2008) suggested that rather than pay attention to the actor on Twitter, it is important to inquire into the kind of technological assemblages at play when individuals communicate online. For example, we must heed how software is organized to process, sort and rank information, making it both less or more visible. Sharma (2013) also added that tweets and

hashtags are not merely social representations, but rather are products of assemblages of Twitter, which include software interfaces, hashtags, profiles and language in use. Assemblage theory seeks to understand the relationships within networks in relation to space and power. This study particularly seeks to explore the role of Twitter assemblages in constructing transnational identity in the online activism of the #EndFGM by exploring the technological features and discourse practices as expressions of assemblage.

Methodology: Discourse Analysis

Linguistic resources form part of the assemblages of Twitter as a social media space. In the case of online social movements, these platforms provide an avenue for the expression of thoughts with hidden meanings and power relations (Wodak and Meyer 2015). In the case of #EndFGM, the discourse produced constitutes signals of identity and hidden meaning that could be made apparent by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Blommaert (2005) described discourse as all forms of meaningful human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and use. CDA involves a comprehensive analysis, rational thinking and arguments on prevailing ideas (Wodak 2011). Discourse analysis, therefore, examines discourse features as they occur in specific contexts as well as the varieties that individuals use to communicate (Blommaert 2005).

The discourse historical approach (DHA) is a strand of CDA that focuses on the relationship between fields of action, genres, discourse and text (Wodak 2011). This approach defines discourse as a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices situated within specific fields of social action. These are socially constituted and constitutive. They are related to a macro topic and linked to arguments about validity claims such as ‘truth’ (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 89). According to the DHA, every text is situated in a particular context that has a previous historical background. The analysis of discourse would therefore require a reference to the contextual and historical background of the text. The DHA recognizes the concept of power and ideology as indispensable tools in analyzing discourse. The DHA seeks to analyze what is said (text), the linguistic genres and the social, cultural and historical contexts that surround discourse. The analysis of discourse also requires a reference to the contextual and historical backgrounds of the text.

Discourse is constitutive of transnational social fields, including social movements. In examining the assemblages of social movements on Twitter, it is also important to explore beyond components. Therefore, the expressive roles of assemblages that are embedded in them must also be paid attention to. Thus, a discourse analysis in this context would examine the semiotic components of assemblages, their relationship with society, the historical origins where these discourse practices emanate from, the embedded genres and styles of users, and how these interact to form a transnational identity across Twitter (Fairclough 2013).

To study transnational engagements against female genital mutilation on Twitter, 1% of #EndFGM Twitter data, from July 4 – August, 3 2018, was crawled using Keyhole. This is a real-time hashtag tracker for Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. A total of 783 posts from 326 accounts was retrieved from the dataset. This included retweets and comments. However, to avoid repetition, only 100 original posts were randomly selected and analyzed in this study. The data was manually coded from S1- S100. Among other tweets that focus on female genital mutilation, the #EndFGM was chosen as it provided a platform for victims of female genital mutilation to share their personal experiences. To examine the hashtag within the broader context of female genital mutilation controversies, the study collected news stories shared on the Twitter links as well as other media stories relating to end FGM engagements.

The End Female Genital Mutilation Movement

The #EndFGM campaign was started in 2009 by Amnesty International and fifteen other non-governmental organizations. It was launched to raise awareness about the issue of female genital mutilation and encourages policies that would end the practice (see also www.endfgm.eu). Their advocacy over the past years has resulted in the global recognition of the movement, even resulting in a ban of the practice in some countries. Across social media platforms, the campaign has resulted in the emergence of cross-border cooperation and engagement through many hashtags such as #stopfgm, #fgmmyissues, #metoofgm among others.

This study focuses in particular on the #EndFGM hashtag and its contribution to the forming of a collective transnational identity. Transnational feminist movements have emerged in response to issues such as violence against women (Baer 2015). These movements use social media platforms such as Twitter to express their frustrations. The #yeswecan and #notallwomen, for instance, are forms of Twitter activism that were used to frame issues of discrimination against women at both translocal and transnational levels. The #yesallwomen in particular emerged in response to the killing of six female undergraduates near the University of California by Elliot Rodger, a 22-year-old male who had earlier posted videos on YouTube about his intent to punish women who refused to have sex with him (Baer 2015). This action sparked protest on the violence that some women encounter, where many recounted their ordeal using this hashtag. Baer (2015) further noted that feminist movements constructed under one hashtag demonstrate collective experiences of inequality that occur across borders.

The percentage distribution of the #EndFGM tweets across geographical space is illustrated below in Figure 1.

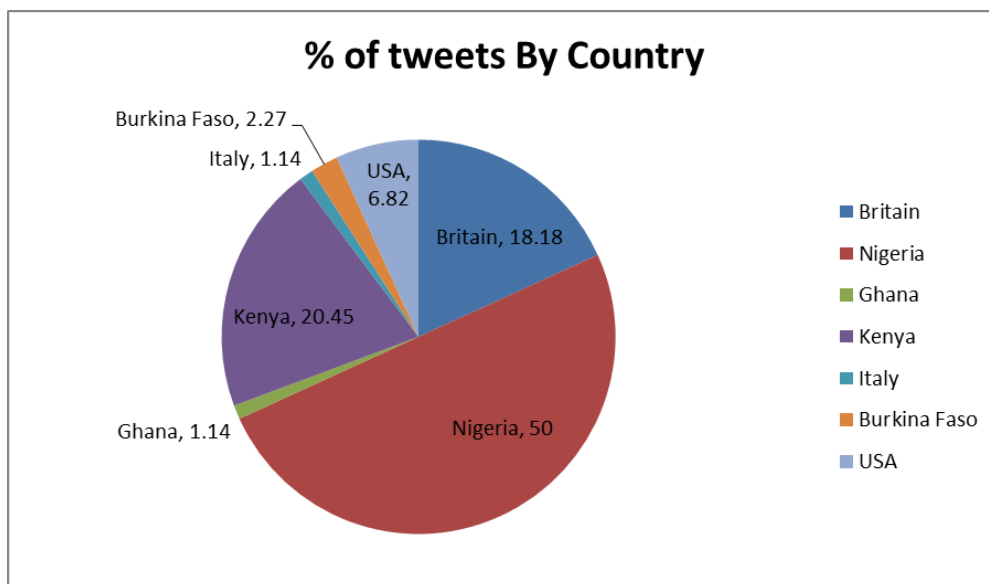


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of geolocation of #EndFGM users.

The first step of the analysis wanted to gauge where the participants of the #EndFGM campaign were tweeting from. It did this by mapping the geolocation of the users. In our data set, users are distributed across countries such as Nigeria, UK, Kenya, Gambia and other countries. Among these, Nigeria, Kenya and Britain represented the highest engagement of users, with a frequency of 50%, 20% and 18% respectively. Female genital mutilation is mainly practiced in Africa, as well as in some places in The Middle East and Asia (World Health Organization 2018). This accounts for the increased participation from users in African countries. However, other countries like Britain, Italy and the US found in the analysis show the #EndFGM transborder engagement.

Narratives of #EndFGM across Twitter as Transnational Engagement

Transnational identities are a concatenation of assemblages that include discursive practices. Although #EndFGM is focused on the elimination of female genital mutilation, the tweets cover macro issues such as engagement across borders and cultural diffusion, expressed by linguistic microstructures. One of the means of communicating local discourse across the online space is narratives. According to Wodak (2017), the memory of the past remains vital in shaping the conception of current collective identity. Hence individuals are able to use narratives of previous experiences to communicate across Twitter. Female genital mutilation is a practice embedded in the culture of local communities. Therefore, addressing it would may draw on references to past events in history, as indeed expressed in the examples below.

S13“ The thing is, the Bohra communities all over the world have kept this a

well-hidden secret, until now. Now, women are speaking up about the injustice that was done to them when they were too little to even know.”
<https://t.co/P4RiOGPtTH> #EndFGM...

S57 “The Making of Sahiyo Stories” <https://t.co/b8Sxeou3an> via @YouTube
 #ENDFGC #EndFGM #NoMoreKhatna...

S13 narrates a state of affairs in Bohra. The tweet, using an embedded link, reveals the horrors of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Bohra, a community in Pakistan. In 2012, Indian activist Tasleem set up an online petition against female genital mutilation in Bohra. This led to several other protest movements against the practice, according to Mmaka (2016). This activist reveals that the practice is part of the cultural construct of that community, and that it is practiced even across the diaspora (2016). In S57, the Sahiyo stories is a collection of narratives of women who suffered FGM that expresses the emotions of the survivors. They collectively delegitimize these practices within their immediate region.

In telling personal stories, the narrators within their immediate community construct individual identities characterized by the exclusion of their homeland and a new social belonging. While the narratives of sad experiences are constructed to arouse emotions and further participation in the #EndFGM movement, the resilience and success of survivors is also recounted to further strengthen the community. The success or refusal to be cut is expressed in the tweets below:

S59 #IdidNOTconsent to #genitalmutilation, aka #circumcision! #consent
 #pregnant #pregnancy #babyboy #babybump #momtobe #itsaboy
 #EndFGM #nofgm <https://t.co/C5JB6AX7a0>

S80 It’s school break here in Kenya and many girls will undergo FGM and child Marriage before schools re-open in September. Rescued these 2 angels in primary school from getting cut and married this weekend making them 10 girls in the last one week. #ENDChildMarriage End FGM @GMCEndFGM

In S59, the narrator uses the indexical ‘I’ to show her strength and victory in rejecting FGM. In a similar stance, S80 exposes the fate of children in Kenya who undergo FGM and early marriages during their vacations. The tweet also recounts the victory of rescuing children from such practices as a means of strengthening their commitment to the end of FGM practices. These narratives tend to dismantle the notion of nationhood that the speakers emanate from. Through narratives, individuals represent local encounters and describe themselves as in-groups or out-groups. Wodak et al. (2009) observed that

individual identities gradually unfold through narratives, creating either integration or differences. Through narratives of personal encounters, members of the groups attempt to dismantle their national identity and display complex identifications as members of a new community. These discourses convey the communal practices as unacceptable and exposes these practices to a transglobal space.

Self-Representation and Transnational Engagement

Self-representation is understood as identities that individuals take on to describe themselves, and is linked to the concepts of sameness and selfhood (Wodak et al. 2009). Sameness here is taken to mean self-representation that includes social practices that link individuals together in terms of the similarities they share. Selfhood, then, can be seen as an individual's identity in terms of traits that make them unique. Self-representation is therefore described in terms of similarities and differences. The tweets below reveal discourses of sameness and differences, as Twitter users engage in this online transnational space.

S3 “Aisha from Mali has made her commitment to end FGM. Will you?
#ihavespoken #EndFGM <https://t.co/JCdx2t>”

S17 “I will continue to speak up and protect girls who are at risk of FGM.”-
Domtila, Kenya. What are you doing to speak out?”

In S1, the user constructs an authorial identity through name-mentioning. She situates herself within her national identity, being from Mali. The user renegotiates a new identity by aligning herself with the international community that is the hashtag movement against FGM. Through this hashtag, the user becomes a member of a transnational identity. Nationhood is taken apart in the tweet above as the delegitimizing of actions and practices embedded within her local region. A transnational self is therefore established through her alignment with global values.

In S17, the user constructs her tweet using the indexical ‘I’ to express her voice. In doing so, she constructs her identity by first of all defining herself as a Kenyan, a region that practices FGM. Domtila is one of the survivors of FGM and is currently a part of grassroots activism within the region (Khanogi 2017). Though she initially defines herself in terms of a national identity, she then draws away from this by signaling a disconnect to local, regional cultural values. Rather, she connects to a global community that abhors the practice and in so doing constructs a transnational identity. This new identity emerges as a Kenyan who is not bound by the practices of FGM inherent in her region.

Inclusion

Beyond the use of media technology, Twitter activists construct transnational identities through collective group behaviors of inclusion. These are signaled through collective referents such as the collective marker ‘we.’ Snow (2001) observed that the notion of a collective identity resides in the notion of we-ness, a set of shared attributes and experiences that are constructed in contrast to an imagined set of others. In constructing transnational identity through Twitter activism, discourse structures of participants show a sense of togetherness, expressed through collective pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’. Examples of inclusiveness through pronouns is found below:

- S2 @aprilchidinma Let us speak out and take a stand to #EndFGM so that women will live a healthy life. <https://t.co/mLn4tOXgBJ>
- S17 @OlusegunMedupin RT TheGirlGen "RT MTotoNews: We're joining the wagon to end child violence in Kenya. Your voice matters. FGM ends with us. #iHaveSpoken #EndFGM TheGirlGen "
- S56 @GuilhermeBigar1RT @FndGirls: We will speak! We will break the silence! We will #EndFGM <https://t.co/p6j0UGhb7W>

In S17, the use of ‘we’ shows a sense of collective action. The tweet illustrates a collective effort towards banning FGM in Kenya. National identities are constructed in a network of social positioning that is set up through inclusion and exclusion (Farrel 2008; Wodak et al. 2009). In S17, ‘we’ is an exclusive referent that signals the activists versus the other: the Kenyan community is set up as an enemy characterized the negative practices of FGM. The user thus splits her identity along cultural differences, creating a nation that supports FGM and another national identity that fights against the practice. S2 and S56 also represent different groups pitched for battle against FGM. And S2 specifically adopts a transnational stance for all women, irrespective of their nationality.

The use of ‘us’ in S2 represents a broader frame of collective identity, encapsulating all individuals that fight violence against women along national or local lines. In S56, particularly, ‘we will speak!’ represents a collective authoritative voice for a particular cause. The ‘we’ in this context is not specific to any geographical background but frames a new community consisting of victims and survivors of FGM, as well as other advocates who strive for the cause, irrespective of their background. Another illustration of this inclusive ‘we’ is found in sameness as difference illustrated in the text below:

- S48 Yes @TonyMwebia, a true #HeforShe! We need more men and boys like you in our fight to help #EndFGM! #GlobalGoals <https://t.co/p6j0UGhb7W>

S70 @FgmLatestNews What Role Can Men Play In The Fight Against FGM? #MenENDFGM #FGM <https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/g20413598/what-role-can-men-play-in-the-fight-against-fgm/> ... via @TonyMwebia

In S48, there is a gender swap. The expression, ‘...a true he for she’ renegotiates the roles of men as women in this context. In the expression ‘we need more men like you in our fight...’ the speaker incorporates the men as part of the fight against FGM by switching their gender roles. Women are the victims of FGM and ironically, the major perpetrators of the act (World Bank 2018). In examining discourses of inclusion and exclusion, Lafkioui (2008) questions the linguistic resources that are used to create national or ethnic boundaries. Most importantly, in the context of online activism these boundaries may be blurred or could include general value sets that indicate inclusion. One example of this is how traditional gender roles are exhibited through such gender roles such as men speaking up to end FGM

In a bid to provide more collaborative practice, there is an inclusive referent that considers the male gender as part of the fight. Patriarchal cultures regard the male voice as an authoritative voice. Hence incorporating them in the fight against FGM would be useful in amplifying the voices of the protesters especially in transnational space.

Transnational Identity through Cross Border Engagements

Identity is described as socially built interaction and social practices that arise from specific contexts (Hall 2000 cited in Wodak et al. 2009). Within a transnational context, identity can be either individual or collective. Individual identity refers to features that position the individual as unique and different from others (De Fina 2015). In the #EndFGM discourse, social actors negotiate individual identity through voice. This is a process of adapting discourse choices to either create, maintain or transform institutional roles (Lam 2000). The #EndFGM promotes engagement across borders, resulting in active participation and the emergence of complex forms of identity that are not confined to specific territories. Transnational identity is constructed across translocal space, through participation in local activities that receive global attention. Such local activities brought to the limelight are cited in the examples below:

S26 Welcome and Congratulations with Youth Anti FGM-Somaliland by officially launched recently in Hargeisa, Somaliland. #EndFGM #ihavespoken #SomalilandENDFGM <https://t.co/IGIVEuhFVU>

- S35 Communities in Naroosura Village in Kenya are gathering through the work of our grassroots partner @covaw to discuss... #EndFGM...
- S37 All Londoners must play a part if we are to stop FGM says @NimkoAli #EndFGM #endchildmarriage #endfistula #SRHR #SGBV #Women...

In the tweets above, the local regions are historical constructs defined by geographical space, yet their engagements are transnational as they cut across borders. In S26, the engagement in Hargesia and Somaliland are called attention to. FGM is widely practiced in Ethiopia and is a contributing factor to the high mortality rate in the country. It is a cultural construct signifying a rite of passage in Harari, and a means to ensure virginity in Somaliland (Abathun, Sundry, and Gele 2016). The tweet constructs a new community of practice that is defined by a novel set of values that align with the international community. ‘Welcome to Somaliland’ is an open invitation to everyone, irrespective of their region.

The mentioning of a ‘grassroots partner’ in S35 recognizes the role of local engagements in the transnational fight against FGM. S37 uses the collective referent ‘all Londoners’ to incorporate a global audience in the protest movement. The text uses a specific national identity term (‘all Londoners’) as a spatial referent to connect specifically to this location. Generally, Twitter allows individuals from local and international regions to connect and integrate. Through these forms of cross border engagements, the lines between ethnic and national boundaries are blurred. This creates a new form of transnational identity, bound by solidarity and mutual support.

Strategic Language Use across Twitter

Language is part of identity construction. Studies within transnational identity examine bilingualism (language proficiency in two languages) and translanguaging as constructs of individual identity in a transnational space. Translanguaging refers to practices where speakers of more than two languages known as multilinguals, use all semiotic resources within their disposal to communicate in a multilingual setting (Krompak and Meyer 2018). Within the #EndFGM speech community, the notion of language use involves tweeting in different languages to create heterogeneity in the #EndFGM online community. While the tweets of the hashtag movement are predominantly recorded in English, the following samples were tweeted in French, which signals the platform as a heterogenous transnational community.

- S36 Toute les 10 secondes, une petite fille est victime d'une mutilation
génitale féminine à travers le monde. Il faut qu'ensemble... (every ten
seconds a little girl is a victim of female genital mutilation throughout the
world. We must come together...)
- S54 Avec l'engagement des jeunes pour l'abandon de l'excision au Sénégal
#Kebetou #Kebetou @Khadijaaa9 @ndao_diallo #EndFGM #jemeng...
(Translated 'In a meeting with youth to end female genital mutilation in
Senegal')

The tweets above are written in French suggesting these users are from French speaking regions. According to Farrel (2008), nationality is a part of alignment and realignment of identity. In this light, tweeting in French is a strategic use of language. Arguably, it is employed here not just to represent the origin of the Twitter users, but as a form of alignment to a national identity – that of being a member of a French speaking community. In S36, the user makes a declarative statement and calls on the entire world to support the movement against FGM. While the tweet addresses the entire world, using an inclusive 'we,' the use of the French language situates the user within a particular speech community. Thereby, the user locates their identity first within that context and then readjusts it to a broader context, being an online transnational community of #EndFGM activists.

The notion of transnationalism incorporates the representation of culture and nationhood across borders. While the virtual sphere is characterized by the absence of physical boundaries, the use of French among mainly English tweets can be seen as a representation of the local culture that the tweets emanate from. In S54, the message conveyed is a meeting to end FGM that was held in Senegal. The speaker mentions his country, Senegal, as a means of representing his community. Lafkioui (2008) observed that speech or language use is a source of exercising power and a means of constructing and reconstructing identity by oppressed groups.

By adapting to a global movement, S36 and S54 do not eliminate their roots, but use a particular language (French) to exercise control over discourse and reach out to individuals who share the same values and norms in their local space, to then connect them to the outer world. During the Tunisian revolution, Poell and Darmoni (2013) observed that some of the tweets were written in local languages in a bid to address particular publics. Although French is an international language, it is arguably used here to create a link between the local audience within their immediate environment on one hand, and the international community on the other hand.

Repetitions as Assemblages

Feminist tweets such as the #EndFGM are accepted and shared because they address issues of human rights and inequality. Sharma (2013) has attributed the contagious nature of certain hashtags to their memetic nature. That is, their ability to replicate as they are shared through retweets, and they are accepted based on their relevance and web features. In Twitter communication, there are two key players that promote the duplication of texts: the social actor and the mediator.

Mercea and Bastos (2016) described the actor as an influencer that facilitates recurrent exposure to multiple sources. In the analysis of the #EndFGM tweets, certain actors were described as top influencers of the movement. They were characterized by production of repeated tweets on the topic, which serve as a drive to action for members of the community. According to the analysis of the #EndFGM on August 3, 2018, the accounts @korieUNFPA and @TheGirlGen had the highest number of impressions, retweets and mentions as shown in Figure 2. They can be described as social influencers that promote the spread of content due to their engagement.

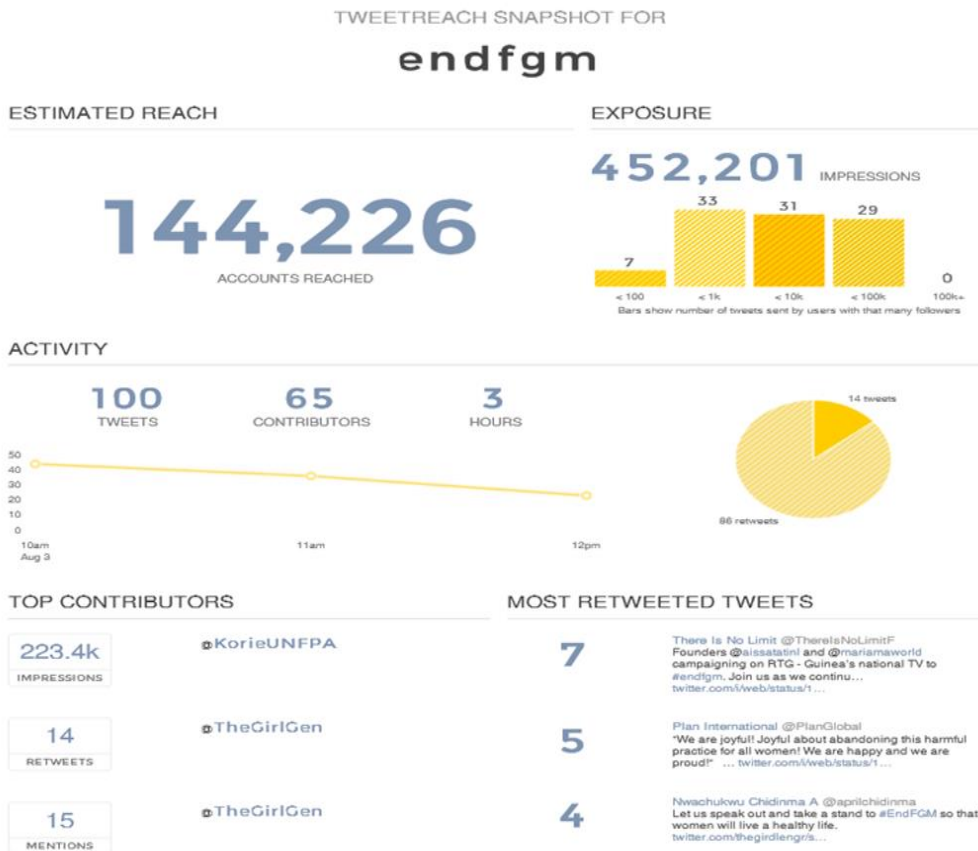


Figure 2. Retweets and top contributors (www.tweetreach.com).

The key contributors @korieUNFPA and @TheGirlGen have a significant number of original tweets that have received endorsements by being retweeted and liked, as well as a healthy popularity index because of their number of followers, daily engagement, and rate of impression. Interestingly, @KorieUNFPA and @TheGirlGen are Twitter accounts of non-governmental organizations. These are the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and The Girl Generation, which is involved in women's rights. The organizations are made up of members from different countries. Their involvement and endorsement by other Twitter users from different nationalities shows national diversity, with a mutual focus on the global issue of ending FGM. Thus, constructing a transnational identity.

Retweeting as a form of repetition could be described as an assemblage. This helps to reiterate the conditions of the victims, resulting in the spread and reinforcement of the users' stance (Sharma 2013) through Twitter activism and through the collective action of users, irrespective of their backgrounds. The mediators of Twitter assemblage, as Mercea and Pink (2015) argue, include Twitter functions that allow the duplication of information, such as retweets and hashtags. These Twitter assemblages allow for the convergence of a topic and its users, resulting in collective behavior. Beyond the role of social influencers as instruments of repetition, the repetition of the hashtag and retweets afforded by the Twitter algorithm, deemphasizes the role of the individual on the social platform. This results in a collective interaction of affection. In other words, this is a situation where all Twitter users are able to express their sentiments by sharing the same message.

One of the Twitter users recounted her personal experience from genital mutilation, as shown in S73. The story, which appealed to the emotions of readers, resulted in fifteen retweets and sixteen likes.

S73 When I got married it took my husband 2 days to try and penetrate me. So I had to be cut again for the 3rd time. I have scars all over. You are left with a hole at the end which you use for menstruation, urine and for giving birth [sic],” https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2018/08/07/my-wounds-have-made-me-an-anti-fgm-warrior-says-marsabit-activist_c1798783 ...

The story above graphically expresses the horrors of FGM. The retweet assemblage aids the spread of such messages as they tap into the emotions of users and play on affect. Such messages are reproduced, resulting in others sharing their personal experiences across the platform too.

Beyond the use of retweets for the duplication of experiences, Twitter hashtags also promote repeated encounters by linking global events. One of the challenges, especially in developing countries, is poor access to education. Female children tend to be most affected by this. Through hashtags such as #EndFGM, global issues are brought to the fore, as illustrated in the tweets below:

- S9 @Leah_Z_M_Black More Leah Black Retweeted 28TooMany
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaLuLnqgs84> ... - “for the last 7 years we’ve reached over 15,000 girls” “we really need to invest in girl’s education” - Some of the inspiring words of Nice Leng’ete @Amref_Kenya #EndFGM who has helped to ban #FGM in Maasai communities Leah Black added,...#EndFGM
- S10RT @FORWARD_Youth: Pregnant school girls to get maternity leave
<https://t.co/MVMG65qve7> #EndFGM #endchildmarriage #endfistula #SRHR #SGBV Successful ending for #NsaKeeno to #EndFGM and #ChildMarriage campaign team in URR. The final screening and campaign was held in Nunuyel village, Jimara Constituency, Gambissara Ward, URR. Thanks to @UNICEFGambia for support @MOYSTheGambia...
- S40RT @FORWARD_Youth: No girl should be dying for virginity says @HiboWardere #EndFGM #endchildmarriage #endfistula #SRHR #SGBV #Womensrights...

S9 draws attention to global issues like the education of female children and ending gender disparity in education. The tweet connects with the rest of the world to discuss the global issue of education by linking the advocacy for equal education with the quest to end FGM. In S10 and S40, other global issues such as discrimination against women, child marriage and gender-based violence become entangled in broader issues regarding human rights as they are interconnected through Twitter hashtags.

Interestingly, the rights of women and their inclusion in all spheres is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2018). Through hashtag, these events are linked to other happenings and advocacy. Hashtags reproduce these events, also in the context of FGM advocacies creating a reawakening for women’s rights activism. Generally speaking, the emergence of hashtags and retweets as repetitive discourses create new forms of behavior produced through feminist assemblages on Twitter. These behaviors have been described as contagious collective behaviors (Sampson 2012).

The Hashtag as a Twitter Assemblage

The hashtag is one of the tools that allows users to categorize, manage and retrieve information on Twitter. It is also useful in tracking crises and international events through

repetitions that result in their adoption and use by online participants. Hashtags involve a combination of form and content that facilitates user participation, and are organized into content and groups (Sharma 2013). As groups, hashtags create emergent communities that amplify a collective message, making it prominent. The #EndFGM is an example of an adhoc community that consist of individuals who have no personal relationship with each other and are only bonded by the social cause they represent. In the context of #EndFGM, the hashtag does not only create awareness but is used to reproduce new forms of solidarity. Through the repetition of this phenomenon, individuals across borders are able to align to a common cause. The use of the hashtag is exemplified in the tweets below:

S40 No girl should be dying for virginity says @HiboWardere #EndFGM
#endchildmarriage #endfistula #SRHR #SGBV #Womensrights

S11 We can change people's attitudes by creating awareness.
<https://t.co/hKxAOMuoGT> #banFGM #EndFGM #abuse #Kenya
#women #children...

In S40 above, the #EndFGM creates a transnational digital connection between events that occur in different countries. In 2016, the UNFPA reported the story of Noorjahan, an Afghanistan woman who had suffered from obstetrics fistula (an internal issue that can lead to incontinence and problems giving birth) for 49 years before receiving treatment (UNFPA 2016). This case and that of other sufferers sparked the campaign #endfistula. Through hashtags, these events that occur across different spaces are linked. Twitter enables victims of these experiences to form a collective identity. In S11, the hashtag is used to connect other forms of social movements and social issues such as child marriage, and to strengthen the movement for women's rights generally. Another illustration of hashtags in raising cross border deliberation is illustrated in the tweet below:

S12 Does what you eat trigger early menopause? - BusinessDay : News you
can trust <https://t.co/jLfAfX0zrU> While we push for #EndFGM, let's be
done with the superstition. @ekeneodigwe @somto_ugwu
<https://t.co/gCvERHZxG1>

Women's health continues to raise issues and form strings of solidarity among women globally. In the tweet, the author connects her observations about general myths regarding women's health and wellbeing, emanating from different contexts, to the hashtag #EndFGM. The challenges of women from childhood to adulthood is indirectly presented here through the discourses on menopause. This new theme serves as an indicator of

different forms of battles that women face. Hashtags therefore create a link for these issues to be collectively identified.

Bonnilla and Rosa (2015) observed that hashtags have the intertextual ability to link a range of tweets on a given topic or on different topics. Women's rights is a global issue that cuts across different themes. It subsumes the victimization of women in their homes and in society in general. A similar case of using hashtags to engage in global discourses is reiterated in S11. In the tweet, the use of #children, #women, and #abuse connects to other issues such as gender-based violence. Children are the worst hit in practices of female genital mutilation. Despite that, the issues of poor access to education, teenage pregnancies and early marriages are practices that are common. Twitter hashtags in this context act as a tool for negotiating transnational identity. It does by linking a group of people with the same goals, aspirations, values and norms, and in this case also the same discursive practices, to the movement. The goal here is to end all forms of violence against both women and children, represented through the constellation of the different hashtags relating to similar issues (Murthy 2013).

CONCLUSION

Twitter provides a platform for the discussion of global issues and the expression of solidarities towards mutual challenges that cut across international boundaries. In this study, it is shown that online activist movements negotiate transnational identities through personal narratives that describe their selves in terms of local and transnational space. The study further reveals that participants in online protest movements describe themselves by denying negative national and cultural values, and by redefining themselves in terms of their groups' goals. This is achieved through discursive practices that signal inclusion and exclusion.

Twitter assemblages such as hashtags, retweets and likes help the spread of information characterized by transborder engagements. Twitter, as a technological assemblage, helps in enhancing transnational engagement by amplifying local practices on transnational online platforms. From the study, participation in the #EndFGM campaign is shared across countries with places where FGM is less practiced, such as the UK, who are also promoters of the movement. The technological platform contributes to the alignment of individuals in this local cause, and its spread as a global cause. The Twitter network as a media assemblage is useful in constructing transnational identities through users' contributions to global issues via activism. This is made possible through the linking of individuals from different cultural and historical backgrounds, who share similar interests and values, resulting in the formation of a new transnational identity.

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Chapter 7

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LGBT ACTIVISM IN INDIA

Paromita Pain

Reynolds School of Journalism,
University of Reno, Nevada

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how LGBT activists in India use social media to educate, counter negative portrayals, and mobilize audiences for social change. It presents the analysis of tweets and Facebook posts over 20 months from January 2016 to August 2017, to understand how messages were framed, what the common topics were, and how social media was used during the Right to Privacy controversy that shook India in early 2017. In-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken with 20 LGBT activists from various Indian cities in order to understand how they use social networking sites in their activism, the decisions involved in the framing of messages, and the advantages and disadvantages of SNS.

Keywords: SNS, LGBT, India, activism, Twitter

INTRODUCTION

The concept of using social media to protest and organize is not new. As early as 1996, scholars have argued that online discussion spaces would help create a conversational democracy, enabling “citizens and political leaders to interact in new and exciting ways” (Corrado and Firestone 1996, 17). Globally, the Arab Spring suggested that to some extent, social media can serve as a powerful tool of mobilization. This was further demonstrated in the Occupy and #MeToo movements in India and the USA. Twitter’s active global users

averaged at 335 million in the second quarter of 2018 (Statista 2018). Facebook had 2.23 billion monthly active users (Statista 2018).

Worldwide, digital communication technologies powered by social networking sites (SNS) like Twitter and Facebook have generated discussion regarding their ability to encourage and ensure the political participation of citizens, something central to democracy (Chadha and Guha 2016). In countries like India, rising numbers of internet users (213 million), of which about 93 million use Facebook and 33 million are on Twitter (Toshniwal et al. 2014), have established that social media has emerged as a new arena for public discourse, where citizens discuss concerns and air grievances about different issues. In India, recent events have demonstrated that social media like Twitter and Facebook have become spaces for online activism. This is especially so for LGBT communities, who have traditionally been marginalized, socially as well as legally (Chadha and Guha 2016). Online, citizens and activists work to ensure that “existing hierarchies of power and influence would be flattened, any individual would have an equal share of voice independent of their status and politics would develop an inclusive and participatory character” (Lilleker et al. 2015, 3). Conversations surrounding sexuality, and especially alternative sexuality, used to be restricted to the private domain but have now found a space online (Srivastava 2014).

This chapter examines the educational potential of social media, as well as its ability to mobilize people in a developing country like India. It does this by focusing attention on how activists framed messages and mobilized audiences during the Right to Privacy controversy that shook India at the start of 2017. This chapter presents a qualitative analysis of a corpus of 4,500 tweets and Facebook posts, spanning a period of 20 months, from January 2016 to August 2017. It examines how LGBT activists used social media as a tool to create awareness and reach audiences hidden away from the mainstream. This study analyses social media posts prior to, and after the Right to Privacy issue, in order to provide a wholistic examination of the role social media played in these circumstances. Interviews were conducted with 20 LGBT activists from the cities of Bombay, Delhi, Hyderabad, Pune Kolkata, Chennai, Kanpur and Bangalore. These throw light on how SNS were used in respondents’ activism, on what decisions were involved in the framing of messages, and on the advantages and disadvantages of SNS. With rising social media users in the country, it is interesting to understand how social media might be affecting the nature, reach and character of Indian activism, especially in a digitally emerging ecosphere. At the outset, it is important to mention that while this chapter analyses hierarchies of power and influence, there are certain dimensions of Indian society that are not explored, namely the rural-urban divide and caste. The issue of caste is complex and its many aspects are too intricate to be adequately examined within the scope of this study. This is an acknowledged weakness of this study.

Activism, which goes beyond conventional politics, is key to maintaining the health of a democracy in a country like India where corruption is rife and human rights are blatantly

violated (Lewis 2014). India is ranked 81st in Transparency International's 2018 global corruption index. Few studies have examined the impact of social media in a country that is presented as being a strong global economic power (Graham 2011), yet is still characterized by deep structural, social and political inequalities and digital divides. Unlike the west, India's deep digital divides ensure that activists cannot take the reach of internet and social media technologies for granted. How do they then use social media for audience mobilization and activism? As this analysis reveals, social media in the country acts as an online space that allows for "intertextuality, or cross-reference between social context, public events and developments, and the political scene." (Warnick and Heineman 2007, ix) There are, however, certain factors that diminish this potential. The interviews reveal that while technology serves as a strong platform to get a message out and rally audiences, cultural norms and behavioral practices constrain social media use and impede the reach of messages.

LGBT RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Before delving into an examination of LGBT activism online, it is important to understand the state of LGBT rights in India. India has a long history of violence and persecution against the LGBT community. LGBT populations have little to no rights in the country since homosexuality is considered a crime 'against the laws of nature' in the country. It is therefore a societal taboo. In ancient times, homosexuality was celebrated in poetry (known as Rekhti, a genre of poetry from the late 1700s that describes erotic lesbian encounters) and in Hinduism, men and women were worshipped with men often giving birth. Sexuality, depicted as a part of divinity, can be found in the amorous sculptures of the temples of Khajuraho that are consecrating acts of love. But British rule in India changed this humanistic and enlightened attitude. The British had banned homosexuality with Section 377. The dreaded section of the Indian penal code dates back to 1861 and criminalized sexual activities that were "against the order of nature," including homosexual activities and non-procreative sex (Rao and Jacob 2014). Following widespread protests by citizens and activists in 2009, the Supreme Court did overturn the law and for a brief period homosexuality was considered legal. However important and influential this step was, it did little to stem the relentless hate against the community.

Gay populations face extreme harassment and persecution by the police and vigilante groups. In the cities, the police often harass them with little cause. There is widespread misuse of laws as well. False police reports stating homosexual activities are often filed to avenge petty personal grudges. In rural areas this persecution can take on horrific forms. For example, Rajesh Yadav, 25 and living in the small town of Bilaspur in central India, said she has been gang-raped multiple times and beaten with a brick because of her sexuality (she identifies as a gay cross-dresser) in a profile for the *New York Times* (Schultz

2018). Another case involved Dr Ramchandra Siras, a professor in a renowned university. He was filmed against his will while engaged in a consensual homosexual act by a television channel that forcefully entered his house (Agha 2015). This case received wide publicity and demonstrated clearly how precarious and unsafe the status of the LGBT community in the country, in spite of homosexuality being legal at the time. Then, in a ruling that left civil society organizations as well as the LGBT community stunned, the Supreme Court in 2013 outlawed homosexuality in the country once more. Conversely, the Right to Privacy was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2017 in a move that provided some protection at least to this marginalized group.

The Right to Privacy law was a response to the compulsory registration of citizens' biometric and personal details by the Indian government. Citizens were given a 12-digit random number to serve as a unique identifier, much like the social security system in the USA. Considered the world's largest biometric ID system, it has been hailed by World Bank Chief Economist Paul Romer as "the most sophisticated ID program in the world." (Rodrigues 2017). But concerns arose about the privacy and security of this data and its use and abuse by commercial organizations. The Right to Privacy petition was filed to protect these freedoms and ensure that consent and accountability remained guaranteed rights.

The Right to Privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Indian Constitution. The Right to Privacy in India has developed through a series of decisions over the past 60 years. The name of the law refers to the concept that one's personal information is protected from public scrutiny. As the NRP reported, "laws that currently criminalize homosexuality could now be struck down on the grounds that what consenting adults do is private" (McCarthy 2017). In a press release, Amnesty International (2017) said the right to privacy that the court defended "is closely linked to the exercise of several other rights, from what people say online to who they love to what they eat," adding that the ruling could be "a game-changer." While it was too late for Dr Siras and many others like him, this was an important legal declaration for the Indian gay population.

The issue generated much discussion that revolved around issues of consent, privacy and participation. LGBT activists were quick to recognize the power of this moment to enhance their advocacy and extend their education outreach work. While the usual methods of talking to the press and organizing protests and walkathons were also done, social media was used to ensure that voices that found little space in the mainstream got a chance to be heard. As one of the activists from Pune said: "We put out posts on Facebooks in our groups and often left them 'public' so that besides our group, others could see and understand what this was about." India has a partially free press and the English medium press often writes highly favorably about gay and homosexual issues. However, social norms still force people to either stay in the closet or lead lives where they have families and gay partners, secret or otherwise. Since coming out in India is still taboo and few live openly gay lives,

social media is often seen as a safe space with its closed Facebook groups and anonymous Twitter accounts.

SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

The uptake of the Internet and social media in India has been extensive. From the outset, Twitter was a space for open protest in the country. The online protests against the Radia tapes are an example. The scandal, broken by the online magazine *Open* and involving prominent journalists, saw an onslaught of outrage with trending hastags like #barkhagate, #Radiagate, #firevirbarkha, #firevir, #mediamafia, #cleanmedia, #shamemedia, #medialies #corruptmedia, #radiatapes, #dalamedia, #paidmedia.

Following the ghastly Delhi rape incident in 2012, different hastags were created, underscoring the influence and impact of social media and especially Twitter. The gang rape and murder of the 23-year-old physiotherapy intern, called Jyoti Singh Pandey, drew global attention to the issue of women's safety in the country (Poell and Rajagopalan 2015). Journalists, activists and women's organizations communicated through Twitter and helped make connections around the issues of the protest and events (ibid).

Journalists, feminist activists, students, and young middle-class women and men are among the most active social media users (Belair-Gagnon et al. 2014). Hastags about women's health, breaking the silence around taboo topics, and protesting for the reinstatement of basic rights saw a rise in the period from 2015 to early 2016. In November 2015, one of the most ancient and prominent shrines in India called Sabarimala Temple banned the entry of women fearing the polluting effects of menstruation on its holiness (Anand 2016). The temple also made a demand for machines that would scan women and prevent menstruating women from entering the premises (International Business Times 2015). This inspired the 20-year-old college student Nikita Azad to start the #HappyToBleed campaign, dubbing it 'An Initiative Against Sexism'. BBC India reported that "Since its launch [...] #HappyToBleed has received a lot of responses, especially from young urban Indian women" (BBC 2015). The term "happy" is used here to mock those who believe menstruation is impure. With the tagline of #SmashPatriarchy, the Facebook page had 8,000 likes by February 2015 and organized an event that attracted 1,000 people to show support.

THE IMPLICATIONS

The proliferation of computers and the Internet have enabled popular access to social media, but do the numbers signal a real revolution? The market research firm *eMarketer* reported that Twitter accounts for only 17% of Indian social network users (PTI 2015).

India however has been projected to have the largest Facebook user base, and most users access the site via their mobile phones (eMarketer 2018). Market reports from the year 2014 show that India had over 198 million Internet users and was ranked only behind China and the United States. A total of 38% of users are in the age bracket 25-34 and connect to the Internet mostly at home, school or work (eMarketer 2018). In 2014, the number of Internet users in India amounted to 213 million, of which about 93 million use Facebook and 33 million use Twitter (Patel 2014). Men dominate statistics in making up 61% of users, while a mere 39% of women have access. Driving this is also the rise of affordable smartphones and cost-effective Internet packages. As the *Quartz* reported, “Internet usage by mobile in India is striking compared to that in most other countries.” (Bhattacharya 2017). This suggests that working for LGBT rights in the online sphere may be an effective way to create more equality.

Arguably, social media platforms may have positively altered how communication occurs. However, one cannot assess the technology alone without considering the communication behaviors within the system (Ahn 2011). Even though more of the population is online, gender stereotypes persist. While protesting the issue of women’s entry to temples, a noted journalist in Tamil Nadu was called “prostitute” on Twitter. Her Facebook space was violated with trolls posting comments like “get ready to be ...sister. You are no one’s sister.” This of course isn’t the first instance of online harassment. Female journalists are routinely harassed, according to The International Journalists Network, which reported that Indian journalist Dhanya Rajendran was vilified online just for criticising a movie on Twitter in 2017.

While Twitter appears to substantially lower the barrier for Indian citizens to participate in activism and activist communication, using social media to raise awareness and emphasize the need for things such as personal liberty and safety has its own weaknesses (Ahmed et al. 2013). Is raising awareness and hastags on SNS enough to ensure change? This is certainly contested and much debated. In the area of gender violence, Carstensen (2014) has shown that while hastags like #MooreandMe and #aufschrei play a unique role in highlighting feminist issues, it is important to ensure that one attracts the attention of mainstream media as well (Guha 2015). Yet social media allows an interactive and decentralized environment that offers a cost-effective way for organizations to mobilize supporters, foster dialogic interactions with large audiences, and attract attention to issues that might otherwise be ignored by traditional media (Guo and Saxton 2014; Bortree and Seltzer 2009; Lovejoy and Saxton 2012).

But as Poell and Rajagopalan (2015) have shown, while news of gender violence is “everywhere” on Twitter, its limited user base substantially reduces its potential for dialogue. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context. Less than 20 percent of the Indian population has Internet access, and only a small percentage of these users are on Twitter (Poell and Rajagopalan 2015). The pictures posted on the #SafecityIndia Twitter account (conducting a campaign for making Indian cities safer), for example, show urban

women with access to sophisticated computer equipment. According to the 2011 Census, the majority (68.84%) of the Indian population lives in villages. There is little being done to include their voices on such platforms. Besides aspects of Twitter being inaccessible to a large part of the Indian population, feminist researcher Guha (2015) emphasizes that hashtag campaigns are less likely to succeed in countries like India unless they can converge with mainstream media. In a similar vein, Chadha and Harlow (2015) noted in their study of online activists in India that the limited reach of the Internet was not an issue, but to be truly effective, their advocacy needed to have offline reach as well.

My experiences as an ethnographic researcher, examining citizen journalism in some of the remotest and poorest parts of the country, has shown me a reality where in certain pockets of the country hashtag feminism has not made a positive difference. Much of its ineffectiveness can be attributed to the lack of education, absence of reliable Internet infrastructure, and a patriarchy that keeps women from education and limits their access to technology. For example, in areas like Chhattisgarh, whose populations are poor and tribal, how does SNS as tools of activism help? The 2014 case in the Shahjahanpur village, Uttar Pradesh, where a 14-year-old was dragged out of her home and set on fire for resisting her rapists (Sabin 2014) is a case in point. Unlike the Nirbhaya case in the capital Delhi, this horrific incident happened far away from the mainstream focus and thus there was little protest surrounding her demise.

In India's villages and unnamed hamlets, traditional media like the newspaper and radio hold much more sway. That is why Guha's (2015) argument is important: hashtags have to garner and sustain the attention of both mainstream English and local language media, to ensure that broader audience engagement occurs and there can be meaningful debate. It is in this frame of mind that I set out to examine how marginalized populations, like the LGBT communities and activists in India, may be using SNS in their advocacy and education work. The two main questions this study focuses on are: (a) How did LGBT advocates frame their messages during the Right to Privacy campaign in order to mobilize and educate the public?; and (b) How effective do LGBT activists think SNS are in their advocacy, education and outreach work?

RESULTS

There were three main purposes for which SNS were used. First was educating the public and LGBT communities about their rights. Second was articulating and advocating their demand for a more equitable society and laws. And third was outreach: reaching out to hidden populations who had little access to LGBT resources and answering their various questions focused on rights and health. As some of the activists mentioned, this was the most important aspect of their work on SNS. As the analysis of the tweets showed, the advocates were very focused on the issue of the Right to Privacy to educate the general

public about LGBT rights and the implications of the Act. SNS were used extensively in their work. The activists interacted with various people on Twitter and Facebook. As one interviewee said, “We use social media to talk about LGBT issues all the times. But here was a chance to talk to audiences who were not a part of the community, to explain to everyone how this would affect them as well as the LGBT community.”

While members of the LGBT community, human rights activists, and feminists were among the majority of those who either responded to the tweets and Facebook comments posted, members of the general audience, too, asked questions or commented on the messages. Activists and feminists were identified from the bios posted on their SNS profiles, which clearly stated for example, “proudly gay,” “staunch feminist,” “equality for women and LGBT,” and other identifiers. Respondents who could not be clearly identified have been considered as members of the general public for the purpose of this analysis. Activists (not necessarily for the LGBT cause) showed their support, often retweeting and reposting Facebook messages that talked about the importance of the Right to Privacy for LGBT populations. Other users liked posts, as well as tweeted messages of support for the demand of basic rights. But what was also visible, and especially so on Twitter, was the number of responses that were extremely disrespectful and abusive. Interviews with the activists threw a greater light on this issue, and this will be discussed in greater depth later in the analysis.

FRAMING THEIR MESSAGES

Activists framed their messages at the outset in a way that would appeal to general audiences. Much of the framing was thematic, rather than episodic. Episodic news frames are those that apply a broad lens to the coverage of the issue – focusing on individual case studies and discrete events (Benjamin 2007). In contrast, thematic news frames are those that apply a wide-angle lens to the coverage of the issue – focusing on trends over time and highlighting contexts and environments (Benjamin 2007). For example, one tweet read “Your information is your own. No one owns it.” Another stated that “Governments have no right to your private matters. What you do in your bedroom is your own.” The most popular themes were those about the question of rights for LGBT populations. Tweets and Facebook posts focused on why such matters should be looked at through the lens of human rights, and then went on to explain the Right to Privacy and its importance in extending this right. For instance, one Facebook post starts out asking “What do you think is privacy? Why is it even important?” and then goes on to explain “The right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution.”

Most tweets and posts asked questions, being designed to elicit responses. As the activists said, posts are designed to evoke thought or educate audiences but also to ensure

that they have a way of responding. “Reactions must be more than just Facebook buttons or retweets,” said one activist. But not all posts are designed to be educative or ensure a reaction. Often when activists tweet or post on Facebook, especially from their personal accounts, they are just giving their opinions on issues. For example, one activist tweeted “Finally a step in the right direction” when he heard about the Right to Privacy.

Tweets were used as teasers to then provide richer, more complex information on Facebook pages. Tweets on how the Right to Privacy would affect LGBT populations often included links to Facebook pages where people could find more information. These Facebook pages also had videos. While Facebook had the space for extended dialogue to take place through its comments on posts, Twitter with its limited characters saw activists and audiences use more gifs, memes and videos to exchange information. In fact, videos were an oft used mechanism on Twitter.

A count of the tweets, retweets and Facebook messages showed that 350 videos were used to exchange information. The majority of these were on Twitter. In response to one tweet that said “LGBT right may be nonexistent, but you should not be harassed for your choices” a video was posted where only voices could be heard. These were asking if the Right to Privacy would mean that they, living in a small town in India, would also be protected. This video was particularly poignant. The voice overs were clearly male and speaking in Hindi. They stated that they were afraid to reveal their identities and were interested in knowing more about LGBT resources. The activists interviewed noted that these men were directed to a closed Facebook page where they were given counselling and access to other resources.

The tweets and Facebook posts were episodic, focused on the Right to Privacy act. Activists explained this as another instance of gay rights being marginalized in the country to the extent that only when the debate was public they could actually actively publicise LGBT rights. Activists were particularly pleased with the issues that the Right to Privacy was raising. As one activist said, “For once it is something that concerns the general public, and which can be particularly useful for LGBT people as well. It is helping us discuss issues of privacy and emphasize that private lives are private without it being an LGBT focused issue.” This is also why there was an urge to ensure dialogue. Messages asked questions, offering people the possibility to spark change through conversations. Thus, tweets often were framed as “The right to privacy is a human right. What do you think?” On Facebook, posts asked “Does the government have a right to collect such intimate data? What do you think they will do with it?” Such posts often had a hastag that would enable conversations to be carried onto Twitter as well. As such, the activists used posts to ensure that audiences could use both the Twitter and Facebook platforms to have conversations. By using hastags on Facebook posts, and directing audiences from Twitter to Facebook, dialogues could easily shift from one platform to the other. The activists that were interviewed explained that they did this to ensure that a wider range of voices could be heard.

The activists were very adamant about the positive difference that SNS made in their work. The reach and ability of SNS to direct conversations, especially when they needed audiences to rally, was unappreciated. They were also of the opinion that SNS was helpful, both during moments of urgency when catching and retaining audience attention was key, and during moments of calm, when issues of LGBT rights were not in the public domain. In those times, SNS still served as portals for counselling and education. “Activism does not begin or end with publicizing issues when laws were in question” said one respondent from Kolkata. LGBT activism also involved education and outreach. As the interviews showed, the LGBT population in the country was extremely marginalized and social biases were so prevalent and strong that even basic rights that people took for granted were often blatantly denied to them. For example, one of the interviewees told of a case involving a graduate student who was constantly teased and harassed in college. The activist noted that the boy had even been threatened with rape. There were no resources on campus that he could use. Even the police teased him and said that he “deserved” all the abuse he got. Harried and unable to find help, he reached out to some of the groups on Twitter. They were able to direct him to counseling groups, some of which were online and free to use.

SNS have enabled activists to provide counselling over chat and video conversation, which were confidential and cost nothing. Connecting with audiences that were hard to reach, especially in smaller towns and villages, is an important aspect of the freedoms that SNS have provided. Social media has been used to organize marches and protests. As the activists reiterated, many journalists and media organizations would often reach out to them via SNS, soliciting interviews, or just asking for their opinion on issues. This connection with the media was deemed vital, according to several interviewees. This confirms Guha’s (2015) point about the mainstream media. While SNS were useful to reach out to different audiences and organize responses to pressing LGBT issues and questions, these networks also enabled access to the media. “Often our tweets are cited in articles” said activists. “Social networks are useful but there is no denying that we also need the strength and legitimacy that the media can provide.”

But with the reach and the freedoms that SNS provided the LGBT activists also came some distinct disadvantages. As the activists described, an online presence definitely helped, especially when news was breaking around issues like the Right to Privacy. But social norms and behaviors negative to the cause also played out in the online space.

TROLLS AND MORE

On the surface, it may seem like LGBT issues can be discussed freely and easily. This is especially so in the English media. But the reality of life for most LGBT populations is extremely hard. They suffer discrimination in many ways, as shown by the examples given above. That is why the protection of identities is an extremely important aspect of the

outreach work that activists do. “Often times people participate in a social conversation only to later come back and reveal that being gay they also need help, for example, to come out,” said one activist in Kolkata. These requests are often made anonymously. However, activists noted that trolls often request to join closed groups under the guise of needing support, and then use the platform to abuse, insult and threaten its members.

In fact, trolling is one of the biggest drawbacks of using SNS, stated the activists. “We have been threatened with rape and murder,” said one activist. “Rape and murder are the most common.” Also common are opinions like “this is against our culture” and “you are sick [...] in the head and body”. The LGBT population is portrayed as “dirty,” “depraved,” and “unnatural,” undeserving of help or sympathy. Activists noted that Twitter is the worst platform for these kinds of reactions. In the current political climate, vigilante groups claiming to be protectors of Indian culture threaten and abuse LGBT activists online. A few of the activists pointed out that lesbians and women activists had it the worst. “It is a combination of typical misogyny and of course the prevailing anti-gay sentiment,” said one activist, interviewed in Mumbai.

DIGITAL DIVIDES

The so-called ‘great Indian digital divide,’ mentioned above, also impacts how SNS can be used and the reach they have, especially in the area of LGBT activism. As the groups interviewed for this study pointed out, most people knew how to use mobile phones, but did not know enough about using the internet to actually get on Twitter or Facebook and join groups. This was the group that they were most concerned about. “These are usually those living in villages with very little access to resources,” said one activist. “Nor are they able to access online resources.” Some of these villages have datacenters where a computer with an internet connection may be available. However, “These spaces lack privacy,” explained one activist who had been working with transgender populations in Chhattisgarh, a state in Central India. “To discuss sexuality here would mean exposing themselves to open ridicule and perhaps more.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The activists were certain that SNS had helped create new online discussion spaces, enabling “citizens and political leaders to interact in new and exciting ways” (Corrado and Firestone 1996, 17). But while their work indeed centered on ensuring that “existing hierarchies of power and influence would be flattened” (Lilleker et al. 2015, 3), they knew that much more needed to be done. Indeed, populations that are on the margins and don’t

have access or the ability and knowledge to use social media, still need further assistance to become a part of the larger dialogue on LGBT rights in the country.

Indians may be among the most prolific users of Facebook. However, the activists interviewed said that there were still populations that need other means of communications. While SNS were extremely useful in their outreach and educational labour, trolling often made their work difficult. Twitter activism is effective in India, but women and other marginalized groups like LGBT activists are routinely harassed. Similarly, journalists are even abused on Twitter for seemingly inconsequential issues like giving a movie a bad review.

Mainstream, dominant social norms and views about homosexuality being “unnatural” played out in the SNS sphere. In addition, trolls routinely targeted activists with threats and abuse. An extreme gender bias was also seen in the particular targeting of lesbians and openly lesbian users of SNS. The male gender can be seen as dominant users of the Internet in India, so the question that often arises is whether getting more women to populate these spaces would ensure more feminist, safer, diverser and more humane social media spaces? Besides trolling, there is no denying that “Twitter, its limited user base substantially reduces its potential for dialogue” (Poell and Rajagopalan 2015). The last Census reports in 2011 showed that most of India’s population (68.84%) lives in rural areas. Including these voices could ensure that SNS become more truly democratic, in the spirit of inclusivity. Various studies have shown that hashtag feminism has not had the positive effect it was expected to (Guha 2015; Williams 2015). In India, much of the usefulness of SNS has been diluted by the lack of education and Internet infrastructure. In addition to this, the all-encompassing patriarchy has prevented marginalized populations, and especially women, from accessing and developing the Internet’s full potential. Will the participation of women alone ensure a more equitable social media sphere? For now, the usefulness of SNS assisted mobilization and education of audiences in India might not be in question. But important questions remain about it becoming an effective tool for LGBT related activities.

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Chapter 8

**HOW WOMEN IN TURKEY BRING FEMINIST
MOVEMENT TO A NEW LEVEL ON TWITTER:
THE CASE OF WOMEN THEATRE PERFORMERS**

Çiğdem Erdal, PhD*

Department of Cinema-TV, Harran University
Şanlıurfa, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Women in the media in Turkey have always been associated with homicide, and domestic violence. This chapter reviews the status of women in Turkey, as well as questions the point where violence toward them has shifted along with the transformations in the Turkish society in 2018. This study takes a closer look at how state politics is being shaped around gender issues and how the public reacts to it in Turkey. Discover text tool has been used in order to understand and extract the profound meanings of texts posted by users in big data of social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. Twitter is used in this study not only as a social interactive media platform but also as a platform for collaborative activities in defense of human rights. This study aims to display the changing views on the matter of women's rights and their role in the society, and to reveal the implicit meanings of Twitter texts in the data.

Keywords: Gender, Turkey, Women, Twitter

* Corresponding Author's Email: cigdem.erdal@outlook.com.

INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, the concept of gender is constructed around the family unit. According to Kağıtçıbaşı and Sunar (as cited in Özkan & Lajunen, 2005, p. 104) gender roles are accepted even before birth and assigned to women in order to be submissive, domestic, and supportive, while men are expected to be extraverted, bread-winner, and the bearer of the family lastname. Reforms failed to modernize traditional values and habits of the Turkish society in the early years of the Republic, positioning women in no different position than being mother and caretaker, contrary to the provisions of the Civil Law that came into force in 1926 (Çaha, 1996, pp. 111-127). As industrialization increased in the 80s in Turkey, women's employment began to be a necessity and men's chances to get and maintain jobs became more difficult (Ecevit, 1998, p. 124).

Historically, human economic activities began after humanity invented tools for production, which configured societies as well. Holding the power to invent tools also changed the course of humanity; male sex was the ground upon which the notion of gender was built. Men were holding property, and controlled the factors of production, which in turn means, power; whereas the female gender was restricted to the domestic space as a result of the daily activities they were engaged in. Division of labor caused a gendered social life (Coşar 2013, p. 36).

Patriarchal structure made its way through the praising of male intelligence, as a new era of agriculture and cultivation began. This rationality of the masculine also defined masculinity as a whole in the 19th century. Male and female relationships were being reshaped by the capitalistic market conditions. The place of women became the home, while men were associated with the outside, or the public (Uçan 2014, 20).

It is also necessary to consider gender and femininity phenomenon as a part of the cultural structure. The Turkish society is idiosyncratic in many respects, representing both the East and the West, as well as the big gap between them, along with being multicultural. Sometimes, it is a very sensitive conservative, and sometimes utterly submissive. All of these have very clear effects on developments throughout the country and the society (Bingöl 2014, 110).

Late industrialisation and patriarchal state structure have an impact on social life in Turkey. The government is insufficient in meeting the demands of female family workers who are not paid for their domestic work, and self-employed segment of the public, at the point where family and kinship come into play. Women are identified with maternal qualifications assigned to them, as a result of the strong emphasis on family (Dedeoğlu 2009, 44-5). Dedeoğlu (2000, 154-55) identifies production and property relations as significant agents that are changing the structure of family. She argues that the rapid change in production with the effect of technology in the 1950s brought along migration from the rural areas to the urban, which in turn started the shift in the family structure.

It is possible to say that there was no gender discrimination in pre-Islamic societies, where women and men participated in equal social life. Conversion to Islam brought the influence of Byzantium-Arab-Iran cultures into the Turkish culture. Religious judgement, rules and beliefs transformed Turkish women and led to gender discrimination, as some of the verses of the Quaran and hadiths were translated subjectively. During the Ottoman era, the status of men gained even more power. Polygamy became widespread within Islam. After the Ottoman era, fundamental changes occurred with the newly founded Republic. These revolutions include changes such as women's presence in public space, and their participation in the development process of the country (Bingöl, 111-112).

STATE POLITICS AND GENDER ISSUES IN TURKEY

According to Kerestecioğlu (2013, p. 17), The Justice and Development Party (JDP) government is successfully blending religious and traditional values with market demands by emphasizing that the more population grows, the more powerful the economy will get, through highly educated and qualified young generation. Anti-abortion discourse and family emphasis are a part of this blending. The government, this way try to make women volunteer as defenders of flexible market labor. Conservative approach of the ruling party requires a strong family notion. Family is seen as a prevention against poverty in a society where social rights are marketed. Therefore, the blessed family is used against the riot of poverty, as the neoliberal government withdraws its support from children and the elderly care, which is now a burden on women's shoulders (Kerestecioğlu, 20).

Political discourse and practice has been undergoing a shift in Turkey since 2002, which is evident in the policies of the JDP Government. The party emphasized that it is tied to Western democracy and the liberal economy, despite its conservative orientation. Neoliberalism prevailed between the period of 2002 and 2007. After 2007, patriarchal and moral values framed the party's agenda and rhetorical discourse with the touch of religion. Neo-conservative states add religion, culture, patriotism concepts to the entity of state, and withdraw from welfare services such as education, health, and social services. (Acar and Altunok 2013, p14-5).

There are other factors in Turkey that reshaped gender roles and stereotypes. For instance, rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, and Westernization are only a few, which were accelerated by the EU prospective membership process. Moreover, international and regional migration, increased education opportunities, the meaning attributed to secularism, equal property sharing law, recognizing housewives as unpaid workers, and protection of rights of women workers to a greater degree might have facilitated the shift of gender roles and stereotypes in the country (Özkan and Lajunen 2005, 105).

The prospective EU membership has had evident effects on law and policy-making, one of which was seen on the civil law. Specifically, the rise of women's movements in

the 1990s revealed women's requests on the one hand, which led to gender equality implications for the Turkish Government. On the other hand, after the JDP government took over, attempts to financially support birth, or strict restrictions on abortion, generated conflict with civil law regulations. The party's discourse focused on the value of family, and stood behind the notion of traditional family model by drawing strict lines between men and women. When the neo-liberal policies replaced the welfare state, the welfare system had also been restructured. Public services underwent privatization, which meant a heavier burden on women regarding family care. Families were encouraged by government support to take back their children whom they left at child protection institutions. Besides all these regulations and changes, the law passed in 2012 on the protection of family and prevention of violence against women was criticized that it was way behind international standards. (Acar and Altunok 2013, 16-9).

Scholarly literature support that EU prospective membership related obligations lack solutions to gender and women issues in Turkey. EU-imposed reforms fall short of tackling Turkish women's issues. One of the most obvious of these issues is employment. Only 25% of women in Turkey are presently in work life. Women employment rate declined to 24% in 2008, while it was 72% in 1955; it gained a little boost in 2011 with an increase of 30%. What this means is the fact that inactive women work at home unpaid. Besides, there are women working in the service industry, such as hairdressers, secretaries, etc. According to the World Bank, women become more educated, and marry younger with less children. However, women participation in labor in Turkey is below international standards. (Dedeoğlu 2013, p. 5).

In the traditional Turkish family, the Turkish man continues to control the woman's work and educational life among other areas of life. Women are merely identified with their maternal identity, while their labor within the family is unseen (Bingöl 2014, 112).

Dedeoğlu (2013), while comparing welfare policies in the West and Middle East, observes that markets and citizenship phenomenon are not stable in the Middle East unlike the West, and that it is difficult to implement welfare policies in Middle East countries. Religious establishments, community and kinship-oriented relations determine women's roles as well as welfare in financially underdeveloped countries. These policies leave women out, and assign Islamic identities to women. Meanwhile, Turkey displays a different example of a blend where it comes closer to international standards regarding women's equality requests, whereas women at the same time are given a social identity according to their stereotyped roles within their families (Dedeoğlu 2013, p. 2).

Turkey is experiencing both the traditional patriarchy, and Islamic social rules. Revolutions came after the founding of the Republic in 1923 (such as polygamy ban), which affected family relations as well. Although the concept of family leader was abandoned, and new regulations regarding the family were implemented, no actual changes occurred in the social life. Patriarchal structure and the husband's status remained protected (Cindoğlu et al. 2008, p. 253).

Arat (2010) points out that religion and politics became intertwined as of 2000s, and governments support for religious beliefs and freedom, became a threat to gender equality. Patriarchal roles imposed on women also became stronger notions through state bureaucracy. This spread of patriarchy was implemented by the education system and non-governmental organizations as well. To name one of these implications, the Social Security and General Health Insurance Law immediately comes to mind. The law came into force in 2008 making women retirement more difficult. According to Arat (2010), the then Prime Minister had been advising women to have at least three children, while the disputable law raised questions in public, which was implying the importance and divineness of motherhood and mother roles. Religion began penetrating the educational system. Religious education became compulsory, while prayer rooms were built in non-religious schools (Arat 2010, 874). Directorate of Religious Affairs spread provoking messages, such as the hijab was a religious must-obey rule, or women should not wear perfume outside their homes, or should not stay alone with men other than their relatives. The underlying reason was to keep women away from working (Arat 2010, p. 875).

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

The data used in this research was collected through a textual analysis tool known as *DiscoverText*, for the hashtag *#kadinlarsahneye*. On the memorial day of the 18th of March (Çanakkale Martyrs) in 2018, women performers were not allowed to go on stage to perform at a play where the President of the Turkish Parliament, İsmail Kahraman was present as a guest. This incident was covered by the media, followed by a Twitter campaign with the hashtag *#kadinlarsahneye*, organised by female/male performers and female/male supporters as well as women's associations. 100 women performers read 100 different protest lines on the stage in order to speak up. The campaign reached a wide audience and supporters, which led to another online campaign where people signed to ask the Parliament President to resign. It is important to mention that "Women theatre performers" are not a specific group of people with organisational structure, but random performers who were cast to play in front of the bureaucrats that memorial day.

DiscoverText enables coding with various options, and drawing categories and conclusions based on the code density displayed with percentiles. Coding was conducted on two different datasets, namely *Kadinlarsahneye1* and *Kadinlarsahneye2*. The first dataset consists of 1940 tweets, and the second dataset consists of 500 tweets. Both datasets consist of most retweeted and favorited tweets, while the difference is the codes used in order to establish diverse categories. Therefore, while the first dataset coding puts emphasis on specific and individual meanings, the second dataset draws a broader picture with more generalised categories, such as "Women's Rights." It is possible to say that the first dataset highlights hidden meanings from tweets, while the second dataset adopts an inductive

approach toward the data to uncover the correlation between the case study and the ongoing gender discrimination in Turkish society. The tag cloud and the most used words/hashtags are used in the analysis of both datasets as follows:



Figure 1. Tag Cloud for Datasets.

“Kadınlarsahneye” [womentothestage] (1319), kadın [woman] (766), yüz [hundred] (676), gazetemüstehak [papermüstehak] (404), kenter [Kenter Theatre] (355), replikle [with lines] (333), sahnede [on stage] (309), mertfirat [Actor Mert Fırat] (283). Other outstanding words on the list are: vazgeçmeyecek [will not give up] (114), ismailkahramanistifa [quit İsmail Kahraman] (102). A total of 348 tweets were coded for the first dataset, and 73 codes were produced out of original tweets. Retweets were not included in the coding. The results were compared to a total of 219 tweets and 6 codes for the second dataset, in order to define overlapping/intersecting categories. The coding conducted for the first dataset indicates “time to unite” category as the most referred theme. Unlikely, “defiance” was the most referred theme with 32% in the second dataset, which was followed by “call for solidarity” with 22%, women’s rights with 17%, call to account with 14%, and gender issues with 9%. Categories formed out of the codes are “freedom,” “resistance” and “struggle.”

The hashtag “kadınlarsahneye” holds the first place with 15% percentile when we look at the retweet number, influence score, and hashtag percentiles. Tweets that fall under this hashtag were coded with “birlik olma zamanı” [time to unite]. Twenty-seven tweets were coded with “vazgeçmeyecek” [will not give up], 42 tweets coded with “kadınların sesi” [voice of women] and “kadınlık mücadelesi” [struggle of women]. Influence score is the highest with 50% and corresponds to “kadınların sesi” [voice of women] and “kadınlık mücadelesi” [struggle of women]. “Influence score,” is a term used to explain a Twitter user’s circle that expands based on the number of retweets and favorites of the user’s tweets. This means that the user is actively posting and retweeting on a constant basis; this score is not only calculated by a user’s follower number, but its activity as well. The influence score here indicates the number of 47.282.333333. Favorites count indicates 260.956 and coded with “birlik olma zamanı” [time to unite]. The highest retweet number

is specified as 3728, with the codes “eril zihniyet” [male dominance], and “erkek ve kadın yan yana” [men and women together]. The tweets holding the highest favorites count number are shown below:

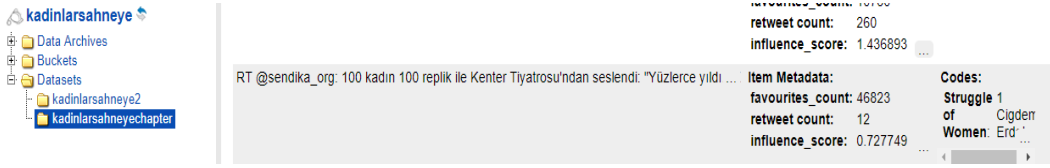


Figure 2. Favorites Count, Text coded with “Struggle of Women.”

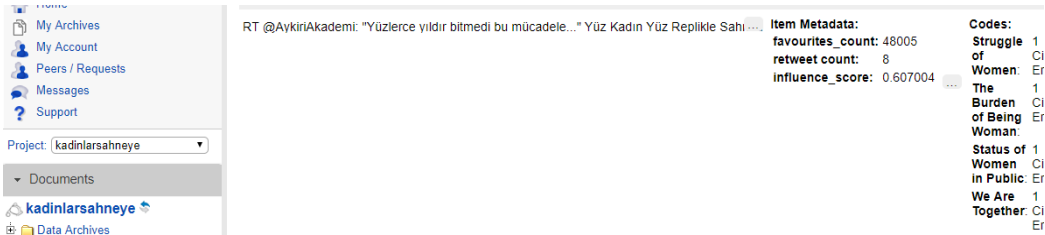


Figure 3. Favorites Count, Text coded with “Struggle of Women,” “The Burden of Being Woman,” “Status of Women in Public,” “We are Together.”

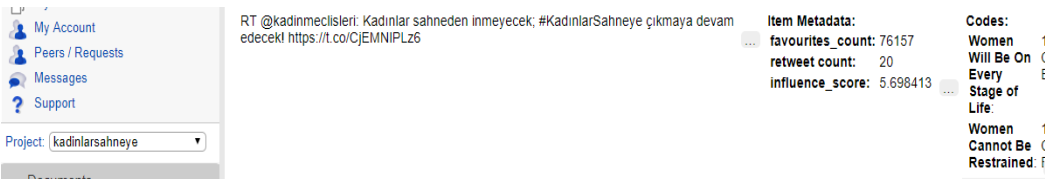


Figure 4. Favorites Count, Text coded with “Women Will be On Every Stage of Life,” “Women Cannot be Restrained.”

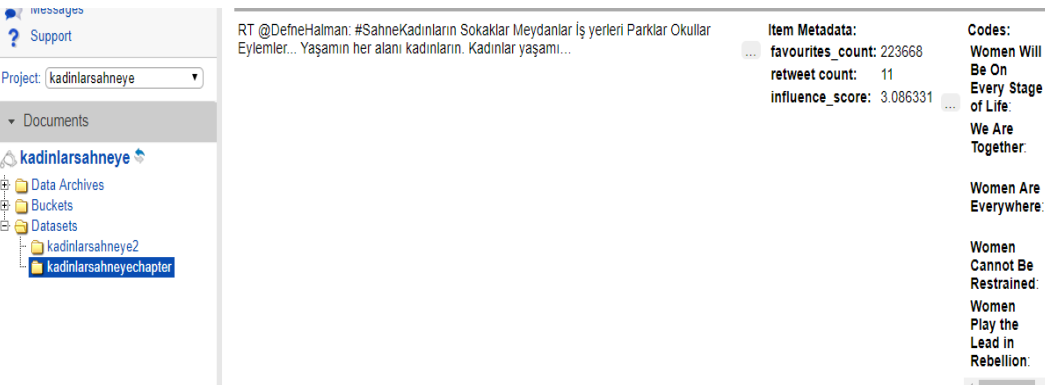


Figure 5. Favorites Count, Text coded with “Women Will be On Every Stage of Life,” “We Are Together,” “Women Are Everywhere,” “Women Cannot be Restrained,” “Women Play the Lead In Rebellion.”

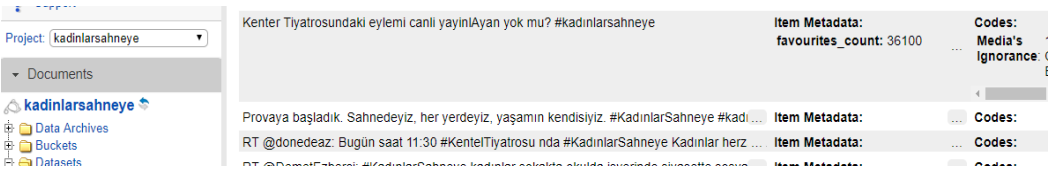


Figure 6. Favorites Count, Text coded with “The Media’s Ignorance.”

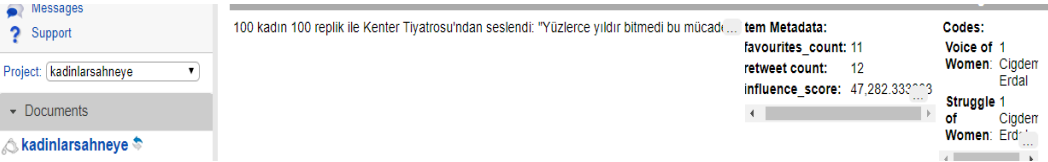


Figure 7. Influence Score, Text coded with “Voice of Women,” “Struggle of Women.”

The tweets seen above refer to women in Turkey being suppressed and restricted within domestic space, using the hashtag “womenonthestage” as a metaphor. One of the tweets above, i.e., “Yaşamın her alanı kadınların” (All life spaces are womens’) is one of the most retweeted texts, directly tackling the issue of domesticating women, identifying them with the mother and caregiver role inside the home. Users by posting and retweeting the above tweets primarily stand up against a gendered domestic space, claiming that women are already within other spaces of life, such as work space, as well as home.

As seen above, the tweets with the highest favorites count the messages referring to “struggle of women,” “the burden of being woman” and “call to solidarity” reached more people than others, creating a greater influence. Also, the tweet referring to media’s ignorance on the matter reached a wide audience. The subtext here shows that the media in Turkey gives wide coverage to the news of murders of women and violence against women, whereas women’s movement or their related activities find themselves hardly a place within the media’s agenda.

One of the tweets with highest influence score, “Yüzlerce yıldır bitmedi bu mücadele” (Never ending struggle for centuries) refers to women’s struggle for their rights in Turkey. Women received voting and election rights back in 1934 in Turkey; however, bestowed rights had little power to change ongoing gendered norms in the society. Here, it is useful to mention what Koray (2011, 40-1) states as to gender politics in Turkey. Gender politics after 1980 in Turkey have to be considered as a part of liberal policies that went worldwide. Women’s employment is significant for a globalizing market, where the liberal economy increases labor competition, and helps liberalism be accepted without resistance. According to Koray, Turkey has mainstreamed gender politics, while trying to harmonise with international liberal market rules. This can be seen in the lack of childcare and welfare support by the state. Besides, within the liberal economy environment, women face wage and social security inequalities.

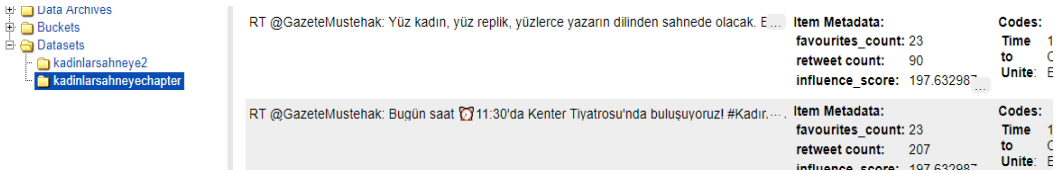


Figure 8. Influence Score, Text coded with “Time to Unite.”

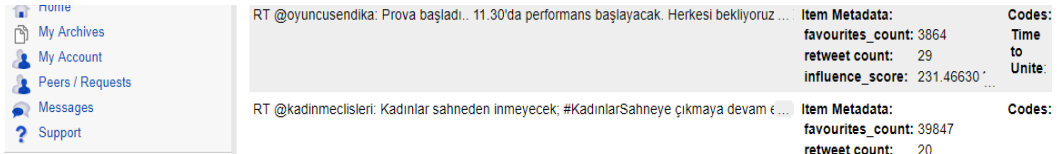


Figure 9. Influence Score, (The call to protesting on stage), Text coded with Time to Unite.

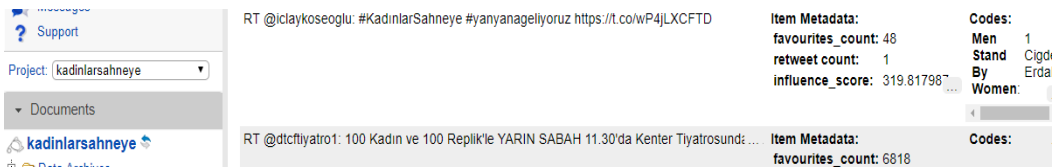


Figure 10. Influence Score, Text (that mentions men and women will be on the stage standing next to one another), coded with “Men Stand by Women.”

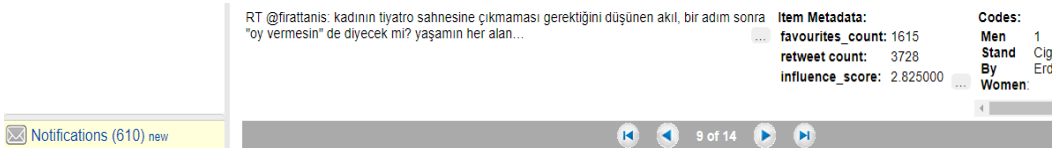


Figure 11. Retweet Count, Text coded with “Men Stand By Women”

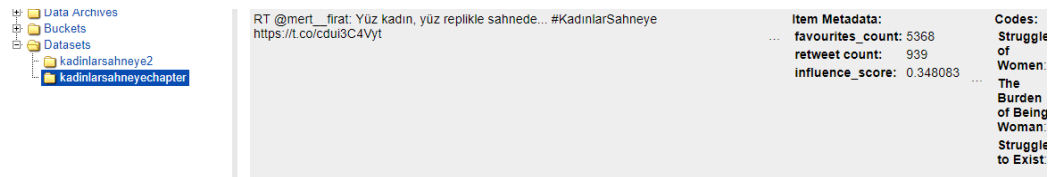


Figure 12. Retweet Count, Text coded with “Struggle of Women,” “The Burden of Being Woman,” “Struggle to Exist.”

Influence score indicates the posts underlining the efforts of women to stand up for their rights, the call to unite, and the continuing, never-ending struggle to have equality. Influence scores with the highest number consist of the tweets announcing the protesting on Kenter Theatre’s stage.

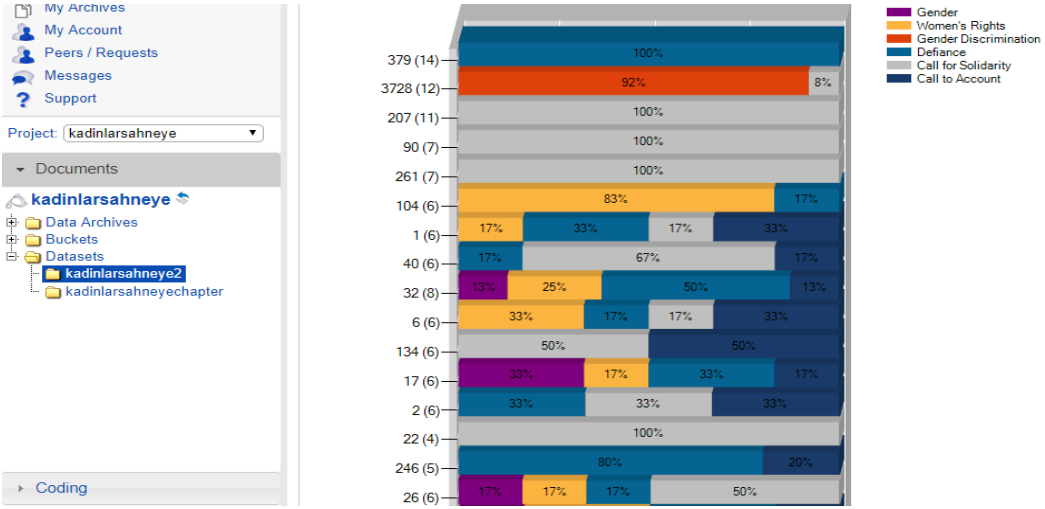


Figure 13. Retweet Count and Codes for the second dataset.

Above are two most retweeted tweets. Both tweets were posted by male actors. What is remarkable here is that the actor posted the first tweet announcing the demonstration, while the second actor wrote with an anti-male dominance approach criticising the administration, and stating that he would always stand next to women. The second tweet received more retweets (3728).

Column diagrams are preferred for the second dataset, to display percentiles and codes in a better way with different colors. A total number of 6 codes were produced for the second dataset:

As seen above, tweets received the highest retweet number emphasize gender discrimination, while 8% refer to the call to unite. Other parts of the column indicate call to unite. Statements of gender and/or gender discrimination occupy lesser place.

The hashtag breakdown reveals that the hashtag “kadınlarsahneye” [women to the stage] consists of tweets referring to defiance with 41%, followed by the call to unite with 26%, women’s rights with 14%, the call to accountability tweets regarding the campaign against President’s stepping down, and messages of gender issues with 8%, referring to suppressing of women at both public and domestic space.

Other remarkable hashtags in the breakdown are as “MUSTAFAKEMALİNASKERLERİ” [SOLDIERS OF MUSTAFA KEMAL], “kadınlarbirliktegüçlü” [women are strong together] “dayanışma” [solidarity] and “İsmailKahramanİstifa” [quit İsmail Kahraman].

CONCLUSION

Gender-related debates of man-woman dichotomy in Turkey has a unsettled history since the ancestors of the Turks before conversion to Islam. This conversion made a big transformation of social norms, daily life, economic and social relations, which in turn had a massive impact on civilized life. Turkish people accepted Islam and adopted its rules also in their social life in order to organize human and interpersonal relations. This break from the past has taken a new turn with the election of the ruling party JDP, which followed Islamic rules at the social level, while implementing neo-liberalism at the economic level and international affairs.

As Islamic rules penetrated more in social life, the woman-men dichotomy reached a point where men felt disturbed by a woman walking pregnant in a park, or by a woman's mini skirt on a bus, which led to violence against women. Although this kind of incidents might be evaluated in terms of ideology and politics, it is a disturbing fact that gender gap is still growing bigger in Turkey.

The primary aim of this study was to picture how big the gender gap is, having a closer look at the situation through Twitter big data, by employing a web-based textual analysis tool named Discovertext. The tool makes coding process easier, with percentiles and comparison between different codes and coders. It is seen in this study that the case has provoked a massive outrage due to the growing gender gap and discrimination. Civil law, family politics, and the politics of economy have a complex and intertwined relation with gender, and gender issues have become a big part of state politics in order to keep women inside their domestic space, and to raise a young generation needed for the development of the country. The incident investigated here reveals through tweets the complex relationship between politics and gender issues. Women's outrage and continuous struggle for their rights is a never-ending debate in Turkey. Women's movement, their struggle for rights, the aggressive tone toward politicians and men in their texts, all indicate their difficult mission. Women's organizations and NGOs speak up against all kinds of abuse, ranging from individual incidents to widespread ones. Big data gives insight on the embedded meanings in texts, and digital tools like Discovertext enables to see through the big data with a different new perspective.

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Chapter 9

HASHTAG ACTIVISM AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE #OCCUPY NIGERIA AND #BRINGBACKOURGIRLS TWITTER MOVEMENTS

Floribert Patrick C. Endong

Department of Theater, Film and Carnival Studies,
University of Calabar, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Nigeria-based civil society initiatives and pressure groups have recently drawn on hashtag activism to mitigate or eradicate various forms of social and political problems challenging the Nigerian Federation. These civil society initiatives have most often used social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Internet blogs to denounce issues ranging from bad governance and corruption to violations of human rights, terrorism and authoritarianism, thereby contributing to a certain extent to setting the political agenda and facilitating democratization of the country. Though laudable, these forms of post-modern activism have, in many cases, yielded only patchy dividends, calling for a re-evaluation of the digital platforms on which they are based. This chapter sets out to assess the role of Twitter-driven campaigns in bringing about political change in Nigeria. Using the #OccupyNigeria and the #BringBackOurGirls campaigns as case studies, the chapter aims to examine the extent to which hashtag activism has contributed to democratization in the country. It equally explores a number of challenges faced by this form of activism in Nigeria.

Keywords: hashtag activism, Twitter, democratization, political change, social movements, occupy Nigeria, bring back our girls

INTRODUCTION

The third wave of democratization that swept across Black African countries in the 1990s did not exempt Nigeria. This wave brought about serious socio-political changes in the country as it led to the passing of an impressive number of liberalizing laws in key sectors of the Nigerian economy, as well as the adoption of a plurality of pro-democratic reforms (Schraeder 1995; Ihonvbere 1996). For instance, the wave engendered the privatization or deregulation of media broadcasting in the country in 1992, as well as the re-introduction of civilian rule and the democratic system of government in 1999 (Chukwudi 2015). Since then, there has arguably been a visibly progressive consolidation of democratization in the country (Chukwudi 2015). According to some optimistic sources, Nigeria has since 1999 been one of the most progressive –if not one of the best– democracies in the West African sub-region (Idowu 1999; Nata 2016). However, the recent sponsoring and adoption of a number of anachronistic and undemocratic cyber laws such as the 2016 Frivolous Petition Bill and the 2015 Cybercrimes Act have undoubtedly been contradictory to this positive profiling of Nigeria. In effect, these cyber laws have given credence to the views of critics who describe democracy and human rights as being in serious danger in Nigeria (Endong 2017a, 2017c; Freedom on the Net 2016). Such pessimistic observers have argued that, instead of working for the advancement of democracy, the Nigerian political class has in these last decades “politically retrograded”, creating conditions favorable for the reign of “democratic dictatorship” in the country (Hassan 2009; Jalingo 2013; Inyang 2017; Endong 2017a, 2017b; Endong 2018a; Freedom on the Net 2016). Corroborating this position, human rights activist Tade Ipadeola (cited in Snaddon 2016) contends that recent government policies have encroached upon the freedom of expression in Nigeria. Among these are the mobilization of troops and police to manhandle the press and politically intimidate the opposition, the adoption of very rigid and brutal approaches to Internet censorship, and other forms of human rights abuses. Such questionable and virtually martial tactics have contributed to re-introducing different forms of authoritarianism in the country’s socio-political system. Such anti-democratic government policies are reminiscent of the various military regimes that ruled the country in its modern history from 1965 to 1998.

In addition to these policies, issues like corruption, insecurity, tribalism/favoritism in the civil service, and ethnic politics among others have posed political dilemmas that have remained unsolved by the Nigerian government since 1999. This has caused the state of democracy and good governance in the country to systemically downgrade. In fact, despite the strong and relentless political activism of entities such as the civil society, the international community, the private media and other endogenous pressure groups, authoritarianism in multiple forms continues to be a persistent and sad reality in the Nigerian Federation.

In view of this problematic political situation, social influencers, human rights activists and pressure groups have diversified their political activism by integrating Internet-assisted tools in their approaches. Many among these socio-political forces have embarked on paradigms such as citizen journalism and hashtag activism to mitigate or even eradicate various forms of social and political injustices occurring in the Nigerian Federation. Especially social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Internet blogs are used to denounce issues ranging from bad governance and corruption to violations of human rights, and terrorism and authoritarianism. Through the use of these tools they aim to contribute to setting the political agenda and facilitate the democratization of the country. Even though these efforts are laudable, their activism has in many cases only been able to yield partial results. This suggests that an evaluation of the digital platforms on which their campaigns are based could prove useful. This chapter sets out to do exactly that: it aims to assess the role of Twitter-driven campaigns in bringing about political change in Nigeria. The chapter focuses on the #OccupyNigeria and the #BringBackOurGirls campaigns as case studies, and looks at the extent to which hashtag activism has contributed to democratization in Nigeria. It equally explores a number of challenges faced by this form of activism in the country. This study seeks answers to the following research questions: What is the state of hashtag activism in Nigeria? What role did Twitter play in social-media driven movements such as #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOurGirls? And how the movements under study contributed to democratization in Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on secondary sources and critical observations. It is equally framed by two main theories, being McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Agenda Setting and Habermas' (1989) Public Sphere. The agenda setting theory focuses on how the mass media influence the salience of issues on the public agenda. It is principally rooted in three assumptions. First, it assumes that the media do more than just reflect reality. Rather, they shape reality in various ways. Second, it assumes that by focusing on a specific issue, the media directly or intrinsically push the public to see these issues as being very important – if not the most important topic to be discussed at a given time. Through weight of attention given to specific issues, media outlets actually influence the public agenda. Finally, the third tenet of the theory stipulates that the agenda setting potential of a medium depends on the typology in which it can be classified as well as on the level of authority it enjoys in a specific society. In other words, different media have different agenda-setting potential. This third tenet seems to be rooted in the idea that media generally have different advantages and disadvantages in different societies.

Given their boundless nature, social media are viewed by a number of critics as having immense powers, particularly in today's digitized world (Cammaerts 2015; Endong 2018c;

Kiel 2011; Lewis et al. 2014; Machado 2015). They are arguably more ‘powerful’ than traditional media, at least in terms of reach and ubiquity. Going by this premise, social networks are believed to have greater agenda setting potential. The seemingly loose, boundless and libertarian nature of social networks enables even individuals (that is, any given Internaut) to have agenda-setting agency in society. Indeed, crafty users who know how to promote and influence via social media could undertake digital activism that could reach masses and sway them to prioritize specific issues over others. Potentially, this could result in mobilizing the masses. Grzywinska and Batorski (2016) highlight five ways in which the agenda setting powers of Internauts (and by extension the digital activists) and social networking sites (SNS) in general are revealed. They note that:

- “SNS users decide what news is important by choosing what to share within their networks (basic agenda-setting effects);
- attributes regarding events are issued by SNS users under particular limitations (attribute agenda-setting);
- in conditions of high uncertainty and relevance, SNS users can directly impact public opinion (psychological effects of agenda-setting theory); SNS are becoming the source of traditional media agendas (sources of media agendas);
- SNS users are reaffirming their opinions as a result of SNS homophily (consequences of agenda-setting effects); and
- users influence public figures within SNS (reverse agenda-setting effects).” (Grzywinska and Batorski 2016, 19)

The second theoretical framework of this study is the Public Discursive Space theory, which strongly borrows from Habermas’ (1989, 73-74) concept of the Public Sphere but is also based on the assumption that this public sphere is a discursive space (Chandler 2017; Dahlberg 2006; Aubin 2014; Howell 1993). According to the Public Discursive Space theory, social media, among other key social factors, have created a virtual space (discursive space) in which something approaching public opinion can be formed and where access is guaranteed to all citizens, irrespective of race, age, gender, social class and political/philosophical affiliations. In such a public space, citizens fully enjoy freedom of assembly and association as well as the freedom to express and publish their opinion on issues of general concern. The ideal of the public sphere is thus a virtual place where people of all walks of life can come together to discuss matters of general concern. Such a context favors the gestation and formation of public opinion. It is greater than the village, the small town or any other situation in which citizens can conceivably gather, talk and deliberate on issues of general interest.

TWITTER AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN NIGERIA

Over some decades now, there is a remarkable Smartphone and Internet revolution which is sweeping across African countries from South Africa through Rwanda to Egypt and dramatically redefining virtually all aspects of human life in the continent. (Africa Practice 2014; Statistica 2017). The rise in Internet penetration and mobile telephony use have facilitated access to social media, particularly among the youth of Nigeria and other African countries. In addition, it has facilitated the increased use of social media (particularly among the youth) as well as the integration of these new media into Nigerians' daily activities. Recent research reveals that the use of social media (particularly Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter) is on the rise across Africa (Endong 2017b; Endong 2018c; Wharton University 2016). According to the UK-based integrated communication agency Portland Communications (2016), the use of Twitter in particular has increased dramatically since the Arab Spring took place in Egypt (i.e., 2011-2012). Similarly, Twitter is the tenth most popular social network in Nigeria since 2012. According to Africa Practice (2014) it is the 9th most used social network in the Nigerian territory. Meanwhile, according to Statistica (2017) it is the seventh in the list of most popular web sites in Nigeria.

The growing popularity of Twitter in the Nigerian socio-political landscape has enabled the emergence of internet-based cultures like online dating, "sexting", selfie-sharing, citizen journalism, tweeting and hashtag activism, among others. These have become popular practices in the country, predominantly for younger users but equally attracting adults, and particularly those adults belonging to the political class. Nigerian politicians have been quick to adopt Twitter, among other social networks, for their political campaigns. The creation of Twitter accounts and tweeting have become popular practices among Nigerian politicians. In view of the many advantages of this social network, political analysts have, on their part, introduced Twitter-driven methodologies to study and monitor political and electoral trends in the country. In line with this, the Nigerian-based firm Sterling and Greenback developed a "Twitter meter", which was calibrated to compute Nigerians' vote intentions and public opinion ahead of the 2015 general elections. As explained by Igbokwe (cited in Onalaja 2015), the meter is "a windows service that uses Twitter's API to retrieve tweets related to the Nigerian presidential elections. The algorithm selects only tweets which were generated within the borders of Nigeria".

Of all the above mentioned digitally-driven cultures, tweeting coupled with hashtag activism has arguably been among the most visible and most politically impactful in these last years. Most social movements (from university strike actions and public health movements to art and cultural activism) start on social networks, chief among which is Twitter (Ayodeji 2016; Egbunike 2015; Ibrahim 2015; Freedom on the Net 2016). This can be illustrated through a Nigerian example. Dentist Lawal Bakare took the initiative in July 2014 to launch a movement on Twitter, aimed at mobilizing and educating local Nigerians

against the spread of Ebola. Bakare actually launched his @EbolaAlert, which was instrumental in recruiting volunteers, disseminating reliable information, and facilitating discussion about Ebola during the period of the outbreak of the disease in neighboring countries. The popularity of the movement was evidenced by the fact that only 2 weeks after launching his movement, Bakare had more than 76,000 followers, both from within Nigeria and outside of the country (Carter 2014).

Another good illustration of the use of Twitter to drive social movements is the #BeingFemaleInNigeria hashtag. It was started in May 2015 by an Abuja-based book club, led by Florence Warmate. The hashtag, which was strongly inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi's feminist pamphlet entitled "*We Should all be Feminists*", served as a platform to set the agenda, and to drive social change in favor of gender equality in Nigeria. In its early stages, the movement was mainly aimed at inviting Nigerian women to speak about their experiences as related to patriarchy or the marginalization of women in Nigeria. A few days after its launch, the hashtag had been used more than 17,000 times by both women and men eager to comment on the prevalence of sexism in the daily lives of Nigerians. The hashtag movement got support from feminist organization operating both inside and outside Nigeria.

A similar hashtag that recently provoked debate on environmental protection in Nigeria is the #StopTheSoot movement. It was launched in early 2017 following successive incidents of soot pollution in the Southeastern Nigerian city of Port Harcourt. The Twitter-driven movement was launched by *Nigeria Info* journalist Sandra Ezekwesili and consisted in gathering the testimonies of victims of the soot. The point here was to raise awareness of the medical issues caused by the soot, exposing the worrisome passivity of political powers, and driving online discussions about the environmental disaster. Residents of Port Harcourt shared visuals of their hands, faces and feet covered by the soot. Others shared reports of victims who contracted asthma, or saw their existing condition worsened by the pollution. All these tweets contributed to providing continuous updates on the environmental situation and served to engender online debate and the expression of feelings. The campaign evolved into a peaceful protest march in major streets of Port Harcourt. This populist action then pushed the government to give a modicum of attention – albeit lukewarm – to the environmental situation.

Twitter-driven movements are many, and it is not the aim of this chapter to discuss all of them. Rather, the cases touched on here serve to underscore that hashtag movements and tweeting have become serious modes for discussing social and cultural issues in the Nigerian socio-political setting. Thus, Twitter, among other social networks, is today seen as a technology that offers a fertile platform to organize all preliminary stages of major social actions in the country.

A realm where the use of hashtags and tweeting has been very productive and has produced remarkable dividends is politics. Indeed, political tweeting is recognized as a dominant feature in the use of Twitter in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular

(Freedom on the Net 2016; Africa Practice 2014; Chinedu et al. 2016; The Commonwealth 2015). Portland Communications (2016) for instance notes that almost 1 in 10 of the most popular Nigerian hashtags is related to politicians or politics in Africa. In a similar vein, a number of studies have revealed that the Twitter accounts of former Nigerian Presidents such as Goodluck Jonathan are the most popular in the country.

Twitter-strategies have also been used by several Nigerian governments in order to circulate political propaganda and to strategically woo voters and sympathizers, particularly during periods of political campaigns. A case in point is the Goodluck Jonathan administration's launching of the #BringBackGoodluck movement, aimed at courting Nigerian voters ahead of the 2015 general elections. Although it turned out to be a veritable fiasco^{††††} it showed that hashtag activism is not reserved for grassroots use, but can also be drawn on by politicians –both democratic and despotic ones– to engineer pockets of supporters and promote their (re)election.

HASHTAG ACTIVISM AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

As mentioned earlier, hashtag activism is one of the more novel forms of social protest that Nigerian masses have learned to deploy to draw attention to bad governance and authoritarianism, among other socio-political issues. This technique has come to refine or complement existing modes of protest such as general strike actions, boycotts and mass demonstrations. Such existing modes of protest have, since Nigeria's independence, been highly relevant in defying or censoring issues such as military dictatorships, violation of human rights and electoral malpractices. Thus, along with other social networks, Twitter has facilitated the formation of postmodern advocacy mechanisms that have led to positive changes in the country. These mechanisms have encouraged, pressed for, and monitored best practices during election times. In addition, they are contributing to a larger dynamic of promoting growth in Nigeria through accountability and conversation (Practice Africa, 2014). The abovementioned mechanisms function in the following five ways:

- i. They facilitate accountability by bringing together those at the top (the governing elites) and those at the bottom (the governed);
- ii. they promote and enable civic engagement;
- iii. they serve as one of the most popularly consulted sources of information on political issues;
- iv. they provide spaces where political issues are interactively debated; and
- v. they contribute to setting the political agenda.

^{††††} The #BringBackGoodluck campaign was disapproved of by a significant part of Nigerian public opinion because it was seen as interfering with the momentum mounted by the #BringBackOurGirls international movement. The latter subtly or indirectly placed blame with the Goodluck administration for its poor management of the abduction of the Chibok girls.

The chapter now moves to consider the two case studies used to assess the contribution of hashtag activism to the democratization process of Nigeria. These are the 2012 #OccupyNigeria and the 2014 #BringBackOurGirls campaigns. The chapter first considers the origin and structure of these two movements, and then goes on to explore how, and to what extent, these two Twitter-assisted campaigns brought about positive political change in the country.

The Case of Occupy Nigeria

The Occupy Nigeria movement took off on Monday 2 January, 2012, after President Goodluck took drastic steps to fully remove the country's petroleum subsidy. For years, the latter subsidy had kept the price of fuel low. The President's decision, announced as part of his 2012 New Year announcement, meant that Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS) that initially sold for N65 a liter, now would cost N141. This tallied up to an increase of more than 100% in the price of petroleum products in the country. Moreover, the implementation of this decision meant an enormous increase in virtually all goods and services of primary necessity in the country, going from electricity to house rent and food. This was a situation an average Nigerian could hardly manage and accept, seeing that more than 60% of the population subsist on less than \$2 daily, and is heavily dependent on petroleum products. Cheap petrol is popularly viewed as the only benefit the masses receive from the Nigerian state. In view of this, many Nigerians –if not the large majority of the population– were strongly motivated to resist the government's removal of the fuel subsidy.

The announcement resulted in drawing the population onto the streets, sparking a series of spontaneous riots, civil disobedience, demonstrations and civil resistance, which grew both in intensity and spread across the country as time went on. The first days of the protests were characterized by relatively small incidences of civil unrest, involving moderate crowds in cities like Abuja (the capital city of Nigeria) and Lokoja. However as days went by, the situation morphed into full-fledged anarchistic movements that were chaotic and, at times, brutal. Protesters shut down petrol stations, blocked major routes in and out of cities, and sought to paralyze major economic activities in the country. Some cyber activists (within the ranks of the protesters) attacked government websites including the pages of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The movement progressively spread throughout Nigeria: from large cities in the north of the country (notably Kano, Sokoto and Maiduguri) to cosmopolitan cities in the south, including Lagos, Port Harcourt and Calabar among others. It attracted Nigerian citizens from all walks of life, and eventually spread to foreign countries. Nigerian protesters besieged Nigerian chancelleries in London, New York, and other cities, demanding answers to questions that had never before been posed. Some of the queries pertained to bad governance, corruption and the maltreatment of Nigerian masses at home. As such, the protests didn't just address the issue

of the fuel subsidy and its subsequent 120% increase in the price of petroleum products. Rather, a wide range of bad governance issues hampering the effective functioning of the state were brought into the public eye. Some of these included endemic corruption in the government and public services and the poor management of the country's natural resources that were responsible for widening the gap between rich and poor, the systematization of poverty in the country, the inhuman treatment of Nigerians by the government and the forces of law and order, and finally the lack of transparency and openness in government affairs (e.g., the opaqueness of national budgeting).

Initially, the movement started without any clear structure, organization or leadership and as such appeared to be more like a grassroots movement, inspired by an international current known as "Occupy the World". The latter took place in countries like Greece, the USA and Spain. By the fourth day of the protests, the movement acquired a relatively formal organization. Organized labor associations (notably the Nigerian Labor Congress [NLC] and the Trade Union Congress [TUC]) as well as other civil society organizations (notably Enough is Enough [EiE]) joined the protest. These new entrants quickly took control and technically, and temporarily, assumed the role of representatives of the masses. According to Ogala and Ezeamalu (2013), organized labor associations not only provided the movement with strength, leadership and a template for negotiating with the government that it needed. It also offered the government an avenue through which it could subdue the protests.

Negotiations between the government and organized labor organizations shortly resulted in the institution of a partial subsidy, which reduced the petrol price from N141 to N97. But this came at the cost of terminating the protest. Having agreed on this partial subsidy, the labor organizations promptly withdrew from the protests. This simultaneously weakened the movement and gave the government a certain legitimacy to use force and crush strongholds of protesters who adamantly continued their demonstrations. The government's repression of protesters ran across a few days, and involved the killing of about 17 people. The latter were presented by official sources as miscreants.

Role of Twitter and other Social Networks in the Movement

Online activism was a major feature of the Occupy Nigeria movement. From its conception to execution, most of the protests staged during the movement were digitally driven. In fact, the civil unrests that characterized the movement from day one was, arguably, the logical consequence of a series of anti-government campaigns carried out on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Google+, 2go, MySpace, YouTube and LinkedIn. This may not be a surprise given that Nigeria is believed to have the largest online audience

amongst the African nations, and a teledensity^{****} estimated at 60% (Communications Week, 2012). Social media thus fuelled the movement in at least three different ways: (i) they chiefly initiated debates and conversations about the topic of the fuel subsidy and the Occupy Nigeria Movement; (ii) they participated in christening the six-day strike action; and (iii) they played a central role in the coordination of protesters' actions on the streets. Protesters used online generated messages such as "no fuel subsidy removal" and "let's meet at Ojota at 9 AM tomorrow" to coordinate the protests on Nigerian streets (Communications Week 2012; Osai 2014; Kombol 2014).

Social media equally served as a strategic platform to report on major developments or circulate updates about the movement. Cyber activists used mainly Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube to disseminate uncensored information about strike actions that were being staged in various parts of the country. In addition, they published footage of protesters who were inhumanly treated or even killed by Nigerian forces. These platforms were also used to pick apart the government fuel subsidy scheme and draw attention to the fraudulent practices associated with it. Some cyber activists used Twitter to break down the 2012 budget, comparing the indemnities accorded to high government officials (such as the President and the Vice-President) and the cost of living of the average Nigerian. All this contributed to informing protesters' next moves and fermenting their street protests in various Nigerian cities. Africa Practice (2014) shared some outcomes of these online tactics:

"Occupy Nigeria marks the significance of social media in Nigerian politics [...] Occupy Nigeria translated cyber conversation to actual mobilization beyond those platforms. With an estimated tweet every second during the protest, the movement highlighted that Nigerians are capable of, and will mobilize to demand change from the government. Occupy Nigeria cemented the need for the government and politicians to engage with citizens, which is why many [Nigerians politicians] are now particularly active on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter today." (Africa Practice 2014, 8)

Another important role played by social networks during the movement was that of unifier. In effect, they served to unite the north and south around a single cause. The message sent through Twitter, Facebook and other social networking sites had no boundaries and denoted a people (temporarily) united to challenge the undemocratic policies of a government and "kleptocratic" – a course that, humanitarily speaking, was more than just.

^{****}Otherwise called telephone density, the term refers to the number of telephone connection for every hundred individuals living within a particular area. This number varies between countries and may also vary between rural and urban areas within a country.

The Occupy Nigeria Movement and Democratization in Nigeria

As a digitally-driven movement, the Occupy Nigeria campaign has in some ways been reminiscent of the Egyptian revolution in 2011 that involved Twitter, commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. Through the creative use of online platforms, Nigerian protesters and cyber activists were able to educate and mobilize the population. Arguably, they rallied the people to rise against an unjust measure by the government and persuaded that same government to review its undemocratic policies.

Much of the information circulated through social networks during and in connection with the movement worked as an eye opener for the Nigerian people. Many were enlightened about the finer details of the fuel subsidy scheme, as well as the fraud that was associated with the initiative. As noted by many Nigerian human right activists, these online sources opened the minds of many Nigerians to the issues of the fuel subsidy (Freedom on the Net 2016). The subsidy was presented as a way of distracting the people from the embezzlement of state funds by the government. Following the storm of online information, many became acquainted with the intensity of corruption at various levels of government, as well as with the opaqueness of Nigeria's 2012 budgeting. Because of all this, the outcome of the movement on the Nigerian government was positive. The protests were actually politically didactic, as Nigerians seemed to realize that they have significant agency to change the political situation of their country. Indeed, online debate and mass protests are a way to criticize the government and call them to order whenever the interests of the people are not served.

The pressure exerted by the movement frightened the people in power, pushing them to *mano militari* adopt a series of changes aimed at sanitizing various sectors of the petroleum industry. For instance, fuel pricing was revisited, and an investigative panel to probe the fuel subsidy scheme was set up. This panel released a report that identified a long list of petroleum marketers, government officials and close allies of the President who were involved in fuel subsidy fraud. Twenty people on this list were later prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crime Committee (EFCC). Additionally, the government saw itself pressurized to set up two committees: the Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede-led Presidential Committee on Verification and Reconciliation of subsidy claims and payments, and the Nuhu Ribadu led Committee on Petroleum Revenue Task Force. All these developments constitute some of the real outcomes of the Twitter campaign, as far as democratization is concerned.

Despite these outcomes, Occupy Nigeria revealed some of the weaknesses of online campaigns. First, the campaign showed how very difficult it can be to coordinate a Twitter driven campaign. The Occupy Nigeria Movement started as an unstructured movement with no leadership or clear purpose. It therefore functioned like a destructive storm, aimed at paralyzing the Nigerian economy in direct reaction to the presumed "heartless" and "daring" policy of removing fuel subsidy. There seemed to be no proper coordination or

harmonization of the cyber-driven components of the movement, the street protests and the negotiation parts of the exercise. This is clearly seen in the fact that, when going to the negotiation table with government, Organized Labor tended to have its own agenda – or at least priorities – that were not entirely aligned with those of protesters or civil society organizations like the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL). As mentioned above, Organized Labor was able to secure a number of concessions from the government that were limited in scope. They backed down following these, thereby weakening the protests and hampering the Occupy Nigeria movement from reaching its full potential. Arguably, many protesters were not satisfied by these concessions and continued to demand greater transparency on the fraudulent nature of the government and its policy. This is illustrated by the fact that, though weakened in magnitude and frequency, protests continued for some months after. CACOL’s chairman Debo Adeniran underscores the unfinished nature and near fiasco of the Occupy Nigeria movement when he opines that:

“Most of the things we got [were] actually deception, to say the least. The calling off of the protest is a kind of betrayal on the part of government and labor leaders, who were our partners in the process, because they were not part of the meeting that agreed on N97 per liter. They betrayed the cause of the civil society populace because we were never part of the negotiation that arrived at N97 per liter of petrol. That is the first loss that we suffered, because we were capable of forcing the government to come back to N60 or even less.” (cited in Ogala and Ezeamalu 2013, 36)

It could therefore be argued that Organized Labor somehow “hijacked” a popular and anarchist movement initiated by the masses and allowed it to result in weaker outcomes than it had the potential to generate. Sharing corollaries, Ogala and Ezeamalu (2013) review an impressive number of mitigated assessments of the movement made by some of its organizers. They cite the Vice President of the Joint Action Front, Achike Chude, who said that:

“The downside was that, resulting from that particular protest, Nigerians were not actually able to impose their will on the government by ensuring that those who were involved in that subsidy were punished adequately. We know the games the government has been playing, hiding the people and using delay tactics through their anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC who, [themselves], perpetrate corruption [...] in this country. We have not been able to do anything [about] revelations arising from the subsidy probe, and the fact that corruption has continued unabated.” (Ogala and Ezeamalu 2013, 37)

The swiftness of the government’s response to the daily protests made many observers (notably Ibrahim 2015; Communications Week 2012) speculate that Occupy Nigeria held great promise for the fight against corruption in the country. However, the eventual outcome of the movement attests to the contrary, as the government seemed to have “malignly” played its cards to have its way. Mainly, important people and influencers of

the regime who were involved in the fraud have remained unpunished, enjoying a mysterious immunity due to their link to established power.

Second, the Occupy Nigeria movement was marked by chaos and it incorporated questionable and undemocratic cyber cultures. For instance, many entities involved in the movement resorted to hacktivism. This is an amalgamation of activism and hacking. Groups within the movement attacked government websites, including those by the EFCC. This could be viewed as a form of cyber crime and antidemocratic tactics. A number of schools of thought have made a case for hacktivism, presenting it as a postmodern approach to digital activism (Jordan and Taylor 2004). However, it remains evident that the practice is questionable as it arguably amounts to a form of vandalism. Another cybercrime and undemocratic action noticed during the campaign was the spreading of false news through social media such as Twitter and Facebook. There were rumors that the protests had caused waves of resignations of government officials. In view of these questionable tactics, President Goodluck lamented that “there are a lot of mischief makers going around to misinform Nigerians, especially through social networks like the Twitter, Blackberry, Facebook and others – to communicate very wrong things to Nigerians” (cited in Communications Week 2012, 9). Indeed, many digital platforms served as sources of misinformation during the movement. This underscores the idea that Twitter-driven activism may result in a variety of both democratic and undemocratic cultures. Indeed, the use of hacktivism and other techniques using Twitter may result in a paradoxical situation where activists ignorantly or deliberately use crime to protest against, or denounce, government instituted crime.

The Case of the #BringBackOurGirls Twitter Campaign

This campaign was launched on April 23rd, 2014, in response to the abduction of close to 300 female students in the northeastern Nigerian city of Chibok. The abduction took place in the night of April 15th, in the knowing and thanks to the apparent passivity/impotency of the Nigerian army. The initial reaction of the government to the abduction was problematic and misleading. It confirmed that the abduction had taken place but assured Nigerians and the worried international community that the army had successfully rescued the girls (Blanchard 2015). However, this statement was a calculated lie, aimed at sparing the regime the embarrassment of losing face. Because of (a) the abduction; (b) the apparent inaction or inaptitude of the Nigerian government to stop it from taking place; and (c) the dearth of information regarding the whereabouts and plight of the abductees, various civil society organizations and political parties took a series of ad hoc actions in the country. Both local and international pressure groups and activists rose to question the government’s poor management of the incident, as well as to mobilize the international community against the terrorist group Boko Haram. The pressure groups

pushed the idea of a prompt rescue of the abducted girls and a reconciliation with their respective families.

It is in this social and political atmosphere that the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls was created by the Abuja-based lawyer Ibrahim Abdulahi. His aim was to pressure the government into being more transparent and showing more enthusiasm regarding the search and rescue of the schoolgirls. The hashtag was strongly influenced by an appeal by former education Minister Oby Ezekwesili during a live telecast of a UNESCO event in the southeastern city of Port Harcourt. During the event, attended by highly placed personalities, technocrats and dignitaries of the regime, Mrs Ezekwesili urged the audiences to unequivocally demand the release of the abducted girls. In an impersonal mode, she coined her request using the terms “they should bring back our daughters”. The lawyer Abdulahi in turn appropriated and slightly modified this to “bring back our girls”, or #BringBackOurGirls. His initial post was re-tweeted by Mrs Ezekwesili and other cybernauts in the span of a couple of minutes. In a subsequent tweet, Mrs Ezekwesili appealed to supporters of the ‘movement in gestation’ to use the hashtag. From there, #BringBackOurGirls went viral on the social networks (particularly Twitter), unifying the national and international community regarding the plight of the Chibok girls.

In just a few weeks, the Twitter-based movement grew exponentially and transnationalized, attracting the support of a constellation of international celebrities, top politicians and diplomats, influential human rights activists, and non-governmental. High profile people such as former US first lady Michelle Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron and supermodel Cara Delevingne added their selfies, voices and support to the mounting social media noise. France offered to organize an International Summit on Boko Haram. The US proposed to send negotiation experts and deployed over 80 military personnel to neighboring Chad. In addition, they offered to share military technology (such as surveillance aircraft) to assist the Nigerian government in the search for the abducted girls. Similarly, Britain sent surveillance experts to help locate the girls. Other forms of support were proposed by countries including China and Israel.

It is estimated that, as of the 31st of May, 2014, over 3.1 million tweets had been sent using the hashtag “#BringBackOurGirls”. At its peak, the #BringBackOurGirls movement included more than 67 countries with the bulk of its online support stemming from the US, Canada, Britain, South Africa and France (Endong 2018c; Ibrahim 2015). As such, the movement that started in the Nigerian capital of Abuja went on to trump large international issues of the day, such as the war in Syria, the Ukrainian crisis, and the missing Malaysian Airline flight MH 370.

The mounting social media activity was accompanied by a series of offline mobilizations and protests across Nigeria. These protests were mainly driven by women. They built on the awareness raised by the Twitter campaign, to trigger other protests in cities around the world, from Paris to Johannesburg and from New York to Amsterdam.

#BringBackOurGirls and Democratization in Nigeria

The #BringBackOurGirls movement brought the issue of recurring and massive abductions of people (mainly girls, women and young boys) in northern Nigeria to light for the Nigerian public and the international community. In addition, it highlighted the inefficacies of the Nigerian government policies in the fight against terrorism. The movement brought attention to an issue that, despite its serious nature, was alarmingly relegated to the banal and had been ignored or downplayed by state run media and government officials. Thus, the movement, and the protests it generated, set the political agenda in Nigeria. It drew attention to the government's poor management of the Chibok incident, and its inefficient methods of fighting terrorism and radical Islamism. These were now placed in the top list of political issues to discuss in the country, which placed greater pressure on the government to take action. The government reversed certain policies it had previously adopted to manage the crisis: first, it negated its initial claim that the Nigerian army had rescued the girls, and officially vowed to show more commitment in rescuing them. Second, it was forced to accept the help of foreign partners in the rescue.

Another contribution of the campaign to the democratization process in Nigeria is that a more direct and sincere communication was established between the people and the government. People realized they could use social media to demand greater accountability of the government, and they could demand immediate political change. It equally pressured the government to work more seriously for the interest of the people. Practically, the pressure exerted on the Nigerian government made the latter devote more attention, resources and efforts to combating terrorism in northern Nigeria. For many years, the Boko Haram insurgency and its terrorist activities had constituted a serious problem for the country, particularly for the non-Islamist communities living in northern Nigeria. They had been behind various incidents in the region, including the burning of educational institutions, the targeted killings of non-Islamic groups, mass-abductions, and the brutal killing of people. Terrorism in the northern part of the country has claimed more than 20,000 lives since 2009 and has led to material destruction worth more than \$2,6 million. and has weighed on the government like a political albatross (Amnesty International 2015; Blanchard 2015). The issue has been seriously mismanaged by successive Nigerian governments since 2009. Arguably, it was the Twitter campaign that motivated the government to redouble its efforts towards addressing this issue.

Furthermore, the #BringBackOurGirls movement showed how uninspired and impotent the Nigerian government of the time was in the face of the growing terrorism threat in the north. As noted by Agence-France Presses (2016), the protests showed how the "Nigerian military was floundering badly in the face of the better-armed rebels, losing territory and vital public support". Indeed, the protests exposed the fact that many soldiers of the Nigerian army suffered from low morale, and were struggling to counter an adversary like Boko Haram that appeared to be increasingly well-armed and trained

(Ibrahim 2015; Adamu et al. 2016). By exposing these various weaknesses of the army, the movement ultimately brought disrepute and unpopularity to the government *du jour*.

#BringBackOurGirls generated a lot of media attention and inspired numerous protests inside and outside of Nigeria, which contributed in no small measure to tarnish the image of both the Goodluck administration and the Nigerian army. Arguably, one consequence of the movement was that Nigerian public opinion in favor of the administration plummeted, resulting in poor results for his Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in the 2015 general elections. As an extension, the president became unpopular and was considered "doomed" to lose his presidential position to Mohamadu Buhari during the 2015 general elections (Freedom on the Net 2016).

The hashtag campaign also politically prioritized the liberation of the schoolgirls and the fight against terrorism for subsequent Nigerian governments. On coming into power, President Goodluck's successor included the search and rescue of the Chibok girls in his topmost political projects. In his inaugural speech in April 2015 he declared that:

"We do not know if the Chibok girls can be rescued. Their whereabouts remain unknown. As much as I wish to, I cannot promise that we can find them. But I say to every parent, family member and friend of the children that my Government will do everything in its power to bring them home."(cited in Shearlaw 2015, 31)

The #BringBackOurGirl campaign thus made the Nigerian government to radically depart from its initial techniques of managing information concerning its military strategies against Boko Haram in the North. One observes that prior to the campaign, the Nigerian government had cultivated the questionable culture of downplaying the gravity of Boko Haram activities in the country while providing misleading or over-doctored information about the effectiveness of its military and strategic actions against the terrorist group. This can be illustrated using two examples highlighted in Blanchard (2015). On October 2014, the Nigerian government claimed to have negotiated a ceased-fire and hostage release with Boko Haram, only for terrorist attacks to intensify within days of the agreement allegedly taking effect. A similar situation occurred in January 2015 when the Nigerian government appeared somehow reserved and lukewarm after a series of deadly Boko Haram attacks in the country and rather showed enthusiasm in expressing sympathy with France for the deaths of 16 terrorist attack victims in that country.

The positive developments that followed the campaign are, arguably, linked to the intensity and volume of the social media noise that erupted in reaction to the abduction of the 276 schoolgirls. Authors such as Endong (2018a, 2018c), Smith (2015), and Oladepo (2016) even go to the extent of attributing the subsequent release of these girls (which occurred in two waves) to the continuous pressure exerted by the digitally driven movement. However, we must be careful to note that it is difficult to precisely determine the role hashtag activism played here. From all we know, the campaign may have been harmless to the Boko Haram group. They have unrepentantly continued to undertake

massive abductions of girls and children in cities like Damasus and Yobe, located in northern Nigeria (Amnesty International 2015; Carsten 2018). In light of this, Boko Haram's decision to release the girls may be due to other factors than the Twitter campaign, thereby mitigating its impact on the terrorist group. Our inability to assess the precise impact of the campaign may be one of the classical problems inherent to digital activism.

Hashtag activism may bring international condemnation and political action that will ultimately tarnish the image of a terrorist group, and this in turn could push governments to use their armies to declare war on such terrorist groups. However, the two most popular approaches to dealing with terrorism or terrorism related issues have been well-planned negotiations and well-coordinated military actions. Countries like France have often resorted to negotiation to secure the release of French hostages, while the US is known not to negotiate with terrorists but uses military strikes or covert solutions. Digital activism has therefore never directly yielded results when it comes to securing the release of hostages that are in the custody of terrorist organizations. Endong (2018) notes that international organizations, such the Red Cross, and the Swiss government negotiated with Boko Haram for the Chibok girls to be released in two waves. These negotiations also led to the release of Boko Haram commandoes and generals in exchange. It could therefore be said that compared to the #BringBackOurGirls Twitter protests and the haphazard military expeditions they engendered, negotiations played a greater and more direct role in the liberation of the girls. As such, it would seem that the social media driven campaign had only a limited impact on politics and the democratization of Nigeria.

Another problem with the #BringBackOurGirls movement lies in the fact that social media campaigns are generally very frivolous in nature. The tumult and media frenzy they generate may die down as abruptly as it started. The world's attention span can be brief, giving social influencers, opinion leaders, politicians and policy makers a very short time to respond, make the difference and achieve socio-political change in times of crisis. In addition, the #BringBackOurGirls online activity got to its zenith very quickly and by the time it started going down, virtually nothing had been done as far as releasing the Chibok girls. Though the Goodluck administration was pressured to refine its anti-terrorism strategies, as well as its approaches to liberating the girls, only about 57 out of 276 abducted girls had gotten away from the Islamist group two years after the Twitter movement was initiated. Most of these girls were liberated not thanks to military intervention but through mere providence – most of them simply escaped when the vehicles on which they were carried broke down in the bush. Therefore, two years after the abduction there still was virtually no hope of finding the remaining 219 Chibok girls. Worse still, mass abductions of civilians continued unabated in northern Nigeria. This situation may indeed have dampened the optimism of many. Negative appraisals of the hashtag campaign began to appear online. The Goodluck administration seized this to suggest there had never been an abduction of schoolgirls and that the whole “fable” was invented by the opposition to discredit them before local Nigerians and the international community (Freedom on the

Net 2016; Adamu et al. 2016). As the online protest became an embarrassment for the government, the latter devised various strategies to undermine it, including the criminalization of the movement and starting counter-digital movements such as the #BringBackGoodluck.

All the above-mentioned developments tend to give credence to theories suggesting that it is difficult, if not uncertain, to translate social media success into tangible socio-political change on ground (Shearlaw 2015; Cammaerts 2015; Parker and McIlwain 2016; Reitan 2007). Arguably, similar issues can be seen surrounding other famous campaigns like the 2012-2016 #BlackLivesMatter and the 2012 #OccupyWallStreet movements.

CONCLUSION

Twitter campaigns have become novel ways in which popular movements and political pressure are manifested in modern and post-modern societies across the world. Globally, “Twitted revolutions”, or digitally-driven social movements, have become excellent tools for mass mobilization. They have equally become a way of trying to engineer social change. Social movements tend to draw on social digital networks to extend their reach and turn up the volume regarding their cause. From student movements to politically motivated campaigns, digitally-driven mobilizations constitute a new way of assembling people around a cause and aim to canvass views and shape public opinion. The emergence and relative success in terms of visibility of such movements as #BlackLivesMatter, #JeSuisCharlie, #OccupyWallStreet and the Arab Spring, among others, are excellent cases evidencing the currency of tweeted international movements. These could be considered to serve as examples of what is to come: Twitter movements may be the “language of the future”.

In the space of just a few years (from 2012 to 2014), Nigeria has witnessed the efficaciousness and political power of such Twitter-driven social movements with the outbreak of the #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOurGirls movements. As explored in this chapter, these two movements have shown the extent to which Twitter and other social networks could creatively be appropriated. Indeed, they can be used by local civil society organizations as well as by human right activists, not only to change the game of political activism in the country, but equally to question government policies and “force” those in power to rethink their model of governance. The use of Twitter and other social networks in the two abovementioned campaigns enabled the Nigerian people to set the socio-political agenda in favor of issues that had been rocking the economy and contributing to the misery of the population, as well as the underdevelopment of the country, for years. These included corruption, the maltreatment of the people by the government, abuse of authority by the forces of law and order, widening gaps between the haves and the have-nots, bad governance and many other forms of ‘democratic authoritarianisms’. It could therefore be

said that these two campaigns specifically offered the opportunity for the Nigerian people to ask the right questions and to push their government to take up some of its prime responsibilities. These include dealing with endemic corruption in the country, ensuring good governance and management of public affairs, protecting the Nigerian citizenry, and ensuring transparency in the affairs of the Federation.

In spite of the political gains derived from these case studies, they have illustrated some of the weaknesses of hashtag activism. As has been shown above, the actual results can be patchy or unclear. In the case of the Occupy Nigeria movement, the Twitter activism generated pressure that frightened the government and spurred them into seeking ways of temporarily appeasing the people, rather than adopting lasting political policies that could serve as precedents for politically, judicially, economically and socially bettering the country. The noise generated on Twitter pressurized the Goodluck administration to make relatively insufficient concessions and to be seen to have heard the outcry of the people. The government maintained a reduced fuel price from the initially intended N141 to N97 per liter, and set a number of ad hoc commissions to investigate and deal with the corruption of the scheme. But its enthusiasm in the fight against corruption in the country has remained doubtful or rather incomplete. Those involved in the fuel subsidy scandal remain unpunished, to the disappointment of the Nigerian people.

In addition, the fact that Organized Labor hijacked the Twitter-driven movement and did not entirely represent the voice of civil society in the negotiations has shown how it can be difficult to build upon online momentum. This lack of symbiosis between online and offline movements enabled the Nigerian government to easily manipulate the labor organizations representing the people, and other influential bodies that took part in the movement, to its own advantage. Thus, the fuel subsidy was partially maintained in a bid to render the price of fuel affordable to the people, and to appease them. However, corruption continued to flourish in the subsidy scheme and those involved in this corruption remained unpunished. It could therefore be argued that the Occupy Nigeria movement simply shook corruption, without totally uprooting it from the system.

The same assessment may be made of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign whose online successes are in no way similar to its political, social and judicial gains on the ground. The campaign successfully coordinated by a number of local Nigerian activists led to the outcry of the international community and local pressure groups, which forced the Nigerian government to show more commitment to its anti-terrorism campaign and security policies. The campaign equally exposed the weaknesses and ineffective management of political crises in the country. However, it proved limited results as far as liberating the Chibok girls and dissuading Boko Haram from conducting mass abductions of vulnerable social groups. As mentioned, negotiations separate from the Twitter movement seem to have played a key role in their liberation.

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Chapter 10

DON'T DARE CALL IT A COUP: TWITTER DISCOURSES ON THE FALL OF ROBERT MUGABE

Allen Munoriyarwa

Department of Journalism, Film and Television,
University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

ABSTRACT

In 2017, Robert Mugabe resigned from office after 37 years in power. The week starting from the move of the army into the streets on 15 November to his resignation on 21 November was a tumultuous time in Zimbabwe's politics. During this time, Twitter became an important platform that was frequently used in the mediation of the coup. It provided spaces for discussion and debates among individuals, Civil Society Organizations, and pro-democracy movements in and outside of Zimbabwe. This chapter answers two questions about the coup in Zimbabwe. Firstly, in what ways was the platform appropriated during the coup? Secondly, what themes emerged from the use of the hashtag #ZimbabweCoup? This chapter broadly discusses how #ZimbabweCoup was appropriated during the coup by identify the key themes that emerged during the online debate about the fall of Mugabe. The chapter draws on 1154 tweets that are using the hashtag. By identifying the themes that emerged on this platform, the chapter contributes to an understanding of the mediation of post-colonial (African) political transitions on new media platforms.

Keywords: coup, thematic analysis, twitter, Rober Mugabe, Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe National Army

INTRODUCTION

How people communicate during times of crisis, like military coups, is crucial for understanding civic debate (Kouzmin 2005). A military coup constitutes a serious political crisis as it ruptures the constitutional order through an unconstitutional appropriation of political authority by an organ of the state (the army), which should be apolitical (Thomson 2010). The Zimbabwean coup should be understood as an extreme crisis, as it violated standing and internationally accepted constitutional criteria on the transfer of power. During a crisis, the medium used to carry the message may shape and define the discursive themes of the message itself (Loader et al. 2014). The advent of social networking sites (SNS), particularly Twitter in mid-2006, has created communication opportunities through which people can access and exchange a variety of information, also during moments of crisis. As Twitter gains in popularity, people have started moving from mainstream media's passive consumption and top-down news patterns (Jenkins and Green 2013), to active engagement with news. With a large number of people losing faith in their governments, state institutions and traditional mainstream media (Foster and Frieden 2017), alternative communication platforms such as Twitter have assumed a key role. While the quality of information on such platforms has increasingly become the subject of scrutiny due to the rising menace of fake news, there is no doubt that Twitter has revolutionized both news production and dissemination. In the process, Habermas's (1989) classical public sphere has been redefined by wresting it from bourgeoisie monopoly (Huang 2011).

Simultaneously, Twitter has recalibrated news and information exchange and relatively lessened the costs of access (Stepanova 2011). The fact that it can be a mobile-based platform has added to many of its advantages, including that it is relatively unfettered by the bureaucracy that is characteristic of mainstream platforms like radio, newspapers and television (Huang 2011). As such, twitter as a platform allows users to speak back to power without the fear of reprisals in Orwellian political contexts like Zimbabwe. As a result of its growing popularity, research has increasingly taken an interest in analyzing the use of Twitter in everyday media consumption by users. To this effect, Twitter has emerged as one of the most researched social media platforms (Jenkins and Green 2013). A significant amount of research has accumulated around the use of Twitter during political revolutions (see Khondker 2011; Huang 2011 and Bruns et al. 2013). In addition, a number of studies suggest that it is intellectually productive to analyze and evaluate political discourses on Twitter during major political events such as mass demonstrations (Hemer and Persson 2017), wars (Bennett 2013), revolutions (Khondker 2011) and elections (Cushion and Thomas 2018).

As noted earlier, research on Twitter and politics has largely focused on how the platform is used during mass demonstrations, mass movements, elections and other political and social processes (Khondker 2011; Huang 2011; Cushion and Thomas 2018). This chapter focuses on a different political crisis event – a coup. It is under such a crisis

that we can possibly understand the discursive trajectories of the coup within its particular framework by examining users' tweets on the platform. In his research on climate change communication on social media platforms like Twitter, Nisbet (2009) notes the need for looking into how Twitter users engage in content production during prominent events. This chapter aims to further existing bottom-up research on social media use in a crisis-specific context (Ampofo et al. 2011), and in doing so it conducts a thematic analysis of Twitter coverage of the coup. It will do this by identifying some common themes within organically generated news. This study thereby addresses a gap in the literature as at the time of publication, no studies had tackled this particular subject through the use of thematic analysis. Scholars have pointed out that an analysis of tweets can reveal new themes emerging around the subject under discussion (Meraz 2011).

The next section provides a brief background to the coup that toppled long-time president Robert Mugabe. It is followed by a section on literature on Twitter and participatory politics in Africa broadly since there is not much on the subject specifically from Zimbabwe. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework for this study, which is the public sphere, after which the study's methodology will be discussed. This is followed by the findings and the discussion.

BACKGROUND: THE NOVEMBER MILITARY COUP IN ZIMBABWE

On 14 November 2017, the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) rolled its tankers onto the streets of Harare and took control of the publicly-owned broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). The next day, the man referred to as "the face of the coup," Brigadier Sibusiso Moyo, announced the military take-over. The army officially called their move "Operation Restore Legacy." In his announcement, Brigadier Moyo emphasized that the army was not undertaking a coup. As such, Zimbabweans, as well as the international community should not call it a coup. Moyo appeared on the main television (ZBC TV) news bulletin and said what was happening was a "bloodless correction" (Moyo 2017) not a military take-over. According to Brigadier Moyo, this "bloodless correction" targeted criminals surrounding the president (Mugabe), not the president himself." Brigadier Moyo specifically said, "We wish to make it abundantly clear that this is not a military takeover [...] we are targeting criminals around Mugabe who are committing crimes that are causing social and economic suffering in the country in order to bring them to justice" (Moyo 2017).

In his theorization of coups and military take-overs, Huntington (2006) notes that there are three types of coups. "Breakthrough" coups are led by a revolutionary group in the military; "Guardian" coups occur when an elite disposes another elite from power; and "Veto" coups occur when the military intervenes to protect a threatened status quo from the possibility of radical political change. Zimbabwe's coup has become something of an

enigma. For a fact, it was bloodless. Political theorists (Huntington 2006) would call it a “soft coup.” However, it cannot escape its label as a coup because the military inserted itself into a civilian government and triggered a series of events that consequently caused the fall of a civilian government and president. There were no revolutionary changes thereafter, nor were there any criminals who were arrested. Mackintosh (2017) says the event was the world’s strangest coup because it does not sync neatly into any of the theoretical models that explain coups. The author (2017, 1) goes on to say that: “Yet for all its strangeness, some facts have become clear: the coup deposed the country’s long-time president, Robert Mugabe 5 days later under pressure from the army, the party, Zimbabwe’s citizens and the international community.”

Perhaps thinking of the information dissemination power of Twitter, the First Lady of Zimbabwe Grace Mugabe tried in vain to order the Minister of Cyber-Security and Threats Detection, Patrick Chinamasa, to shut down Twitter as soon as the army rolled into the streets of Harare. Grace Mugabe is quoted as having said to the minister, “You should shut down Twitter. People cannot stand a coup” (Guma 2017, 12). This order, however, was impossible to execute. On the 21st of November, a week after the tumultuous events of the military take-over, Robert Mugabe resigned the presidency. This chapter seeks to make a contribution to an expanding understanding of the dynamic uses of social network sites like Twitter in political discourses. It attempts to do this through a thematic analysis of a politically oriented hashtag, #ZimbabweCoup. The chapter focuses on exploring the different uses this specific hashtag was put to regarding the coup, and the themes that emerged from tweets using the hashtag. In other words, it aims to shed light on the practices of political mediation that Twitter as a platform was used for during the coup.

TWITTER AND PARTICIPATORY POLITICS IN AFRICA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much of the existing literature on Twitter in Africa has emerged from North Africa as a result of the Arab Spring in 2011. The events hit Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, but were suppressed in Morocco (Stepanova 2011; Bruns et al. 2013). Bruns et al. (2013, 58) note that during the Arab Spring, Twitter users were able to establish “networks of interaction (variously through @replying, retweeting or both.” They further argue that users were able to transcend language barriers (English and Arabic) and mobilize participants. Hermida et al. (2014) note that during the Arab Spring, Twitter became an important source of news. Even mainstream news often had to rely on Twitter feeds. They further found that Twitter ushered in “innovative forms of news production... with the journalists as a central node of trust to authenticate and interpret news flows” (2014, 558). Lotan et al. (2011) agree, noting that during the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, Twitter was central in spreading

news and updates. This view is shared by Stepanova (2011) who notes that the fact that the Egyptian authorities moved to close down Twitter is a testimony to the platform's strength.

Twitter has blossomed during heavily censored environments such as revolutions. Khondker (2011) said that in the absence of an open media and civil society, Twitter played a central role during the Arab Spring. Christensen (2011, 554) shares this view, pointing out that "The use of social media (like Twitter) had injected some interesting new facets into the power relations between state elites and regular citizens." Howard et al. (2011) agree with Christensen (2011), asserting that social media platforms aid the diffusion of democratic ideas across international borders. On the other hand, skeptics have argued that the role of Twitter during revolutions and the role of any other SNS ought not to be romanticized or hyped (Wolfsfeld et al. 2013). They argue that the role of these platforms cannot be understood outside the political environment in which they operate. Critics further claim that the use of Twitter and other SNS is much more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activities than to precede it. Their view is supported by Christensen (2011) who, despite underscoring the importance of Twitter, cautions against celebratory views as the actual levels of Twitter use have not been verified or quantified in any revolution. In a similar vein, Gladwell (2010) argues that Twitter and other social media are built on weak ties. "It's just a platform that ensures distant connections with acquaintances, with breathtaking efficiency" (2010, 4). Gladwell (2010) disagrees with those he terms as "the evangelists of social media," arguing that Twitter's weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism. Therefore, in this author's view, revolutions are not tweeted. What Twitter does is to increase the motivation for revolutions, but it cannot contribute to strategy (Gladwell 2010).

Sub-Saharan Africa is still to be studied regarding its use of twitter. Much of the existing literature straddles various types of social media platforms, without taking a particular focus on Twitter. Research on the use of Twitter specifically is developing, building on case studies from other parts of Africa than the north. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, Twitter use has been important in forging digital resistance to the President Kabila's intransigence towards elections (Emejulu and McGregor 2019). They note that resistance to Kabila's unconstitutional extension of his leadership has developed on Twitter in a grassroots manner. It is led by churches like the Roman Catholic Church (Emejulu and McGregor 2019). In Uganda, Twitter has inspired digital activism (Chibita 2016). More so, scholars have noted that Twitter has been important in the mobilization of new forms of political protests, and political engagement during such protests, in Africa (Chibita 2016).

In other parts of Africa, like Ethiopia, Twitter has revolutionized debates about the country's oppressive leadership, allowing citizens to search their conscience and mobilize against the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolution Democratic Party (Gagliardone and Pohjonen 2016). Despite heavy censorship of the platform in Ethiopia, these spaces remain crucial in political debates in the country (Gagliardone and Pohjonen 2016). An example

often noted is that of the *Zone9ners* in the country whose hashtag #Respecttheconstitution was able to sway decisions by the ruling regime. A positive result of this rattling was that the group was able to secure an unprecedented debate between them and senior government officials.

However, other research on Twitter and participatory politics (see Bird 2011; Fraser 2007; and Castells and Cardoso 2006 for example) challenges Gladwell's (2010) and Christensen's (2011) arguments that the platform creates weak ties, and has not been quantified and verified in revolutions. Twitter has helped create new networks over which new forms of action can be mobilized (Gagliardone and Pohjonen 2016). It has also enhanced participatory politics (Bird 2011; Fraser 2007; Castells and Cardoso 2006). This has made it easy for the powerless, who Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) call the "subaltern counter publics" living on the peripheries of political life, to upend political authority by challenging their preferred discourses, collaborating, coordinating and openly articulating their concerns. A report by Portland University entitled *How Africa Tweets* (2018) has made some very pertinent findings. It established that politicians tweet less compared to ordinary people, journalists and news outlets. With the ever-increasing popularity of Twitter, there is a need to explore how this space has been appropriated for political engagement, and what the themes are that emerge from talk on this platform. The Zimbabwe coup itself was the subject of great Twitter activity, and was widely covered on mainstream media. This was arguably so because of Mugabe's international notoriety. In light of this, it is essential we understand how the coup was discussed and debated on the platform.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THE PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY

This chapter is located within the public sphere and the digital public sphere theories (Habermas, 1989; Deuze 2009; Fraser 2007). The Habermasian (1989) public sphere theory is defined by Dahlgren (2005) as the communicative spaces where ideas flow and circulate. This public sphere is a space distinct from business and state, where political participation is engaged in through discourse (Fraser 2007). Habermas (1989; 2010) saw places like coffee houses as a manifestation of this sphere. Theoretically, the public sphere was central to the health and functioning of participatory democracy (Couldry et al. 2007). However, Habermas' (2010) conceptualization of the public sphere has largely become anachronistic. Online social spaces have revolutionized the concept. However, it still provides a crucial framework for understanding contemporary spaces of communication like Twitter.

Thus, SNS like Twitter lie at the heart of the evolving public sphere. Bakardjieva (2009) writes about "subactivism" or micro-constructions, which occur through everyday practices of citizenship on SNS. In this sense, it can be argued that Twitter might constitute

a modern-day incarnation of Habermas' (1989) public sphere. In many respects, it is a space that creates "Subaltern counter-publics" (Fraser 2007, 14) who challenge hegemonic political discourses. Spaces like Twitter have become incrementally popular to the public. People can talk about politics freely rather than communicate via spaces like mainstream media that would otherwise be characterized by heavy censorship. These spaces bypass the established structures of power (Graham 2012). In addition, online public spheres like Twitter may allow for wider participation and, arguably, a quicker diffusion of information (Shepherd et al. 2015). There are three dimensions that are fundamental to understanding SNS as public spheres (Dahlgren 2005). These are as follows: first, the interactional dimension. This is when citizens encounter media information and interpret the information they encounter. Then, citizens engage in discussions on the information received. Second, the structural dimension focuses on fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and access to a public sphere (Dahlgren 2005). And finally, the representational dimension considers output symbols such as phrases, signs or images, and how they communicate (Brennen 2016, 271).

Despite these arguments, seeing SNS as public spheres has never been accepted across the board. Brennen (2016), for example, has argued that social media spaces like Twitter fail as functional public spheres despite their ability to nurture civic engagement in nuanced ways. The author notes that these platforms succeed only in communicating 'political myths.' These myths are the continual production and reproduction of a common narrative used by citizens to ascribe significance to political circumstances (Brennen 2016). This argument ties in with Gladwell's (2010) ideas about Twitter not being that powerful a space of political articulation and mobilization. But that Twitter is fast becoming a popular space for communicating is a given. Research on the Arab Spring has shown its potential as a place to get together, strategize, mobilize, and connect with mainstream media, even in places with authoritarian regimes (Cottle, 2011). It is therefore essential to assess how this online space was used during a fast-moving coup in a largely authoritarian and closed political space.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter uses qualitative research, and adopts a constructivist approach (Kim 2001). Twitter users are assumed to set their agenda and established their own themes of reference, around which they discussed the coup. #ZimbabweCoup is by no means the only hashtag that was used, so it is not taken to represent the entire conversation about the coup. However, this specific hashtag was created for the specific purpose of discussing the coup. In line with the scale of this study, the researcher collected 1154 tweets using #ZimbabweCoup. This total excludes duplicate tweets and retweets. This was done to ensure an accurate representation of newly generated content using the hashtag. The

researcher also eliminated tweets that only constituted of GIFs, pictures, memes and other images. These cannot readily be tackled with thematic analysis but are more suited to an investigation using multimodal discourse analysis or semiotic analysis. One-word and single phrase tweets were also eliminated as they were deemed insufficient in furthering a discussion or contributing to a debate about the coup. Further, one-worded tweets in any language other than English were also eliminated, as there wasn't sufficient engagement with them. For example, some tweets in Shona (Zimbabwe's common indigenous language) were responded to by about two or three respondents. Tweets in less popular languages like isiNdebele did not engage any users.

The tweets were collected from 15 November at 8PM to 16 November at 12PM. This covered the time that the military's attempt to remove Mugabe was officially confirmed on national television and approximately around that time that #ZimbabweCoup started trending. The collection ends when, the following day, Mugabe appeared on national television. He was flanked by the military, police and prison high command, and confirmed that he was still leading the country, though there were problems raised by the army that he was going to address. The collected tweets were put in a Google spreadsheet where they could be read as one continuous narrative by the researcher. Manual coding was employed, which is possible in view of the limited amount of tweets. After reading through the data, coding began.

Coding helped to summarize, condense and reduce the meaning of the data into analyzable codes that would be developed into themes. It involved three stages that took about a week. The first stage was the researcher identifying descriptive ideas, words and phrases that he saw as resembling the primary concerns of the tweets. The second stage involved running these identified ideas against those of three postgraduate colleagues who have experience and training in qualitative coding, and who had been given a copy of the data. Coding is basically an interpretive process, and not a precise science (Braun and Clark 2006). Inter-coder reliability was discussed and checked in multiple meetings amongst the coders, checking different tweets and discussing categorization. Finally, descriptive headings and overarching themes were identified and tweets were grouped accordingly. Thematic analysis is a method used to search for, identify, record and analyze repeated patterns (or themes) of meaning within a data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). It can be a number of interviews and texts. In order to define a theme, we could say it "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). This chapter used inductive thematic analysis where themes were developed as directed by the content of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The researcher and coders then read through the tweets to identify emerging themes. To decide on what tweet was categorized in what theme, a number of questions were asked, such as 'what are the main key words'; 'what information can be taken away from the tweet'? While some tweets fell into multiple categories, the preference was to place a tweet

into the category deemed most suitable. Representative tweets are quoted below during the analysis. The grammatical, punctuation and spelling mistakes are preserved as they highlight the authenticity of the tweet.

This methodology draws upon previous work using a similar method in analyzing Twitter (Chew and Eysenbach 2010; Scandfeld et al. 2010). However, the length of a tweet (280 characters) can pose a challenge to its interpretation. In order to avoid misinterpretation, tweets were reread, discussed among colleagues, and placed within their proper context. No attempt was made to contact Twitter users, nor to access information that was deemed private. Tweets have been anonymized so that users cannot easily be traced. Any information that links a tweet to a geographical location was also removed. The questions were not about who was tweeting and from where, as this was not deemed to impact the results. The focus lay with the subject of the tweet, i.e., the coup. The researcher did not engage in the discussion on the platform but preferred to be a lurker, avoiding any input into the ongoing debate. Whilst going through the data, a point was reached where no new themes emerged. This was the point of saturation.

FINDINGS

The first section of the findings discusses how the hashtag was used during the coup. The second section addresses the themes that emerged from this use.

Using Twitter for Memory Mining: Discussing the Checkered Legacy of Robert Mugabe

#ZimbabweCoup and the impending fall of Mugabe ignited a debate about his legacy. It became a platform for memory mining where tweets revisited past events and experiences. Halbwachs (1992, 22) defines memory mining as “Essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present.” Users revisited both the fondest and saddest moments that they attributed to Mugabe. For example, three tweets read:

“We are witnessing the fall of an anti-colonial giant...you did your best”

“You left us a robust education system... only that greedy idiots surrounded you.”

“You gave us land, no other person would have!”

Other users recalled the times and places they had last met him, while others yet recalled the happy memories they had shared with him. For instance:

“Hardly after addressing us at the airport. And they want him out? Greedy dogs.”

“He had lost his mojo... last year he could not remember his minister of finance...”

“He was at my uncle’s funeral. Cracking jokes and laughing even in old age. He did not see this coming!”

But some users were not as charitable when evaluating Mugabe’s legacy. They used the platform to revisit what they called the brutality of the regime, with some narrating family and relatives’ experiences under Mugabe. Twitter facilitated ordinary users’ participation in sharing these experiences and distributing them. For example, there was a debate about the Gukurahundi episodes on the platform. The Gukurahundi happened between 1982 and 1987. Mugabe alleged that the opposition party, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo, had planned an uprising against his government. He sent the North Korean trained 5th Brigade into the western part of the country, which is predominantly Ndebele and which was a ZAPU stronghold. The 5th Brigade stands accused of committing atrocities against civilians. Mugabe’s own fact-finding mission about this was never made public. No official discussion has ever been allowed around this issue. The subject has remained a taboo in mainstream historical discourses and media, and under the Mugabe regime any discussion about it was viewed as a manifestation of civil disobedience.

However, Twitter provided a platform where this debate came to the fore as Mugabe’s regime was threatened by the military. The platform provided an alternative communicative sphere for sharing these previously suppressed and marginalized memories. Some tweets posted to that effect included:

“This is the man who massacred the Ndebele. His time has come”

“Mugabe deserves a slow painful death. It was his 5th brigade that massacred us”

“We remember the Gukurahundi. Robert is a devil”

Thus, the platform was appropriated to mine memories that contested the official narrative of historical events. Mugabe had always denied the occurrence of a genocide during the Gukurahundi episodes, and has never admitted the existence of an official plot to massacre the Ndebele. Twitter enabled these once suppressed narratives to surface, and the views expressed were less than positive. Neiger et al. (2011) note that “Networked communication technologies facilitate new opportunities for users to scrutinize and interrogate previous material archives as static memories, thus influencing how the past is remembered” (cited in Zhao and Liu 2015, 41). Kansteiner (2010) agrees, saying that “New media play an emerging role in the process of shaping and formatting collective memory” (cited in Zhao and Liu 2015, 42).

However, the generation that bared witness in person to the Gukurahundi in the early 80s might not be on Twitter in numbers large enough to ignite a fierce debate like the one witnessed here. Some of the posts discussing Mugabe's Gukurahundi legacy were backed by small newspaper cuttings and video clips of the period. Horrific stories of the massacres were posted to the platform. Thus, participants collected material offline to share it online. This confirms the flexibility of Twitter to allow both offline and online interactions. Yang (2005, cited in Zhao and Liu 2015, 43) says that social media allows online and offline participation in political discussions and contentious activities. This means that users discussing Mugabe's legacy, like the Gukurahundi massacres, may have had no direct experience of these massacres but had to "crowdsource" the experiences of others in order to produce historical tales about the episodes. Twitter became a space that consolidated this view of Mugabe by giving old memories a platform of expression.

Using Twitter to Challenge Hegemonic News Discourses about the Coup

The platform was used to challenge the truthfulness of official discourses about the coup. Tweets on the platform challenged two things. First, there was skepticism about the trustworthiness of state-controlled mainstream channels regarding their news on the coup. Second, tweets openly challenged the intention of the army, and especially its claim that it was "targeting criminals around the president." One characteristic of the coup was a lack of mainstream news coverage about it. The army had openly declared, perhaps in a bid to assuage regional and international communities, that the target was not Mugabe. Yet as more soldiers poured onto the streets and more warnings against movements were issued, the intentions of the army were now hazy, at best.

Tweets openly challenged the public statement of targeting criminals. In addition, the official like that the army was "sanitizing the political atmosphere which has been poisoned by retrogressive elements in cabinet and senior government officials" (*The Herald* 15 November 2017) was challenged. These official statements were rejected on the platform, by tweets such as:

"Whose legacy do they want to restore? A legacy of corruption? My foot!"

"It's a coup by zanu pf thieves protesting against fellow zanu pf thieves for stealing more than them"

"That brigadier moyo is silly. Where in this world does a coup restore a legacy?"

"So that idiot calling himself moyo thinks we are dumb? A coup is coup. Does he have a father?"

These comments were perhaps not surprising in view of the suspicion of official media channels in Zimbabwe. They are, rightly so, seen as pro-ZANU PF mouthpieces. Twitter provided a platform to contest these official narratives of the coup, as users posted information contrary to what mainstream news was saying. For example, in its update to the public through official television, radio and newspaper channels, the army said on the morning of 15 November that Mugabe was safe. Twitter users challenged this official version:

“Sorry brigadier we are not stupid like you. A coup does not make anyone safe.”

“So this dunderhead Moyo things a coup is an election? How can Mugabe be safe under those guns?”

“Moyo is lying through his teeth. Gunshot have been heard at Mugabe’s official residence.”

“We are at Mugabe’s residence now. His guards have been changed... unsafe!!”

Expressing political voices and commentaries that challenged the status quo became an important use of Twitter. Protest voices found a platform for expressing themselves. The above demonstrates how Twitter allowed users to challenge the trustworthiness of state-controlled media, and the intentions of the army. But what discursive themes emerged from these discussions?

Discursive Themes Emerging from the #Zimbabwecoup Discussion

In the debate using the #ZimbabweCoup hashtag, three themes emerged: first, viewing the coup as marking the fall of a vile and intolerant dictator; second, discussing the coup as a manifestation of constitutional delinquency; and finally, hailing the “liberation” potential of the coup.

The Fall of a Vile and Intolerant Dictator

This theme contained tweets that largely discussed what participants said about the character of Mugabe. The posts under this theme condemned what users called ‘Mugabe’s unrestrained influence,’ which he exerted on policy for 37 years. It was more a reflection and subsequent condemnation of his legacy. He was literally condemned as vile, malevolent and cruel with participants expressing little sympathy for his current predicament. For example, the following tweets did not feign any compassion for the president:

“Finally the emperor is without clothes. Nero is gone.”

“What a mountain has fallen! He hated everything that breathes except his puppies that he spoiled.”

“Now the devil will be history. Everything has an end”

“The dictator who destroyed opponents is going down the dictators’ avenue.”

“Will his prostitute wife marry another president now that the goblin Robert is unemployed?”

There was a huge number of tweets coded under this theme that reflected dissatisfaction, anger and feelings of revenge against “the tyrant” as many users called him. This came across as the breaking down of a psychological barrier that made people afraid to speak out against the regime. These voices were now finding expression on Twitter. Other tweets described Mugabe as a depraved and perverted president who recklessly let Zimbabwe descend into chaos. The president stood accused of destroying a post-colonial nirvana, a country with the potential to be the jewel of Africa. For example, two tweets read:

“The man is a degenerate corrupt and opulent sybarite that destroyed ZW.”

“The spineless, depraved coward will go! And his prostitute of a wife will sink with him. His greedy kittens will be suffering like all of us.”

In many administrative respects, it is to an extent true that the Mugabe regime was rather incompetent than perverted. Of course, there are larger depravities like the 2008 election violence, which cannot not be blamed on Mugabe alone.

Discussing the Coup as a Culmination of Constitutional Delinquency

Tweets coded under this theme generated a lot of responses on the platform and they generated the largest amount of data from the hashtag. Basically, the posts discussed the legality of the army’s actions. The tweets raised the issue in two ways. First, some tweets saw Mugabe himself as a constitutional delinquent “having a taste of his own medicine” as one tweet said, and as someone who was starring in his own end-game. Other respondents agreed but still saw the army move as a blatant disregard of the rule of law. Those who discussed the coup as a manifestation of a general culture of constitutional indiscipline under the regime saw the coup as a welcome move to restore government institutions that had been significantly weakened by Mugabe. For example, citizens tweeted:

“Good news, the fox will go, we will build new institutions and political discipline”

“He tore apart our beautiful institutions for selfish gains: idiot!”

“How many times did he amend the constitution to suit his end?”

“The man who feared nothing, no one and did everything for his ego.”

The emphasis of the tweets was on Mugabe’s constitutional indiscipline that isolated Zimbabwe from other nations. This debate seemed to have emanated from an earlier tweet on the platform that questioned the legality of the coup. That post suggested that Zimbabwe’s pariah status would continue unabated if Mugabe’s departure became messy and bloody. Concerns were also rife on the platform about how the army had to be sure of success, as any failure would evoke a bloody revenge from Mugabe and his allies. For example, the following tweets underlined this fear:

“If the army fails on this move, the wily old fox will chop their heads on a guillotine.”

“There are lessons of failed coups the world over. They are encrypted on graves!”

Other tweets expressed fear that a bloody coup would have violent consequences for the whole country. Others feared for a civil war, pitting the army against disgruntled citizens.

Hailing the “Emancipatory” Potential of the Coup

There were also many tweets on this platform that hailed the army’s bare-knuckled challenge to Mugabe. These tweets expressed hope that the military move against Mugabe would restore democracy, the rule of law, and economic prosperity. The hope was that the current era of resource mismanagement, corruption and political intolerance would come to an end. These tweets, furthermore, justified Mugabe’s removal from power. For example:

“The army has made a good move. We need to restore the economy”

“UMugabe u felelise umnotho wethu Manje akasekho” (English translation: Mugabe killed the economy, now he is gone we will rebuild).

“Ukhambe kuhle Mugabe sifuna uku tshugulula ilizwe lethu!” (English translation: Mugabe goodbye! We want to rebuild our nation).

The tweets that revisited Mugabe’s achievements were overshadowed by those that clamored for his departure. In a way, the anti-Mugabe protests that had been a feature of

Zimbabwe's politics had finally found an outlet through Twitter. These sentiments were not new, but pro-regime mainstream media have always criminalized any talk about Mugabe leaving office. Some of the tweets coded under this theme saw the coup as a perfect moment for revenge against Mugabe and his family. There were also calls for further action against Mugabe. For example:

“He should go to The Hague”

“We should hang him here for the millions of death he caused.”

Svenson (2009) calls this use of Twitter ‘instrumental use’ – where participants call for further action regarding an issue. Using social media this way, Svenson (2009) says, participants call for specific policy actions and settlements. This phenomenon is part of what the author calls ‘hacktivism.’ Several users hoped the army would reform the entire system, though others remained skeptical, thinking this was an unrealistic hope. Three users posted:

“Coups have never delivered democracy, ask our brothers and sisters in Nigeria!”

“Expecting the coup to deliver democracy is like expecting an elephant to hatch a chicken.”

“A coup can deliver change, not transformation.”

Thus, the military stance divided opinions as to the prospects of a positive transition. Some Twitter users saw the military coup as the only way of achieving change and restoring the country's economy. For example, one user tweeted:

“If the coup is able to kick out that dictator, we are back to the promised land.”

Many users who took to the platform (nearly half of the sample) seemed to be aware of the difficulties of a military-induced political change, but still hoped, rather sentimentally perhaps, that the coup would deliver positive changes.

DISCUSSION

This chapter explored two issues in regard to #ZimbabweCoup: How did users employ Twitter to discuss the coup that led to the resignation of Mugabe? What themes emerged from the tweets using this hashtag? The tweets showed that users relived parts of Mugabe's 37-year leadership and expressed hopes about a possible post-Mugabe era. In addition, Twitter allowed users to talk about their experiences under the Mugabe regime, which were

often horrific. One aspect that stands out with regard to Twitter and the Zimbabwean coup is the fact that the platform allowed citizens to share views that would otherwise be censored by mainstream media platforms. Twitter users also benefitted from frequent updates about the coup that were provided on the space. Some contributors even added links to other news sources to help users get news, which helped widen the range of information available to users. Frequent updates were also provided about the position of the army and Mugabe's reactions. This illustrates the potential of Twitter as a freer platform beyond the penchant zeal for censorship frequently displayed by African ruling elites. Twitter was able to provide more updates about the coup than mainstream channels could provide. And because of its interactive nature, audiences could provide feedback. Indeed, users were quick to provide information and share the latest developments. Users could select who to engage with on the platform. This is, arguably, detrimental to a public sphere. As Centola and Van de Rijt (2015) note, by choosing who to engage with, social networks like Twitter potentially harm debate because participants only choose to engage with those who closely match their views.

In this research, however, this potential stifling of the public sphere by means of selective engagement was not a key issue. There were other more pertinent issues. First, the debate threatened to disintegrate because of the "Tower of Babel" effect. Users tweeted in a range of languages, including the native languages Ndebele and Shona. This limited the number of users that could engage with such tweets as some could not understand or respond to it. The added danger is the creation of "inner groups" or smaller communities within the same platform, who are connected by a native language. One characteristic of a public sphere is its accessibility to participants (Brennen 2016). One can also add another characteristic – entry on to the spaces. If one space (for example a hashtag), uses multiple languages, the danger is that it limits the number of people who are able to join the debate. Thus, it becomes inaccessible to some participants by virtue of them not sharing this language. Conversely, users who cannot communicate in English are marginalized. However, a more "commonly" shared language like English creates a better opportunity for a more inclusive public sphere. Thus, use of native languages can be a barrier to a wider and more involving public sphere, although it can have the advantage of providing a space for users who cannot communicate in English. More so, some tweets were far smaller than the standard (280) characters. This meant details that could potentially enrich the debate and provide information were excluded.

TWITTER AND DECLINING CIVILITY ON THE PLATFORM

Tweets discussing the coup were not always civil. Strong personal (and political) feelings were expressed. Of course, Zimbabwean sentiment about politics has historically been strong, considering the country has witnessed many unsettled periods, from election

violence to mass protests designed to topple the regime. It would now seem that these feelings have spilled over into the public domain, and especially in unrestricted spaces like Twitter. This may not necessarily be a healthy development. The major signs of this decline in civility in the data were visible in the heckling of other contributors. This included the exchange of personal insults, demonizing and derogatory rhetoric directed at Mugabe and his family, and users resorting to insults in their native language against other users. Arguably, this incivility was disguised by the rationale that everyone should speak up however they can. The researchers was noted that as the debate on Twitter heated up, the nature of incivility worsened. Cheadle (2018) found something similar when studying the use of Twitter in the US. He said that “Everyday Americans seem to get a little angrier... wander over Twitter just for a second and you can feel the anger wash over you...” (Cheadle 2018, 1). It is possible that the anger and incivility seen on #ZimbabweCoup might have been borne from the nature of the debate itself. After 37 years under the same autocratic ruler, Zimbabwean people might have jumped at the opportunity to express their bottled-up anger. Cheadle (2018) further notes that the Internet and social media era has seen a renewed vitriol in public space, as these have opened up new possibilities for those wishing to make life harder for their political opponents. Thus, Twitter has in this respect moved us away from former civil standards of civic debate, into rage, one can call it. Indeed, the debate about the coup was sometimes combative and even savage, to the detriment of this public space. Civil discourse argues for an understanding of the other’s point of view (Cheadle 2018). Abusive talk calling Mugabe an idiot and his wife a prostitute, for example, are uncivil to the point that the statements disallow alternative views out of hand. This is because abusive and uncivil talk is oftentimes a one-way statement, meant to threaten rather than engage.

Even though outrage and anger can be a logical reaction during times of crisis, such emotional reactions and affective discourse on Twitter and other social media platforms leave no room for users to really understand each other or reach a common ground (Bouvier 2015; Bouvier 2019). If social media is to operate as a public sphere, users need to attempt to understand each other, conduct the debate in a rational manner, and be tolerant of opinions that differ from their own. But it would seem that the ease and speed with which emotional tweets and angry reactions are sent out via a single click, means that uncivil behavior is likely to arise. This continued incivility has the potential to drive other users away from the platform. As Schoenherr (2018) puts it, civility means we should not be stuck between reactive gut feelings and indifference on platforms like Twitter. Rather, the disinhibited nature of this platform should allow users to engage more meaningfully with each other on pertinent issues, especially during a crisis like a coup, and users should aim at depersonalizing debates.

The themes and uses of Twitter identified on this hashtag are admittedly not entirely new in academic literature. But the chapter heralds a previously less-researched field on

the use of Twitter during spontaneous events like military coups in political environments where mainstream media are heavily censored.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH AND AREAS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH

It is difficult to ascertain the geographical reach of the Twitter conversations analyzed in this chapter. This is largely because Twitter platforms can be appropriated by everyone interested, whether they inhabit the geographical location where the event occurs, or they are part of the diaspora. And by extension, non-Zimbabweans could also contribute to this discussion. Therefore, one cannot state with certainty that the posts originated from within Zimbabwe and were by Zimbabweans only. This makes it impossible to argue that it was an exclusively Zimbabwean public sphere, considering the unrestrained nature of Twitter as a social space. Some citizens only have limited access to the Internet, and the discussion analyzed in this chapter is certainly not claiming to be representative of all debates about the coup by citizens. In addition, the data was limited to tweets from one day, which were then further reduced. This means there are limitations to the representativeness of our data set, and our findings should be seen as such.

Future research may focus on a much larger corpus of tweets and retweets over a longer period of time, possibly from the day the ZNA moved into the streets to the 21st of November when Mugabe officially stepped down as president. This is a period of 7 days in which many events took place, and would be well worth studying. Such an extensive corpus can be analyzed by means of software like Atlas, Discoverytext, etc. However, the researcher is skeptical about the use of software on qualitative data like media texts. Texts have an ideological basis (Van Dijk 2003, cited in Braun and Clarke 2006). The ideological embeddedness of texts is lost when tweets are subjected to computer analysis. Unless one is standing in a science laboratory, qualitative research should maintain its inherent advantages by sticking to human/researcher-led investigation. More so, if the purpose is to ascertain the use and the nature of themes emerging from Twitter than this can be gotten to via qualitative approaches.

It would also be interesting in the future to explore how people make use of Twitter-shared information, especially those who do not tweet but read, referred to by Shepherd et al (2015, 67) as “the silent observers.” Given Zimbabwe’s checkered history of political violence, future studies could explore the emerging role of Twitter in (re-) shaping collective memory. While this chapter has briefly talked about memory issues, this discussion has been limited and would require further exploration. A multimodal (critical) discourse analysis of Twitter posts that includes pictures and other forms of images in relation to the coup would also be an interesting field of exploration.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored two issues: how Twitter was appropriated in the debates about the coup and the themes that emerged from the debates on this platform. The results of this discussion show that users of the platform appropriated it to mine memories of a regime that had dominated Zimbabwe's political space since independence in 1980. Victims of the Mugabe regime shared their ordeal at the hands of the regime and were able to share other experiences. The chapter has two main conclusions first, there is need to continuously harness the reach of Twitter so that the platform becomes a tool for multidirectional engagement. This is very pertinent in authoritarian political environments where mainstream platforms are restricted and censored. Second, this chapter found that a thematic analysis of tweets can be very useful to gain a better perspective on how citizens communicate during a political crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Masters Students at the University of Johannesburg Department of Journalism, Film and Television for assisting with coding and theme generation.

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Chapter 11

**ONLINE ACTIVISM IN MALI: A STUDY OF DIGITAL
DISCOURSES OF THE MOVEMENT FOR THE
LIBERATION OF AZAWAD**

*Innocent Chiluwa**

Department of Languages & General Studies, Covenant University, OTA, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the activities of the Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) - an armed movement of the Tuaregs of Northern Mali. Since the 2013 defeat of the Islamists with the aid of France and African forces, and the re-integration of the northern region in Mali after the declaration of the “Islamic Republic of Azawad,” MNLA has maintained an active online presence, which has not been studied. This study examines the various online discourses that reveal the group’s affiliations, potentials, aspirations and relationship with the Malian government. The study shows that in spite of the ceasefire agreements of July 24, 2014 under the supervision of the United Nations Action Group in Mali and other mediation teams, the Malian conflicts are far from being over. The online discourses reflect war and conflicts, security violations and terror attacks, as well as accusations of violation of the ceasefire agreements. This study argues that social media discourses of the MNLA are capable of escalating the conflicts.

Keywords: discourse, Azawad, website, Twitter, Facebook, conflict, ceasefire, media, Mali

* Corresponding author: E-mail: innocent.chiluwa@covenantuniversity.edu.ng.

INTRODUCTION

“Activism” has been defined as the “policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political change”^{§§§§} or achieve a complete revolution. Such “vigorous campaigning” often involves not only offline activism in the form of rallies and protests but also the use of the internet for mobilizations and coordination of mass actions. The Internet has the advantage of reaching mass populations of users who share similar interests and perspectives and are willing to support revolutionary efforts especially in places where democratic principles and the rule of law are compromised. But more importantly is the fact that the Internet and social media (*Twitter* for example) has the potential for a “reconfiguration of the structure of political discourses towards broadening of public debate by facilitating social connectivity” (Maireder & Ausserhfoer, 2012:1). And since the beginnings of the Arab Spring to the present time, the Internet and the social media have become increasingly popular with social movements and individual activists, to disseminate their presence and promote their activities (Chilwa, 2012). So far, the Internet, has provided interesting opportunities for online campaigning and deliberation as well as become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world’s political movements (including rebel/separatist groups), which is why the most world’s dictatorships and increasing number of democratic governments are trying to limit access to social media (Shirky, 2011; Vegh, 2003).

THE USE OF THE INTERNET BY TERRORIST AND SEPARATIST GROUPS

A terrorist group is a group that uses violence or intimidation to achieve a political goal and is usually listed or designated a terrorist group by law or government under certain criminal code regulations.^{*****} For instance, the Boko Haram of Nigeria was designated a terrorist group by the United States under the “Boko Haram Designation Act of 2013” (S.193) for meeting the criteria for designation as a foreign terrorist organization.^{††††} Separatist groups on the other hand, though sometimes apply violence; generally seek autonomy or self-determination for a particular geographic region. Their members are citizens of the conflict area and do not come from another country.^{‡‡‡‡} They often apply civil actions, such as campaigns, protests or riots to pursue their objectives. They are not generally referred to as terrorists until they are officially designated by some official legal framework or by government.

§§§§ The Oxford dictionary of English.

***** see <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/listedterroristorganisations/pages/default.aspx>.

†††† See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/198>.

‡‡‡‡ See Harris (2009). *The Nation in the Global Era Conflict and Transformation*. p. 320.

Terrorist groups have also embraced the Internet to disseminate their propaganda and coordinate their activities. Because the Internet combines the advantages of speed, cheapness, accessibility, and anonymity, it offers terrorists a variety of media options to sell their extremist ideology and message and attempt to radicalize other Internet users who may have sympathy for them. In recent times, the Internet has served Islamic extremists a variety of resources targeted at young people, connecting them with online Islamist recruiters. Some extremist groups have “established websites designed specifically for youth audiences, disseminating propaganda through colorful cartoons and games. These sites – many of which are available in English – help to get the groups’ message out to a worldwide audience...”^{§§§§§} ISIS for example, has even developed an app to spread their propaganda through images and the streaming of violent online videos (Awan, 2017). In Africa, the *Boko Haram* of Nigeria and the *Al-Shabaab* of Somalia have consistently used the Internet to wage a cyber war. *Al Shabaab* for instance, has been accused of “twitter terrorism”, and hate-speech warranting the shutting down of their twitter accounts at different times (Gentleman, 2011, p. 2; Chiliswa, 2013).

Separatist and secessionist groups like the *Indigenous People of Biafra* (IPOB) of south-east Nigeria and the *National movement for the liberation of Azawad* (MNLA) of northern Mali, have also used the Internet and social media to express their grievances and ask for referendum for the independence of their separate regions. Although terrorist and separatist groups are different in terms of ideology and approach to achieving their objectives, discourses produced by them are similar. Both groups apply highly ideological activist discourses to promote their agenda and propaganda (Chiliswa, 2015). Activist discourses frequently show evidence of polarization and ethnic stereotypes in the definition of collective identity and the representation of “others.” This includes defining categories about who belongs to “us” and who “our” friends and enemies are; what “we” believe and what “our” goals are. Unfortunately, such discourses have often reflected non-tolerance to religious and cultural practices.

Discourses (verbal or written) and videos associated with separatist groups have also been accused of expressing hate-speech and abusive language (Gentleman, 2011). Apart from being largely confrontational, the general characteristics of this genre of discourse are that language is used in a direct rejection of perceived victimization, denial of economic rights, marginalization or human rights violations by national or regional governments. Generally, actions of national governments are heavily criticized and negatively constructed; and government officials are often accused of corruption and mismanagement of state resources.

^{§§§§§} See “The Internet as a terrorist tool for recruitment & radicalization of youth.” *White paper*. US Department of Homeland Security, 24 April, 2009.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Internet penetration in Mali is considerably rapid, growing from 18,600 in 2000 to over 12 million (i.e., 65.3%) in 2017. About 1.5 million subscribers are on Facebook. The total population of Mali is about 19 million (Internet World Stat 2018).***** This shows that internet literacy, and social media activity especially among the youth are most likely to contribute significantly to shaping public discourse and contribute to political developments in Mali. This study examines the structure of online discourses produced by the MNLA.††††† It also studies the various online publications, including social media posts by the MNLA in order to establish their cultural and political position in the current resistance, their ideological perspectives and how these form the basis of their struggle for self-determination. In analysing the implications of the online activities of this group, this study argues that the structure of social media discourses of the MNLA is likely to escalate the current conflicts with huge implications for peace and security in Mali.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN MALI

Mali is a former French colony. Since its independence from France in 1960, the country has struggled economically and politically and has also suffered from extreme poverty, political instability and corruption. Mali is a historically moderate Muslim country, and even in the northern regions of radical Muslims, the extreme version of Shariah law was not very popular with the population (Nerd, 2013). The north of Mali is dominated by the Tuaregs and some Arab groups, while in the south are the majority of the population, whose economy depends on agricultural products. The nomadic north comprises the Fulani cattle herders, who also move throughout the country, sometimes getting into conflicts with farmers over land and water. During the Algeria's conflict with France, Algerian militants often escaped to Northern Mali, which was the beginning of Northern Mali's roles as a settlement, and planning area for militants and fighters (Nerd, 2013).

Historically, the Tuareg people, who constitute about 10% of the Malian population, have been fighting for independence for the nation of Azawad, since the 1960s. They also rebelled in the 1990s and the years 2007-2009.††††† The two main causes of conflict in Mali are the progressive decline in the power and affluence of the Tuareg people, and the marginalization and poverty of northern Mali (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). They have participated in some negotiations with the Malian government seeking more independence and have carried out periodic raids on Malian military bases and also attacked other

***** See <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>.

††††† "MNLA" is the abbreviation of the French version (i.e., Mouvement nationale de liberation de l'Azawad).

††††† Mali 2013, Richardson Institute, *Peace Research 2013*.

government facilities, but these efforts have not been fruitful. Some scholars (e.g., Chauzal & van Damme, 2015), have argued that a holistic tackling of the Malian regional problem must involve a comprehensive approach to addressing the complaints and resentment of the Tuaregs. There have been a long history of neglect and marginalization of the north in terms of economic and political demands; and where the ruling south had responded at all, it has been fraught with favoritism for certain ethnic groups (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). According to Arief, (2013) the conflicts and insecurity in northern Mali displaced over 350,000 people and aggravated regional food insecurity and poor humanitarian conditions in the region.

Mali's conflicts are also attributed to political instability; unpopular governments were overthrown by the military in 1968 and 1991. Civil government was restored in the 1991, and multiparty elections were held every five years. The seat of government is in Bamako – in the south. On March 21, 2012, a faction of the Malian military, in a military coup, overthrew the civilian government Amadou Toumani Toure. A few weeks later, the coup leader, Amadou Sanogo agreed with ECOWAS negotiators to step down, giving power to a transitional government led by the parliament speaker Dioncounda Traore.

Political crises in Mali deepened, and on April 17, Malian television announced that Cheick Modibo Diarra had been appointed as interim Prime Minister to assist with the processes of restoring civil rule. In what looked like a second coup in the following weeks, Diarra was arrested and forced to resign while an army spokesman Oumar Mariko, accused Cheick Diarra of blocking the transition programme. Elections were eventually held in 2013 which saw the incumbent Ibrahim Boubacar Keita winning the elections and becoming President. The instability in government then created fresh opportunity for the Tuaregs rebellion and the temporary loss of northern Mali to the rebels.

International Mediation and Peace Process in Mali

As insecurity in Mali worsened with reports of violence and deaths and displacement of thousands in northern and central Mali, the United Nations and its mediating partners responded with appreciable degree of peace processes. The most significant was the setting up of the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA) established by Security Council Resolution 2100 of 25 April, 2013 following the recommendation of France and the United States. MINUSMA, which replaced the initial African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), was to focus on ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; assisting the re-establishment of state authority, and the rebuilding of the security sector, as well as the promotion and protection of human rights in that country (Skons, 2016)

With a democratically elected president and government in place, the stage was then set for formal peace negotiations. After a dialogue between the parties in Algiers from 16 to 24 July 2014, the declaration of a cessation of hostilities was finally signed and the consensual roadmap was adopted on the 24 July, 2014. According to the roadmap, mediation between the parties was to be led by the Algerian Government and held in Algiers (Nyirabikali, 2016). A mediation team headed by Algeria played a crucial role in the facilitation of a peace process in May and June 2015. The team comprising the special representative of the UN Secretary-General in Mali and head of MINUSMA, representatives of the AU, the EU and ECOWAS, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OCI) as well as representatives of Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mauritania and Nigeria, achieved a preliminary peace agreement, which offered to address the prevailing governance and socio-economic inequalities, which are the core issues in the political conflicts in Mali since independence. The objectives if achieved would address the crucial issue of self-determination of the Tuaregs; (ii) undertaking an accelerated economic development strategy for northern Mali; (iii) establishing a governance system that takes into account the geo-political and socio-cultural dimensions of the northern regions (iv) restoring security and translate into reality the rules of good governance, including transparency in the management of public affairs, respect for human rights, justice and fight against impunity; and (v) combating terrorism and transnational organised crime (Nyirabikali, 2016, p. 182).

However, the peace process is plagued by a number of challenges. These include numerous social and ethnic conflicts between the various population groups, the root cause which is complex. Secondly, there is the fragmentation of actors in the conflicts and allegiance among the armed groups in the northern Mali rebellion has also shifted over time during the peace process. Thirdly, violent extremism is a major problem in Mali and the Sahara-Sahel region. Various non-state armed groups are involved in violence extremism in the name of Jihadism or Salafism. Fourthly, there is the organised crime, which includes drug trafficking, illegal arms dealing, kidnapping for ransom and other criminal activities (Skons, 2016). These have disturbed the activities of the MINUSMA and the mediation group, as well as prevented the establishment of a successful platform for negotiations (McGregor, 2017).

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) is both military and political rebel/separatist movement founded in October 2011 in Azawad (northern Mali) for the purpose of establishing a secular independent state of Azawad. MNLA is one of the three groups within the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) coalition. Other members of the coalition are the “Haut conseil pour l’unité de l’Azawad” (HCUA) (i.e.,

the high council for the unity of Azawad); and the “Mouvement arabe de l’Azawad – Dissident” (MAA–D) (i.e., the Arab Movement of Azawad). This cooperation was launched on June 9, 2014 as part of the measures to identify and coordinate the activities of the different warring separatist/political groups in northern Mali. MNLA have their headquarters in Kidal. Their revolutionary council is headed by *Abdul Karim Ag Matafa*, while the Secretary General is *Bilal Ag Acherif*. Members of the group are mostly the *Tuaregs* of northern Mali. §§§§§§

The Tuareg fighters who had fought in the Libyan army, as well as the National Transition Council (NTC) had returned to Mali after the war in Libya. They launched an armed rebellion on 17th January 2012 and expelled the Malian army from the north. ***** In April 2012, collaborating with *Ansar Dine* and *MUJAO* (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa), MNLA declared the independence of northern Mali taking control of the three largest cities of *Kidal*, *Gao* and *Timbuktu*. In May 2012, they signed an agreement with *Ansar Dine* to form an Islamist state known as the “Islamic Republic of Azawad,”+++++ however, the alliance broke up when *Ansar Dine* and *MUJAO*, (two Islamic terrorist groups with links to *Al Qaeda* in the Islamic Maghreb), resorted to implement Sharia laws in the new state; MNLA had wanted only a secular independent state. This resulted in a conflict between the armed groups and by July 2012, MNLA had lost the control of the north to *Ansar Dine*. *Ansar Dine* and *MUJAO* now control major cities in Northern Mali and there are fears within the international community that Mali may become the hub of terrorist’s activities in West Africa with the support of *Al Qaeda*.*****

With the escalating crisis in northern Mali, the Malian government applied for foreign military assistance to recapture the region. In January, 2013, the French military, with the UN mandate and some African Union members (e.g., Nigeria, Algeria, etc.) began a military operation against the Islamist militants and by February 2013, the Islamists had been driven out and the Islamist-held territory was recaptured. A peace agreement was signed between the Malian government and the Tuareg rebels on 18th June, 2013. On 26th of September, 2013 the rebels broke the agreement claiming that the Malian government had failed in their commitment to the accord (Refning, 2013). Hence, the “Tuareg Factor” in the Malian peace process “remains serious, both in terms of appreciating the deterioration of the situation and attempting to frame long-lasting solutions,” (Zounmenou, 2013, p. 16).

The Malian government accuses MNLA of having links with *Al Qaeda*, which the group has consistently denied but has carried several military attacks against government forces in some major Malian towns. §§§§§§ Interestingly, MNLA has not been officially

§§§§§§ See *Think Security Africa*, 2012 Annual Report.

***** *International Crisis Group*.

+++++ *BBC*, May 27, 2012.

***** *Think Security Africa*, August 2012.

§§§§§§ *Ibid*.

designated as a terrorist group by the United States or the Malian government. The *Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium* (TRAC) describes MNLA simply as a “political and military organization”***** with a different religious ideology from other extremist groups like Ansa Dine. So far, there are five different coalitions of non-state armed groups operating in northern Mali (Ibid). They include the plateforme coalition; the coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad (CMA); CMA dissident groups; Salafi-Jihadist groups; and the ethnically- oriented groups. Each of these coalitions has a minimum of three rebel militant groups within them (McGregor, 2017).

MNLA on the Internet

For a couple of years now, it appears MNLA has been more active on the Internet than offline military or civil actions. They host a functional website+++++++ that provides the platform for regular publications of messages and videos, and other forms of media and political communication. Messages are published as “press release,” “statement,” and “communiqué.” Two different faces of the website are shown in Figure 1a & 1b below. It is set up with an animation feature that enables the webpage to appear and fade, as another interface appears.

The group also establishes a very strong social media presence with which they have disseminated their message and ideologies. Their vibrant Twitter account+++++++ (i.e., MNLA officiel (@MnlaNews)##### already had over 500 tweets and over 2000 followers as at the time of this study. (See Figure 11).

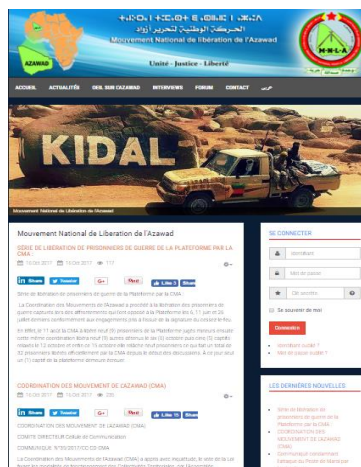


Figure 1a. MNLA website.

***** <https://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/national-movement-liberation-azawad-mnla>.

+++++++ i.e., <https://mnlamov.net>.

+++++++ The Twitter account is also in French.

The twitter website is <https://twitter.com/mnlanews?lang=en>.

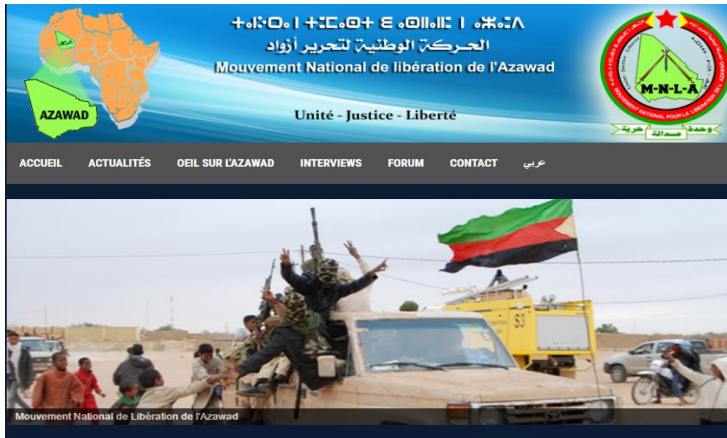


Figure 1b. M-N-L-A website.

Their Facebook page^{*****} is also very active. A screen shot of the Facebook page is shown in Figure 5 below. Members of the groups or their supporters are required to create an account and log in to have full access to the community of interacters. As at the time of this study, the Facebook page already attracted 4720 likes with 4709 following.

News updates, photos, videos, cartoons and links are also regularly uploaded and shared on the Facebook page. Some of the prominent videos are those of the leader. For example, “the discours de Abdoul Karim Ag Matafa” (Figure 8), posted on October 17, 2015 is a video in which the leader re-iterated their commitment to the liberation of Azawad.^{†††††††††} M-N-L-A also uses their social media accounts (e.g., Facebook) to express supports for other separatist groups in and outside of Africa. A solidarity message to “the referendum of Kurdistan,”^{†††††††††} posted on September 17, 2017 says “we are with independence of Kurdistan and Azawad.” This message, which was accompanied with a YouTube video,^{§§§§§§§§§} was shared from twitter trending on hashtags #Kurdistan; #independence; #independence for Kurdistan; #Azawad.

Significantly, M-N-L-A does not utilize its online activity as part of its conflict with other opposition groups in Mali like Ansar Dine and MUJAO; the latter for example, does not appear to have an online presence yet. M-N-L-A appears to concentrate their online activism on their fight for self-determination and regional autonomy from the Malian government. However, some social media posts merely accuse Ansar Dine or MUJAO of certain terror attacks in Azawad region.

***** : i.e., <https://facebook.com/mnlamov>.

††††††††† See <https://youtu.be/ZhuzykJaH70>.

††††††††† The Kurdistan Regional Government later offered to freeze the results of the referendum on independence from Iraq as part of an effort to defuse crisis with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad. Reuters, October 25, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/25/iraqi-kurdistan-offers-freeze-referendum-results-defuse-crisis-with-baghdad.html>.

§§§§§§§§§ E.g., <https://youtu.be/SwMqA2MqkVM>.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies on political developments in Mali, especially on the conflicts and peace processes in the northern region have traced the history of conflicts and series of uprisings by the Tuaregs and have also expressed serious concerns over the proliferation of armed militant groups in contemporary northern rebels' enclave (See McGregor, 2013; Cline 2013). Lawrence Cline for instance, expresses some fear that with the Tuareg rebels, and Islamists with varying goals ... it will at best be very difficult to resolve the conflicts in the long term (p. 617).” He blames the Malian government’s failure to institute long-term peace agreements, and warns that, “the focus on counterterrorism in northern Mali may not be conducive to a long-term resolution of what in reality is a much more complicated security environment.”***** Karlsruud (2015) further argues that not even the UN mission in Mali is likely to produce any sustainable peace in the Tuareg region. He warns that “the aggressive stance of the (MINUSMA) mission will be self-fulfilling, turning it from a peacekeeping to a counter-terrorism mission, leading to an escalating circle of violence with a high likelihood of civilians being targeted and killed” (p. 46). He therefore advises that troops should be properly educated on the similarities and differences between NATO and UN missions, and the need to take a less combative stance in Mali.

Intra-ethnic tension and community distrust have also been blamed on foreign interference. For instance, Libya and Algeria had attempted to assert their influence on northern Mali to broaden their geo-political power; this had also tended to turn the local tribes against each other (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). Furthermore, the religious influence of some Arab-speaking charitable organizations and NGOS who had visited northern Mali cannot be overemphasized; these charitable groups have attempted to play the role of social and security providers but have also spread their own Middle-East version of Islam. This diffusion of new ideologies challenged religious tolerance that is popular with southern Muslims. This added yet a new layer of misunderstanding between the northern and southern Muslims.†††††††††† As conflicts escalated in northern Mali and attention of Mali’s Western partners began to respond to humanitarian needs, several international security and development programmes began to be implemented there. “However, their exclusive focus on fighting terrorist and security threats in the Sahel, with limited consideration for other civilian issues such as economic development or social grievances, turned these programmes into accelerators of discontent and emblems of the negligence of public needs in the north...” (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015, p. 9).

Significantly however, Pezard, Stephanie & Shurkin Michael (2015) argue that indeed progress has been made in Mali, even though previous peace accords and development programmes have not entirely promoted lasting peace and national unity. For instance,

***** Ibid.
†††††††††† Ibid.

according to the BTI 2016 report on Mali,^{*****} the deteriorated human rights situation in many areas and setbacks to socio-economic development are slowly being tackled. The GDP growth of 2014 stood at 5.6% as against 1.3% of the previous year. And though the impacts of the 2012-2013 conflicts and fighting remain obvious, Mali's twenty-year reputation as a model of democratization and development cooperation in sub-Saharan Africa is being rebuilt. Also, "the new government's 2013 – 2017 growth and poverty reduction policy priority contends with the reconciliation and peacebuilding agenda."^{*****}

Pezard, Stephanie & Shurkin Michael (2015) suggest that the Malian government should "prioritize improvements to the system created by the National Pact of the 1990s—namely, the integration of the Malian army and greater decentralization and democracy," (p. 90). Also, rebel groups should be integrated into the Malian armed forces and into key political and administrative institutions. The Mali's government should be made to become legitimate in the eyes of the northerners. Borrowing from Niger's initiative, northern traditional chiefs and community leaders should be included in political administration and decision making. Thus, integrating the Tuaregs in government will promote alternative government that is people-oriented, as well as development-focused policies in the system.

Beginning with the Occupy Wall Street movement, twitter activism or hashtag activism has received global scholarly attention as a form of Internet activism for the purpose of achieving social or political change; or at least, for drawing global attention to social injustice, victimization, misogyny or racial discrimination. Hashtag activism such as #BlackLivesMatter, #Kony2012, #Ferguson, #yesallwomen, #justicefortrayvon, #bringbackourgirls and #metoo among others have sought to right the wrongs, and have often garnered mainstream media coverage. This form of activism and campaign has been used to champion the cause of women and the aggressive behavior against them. The #yesallwomen for example was formed as a reaction to the killing of women at Isla Vista, California, in May, 2014, calling attention to gender-based injustices, particularly to enact the desire to redirect media attention toward the systemic misogyny that inspired the killings (Dadas, 2017). The #bringbackourgirls movement called for the released of 276 girls abducted by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria (Chiluwa, 2017), and #BlackLivesMatter, was a protest movement that was formed, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in July 2013 in the killing of an African-American teenage Trayvon Martin (a similar hashtag was #justicefortrayvon). Another example, is #Ferguson, that happened in response to the shooting to death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014 (Yang, 2016).

***** BTI 2016 Mali Country Report https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016_Mali.pdf.
***** Ibid.

The movement for the liberation of Azawad is not a hashtag activism; as highlighted above, MNLA is a separatist group that uses the Internet and social media (including Twitter) to champion their political cause. So, this chapter not only examines the activities of the MNLA on Twitter but also other social media platforms; hence, the research question does not focus on the contributions of Twitter to their online activism, rather how social media and Internet technology has been used to promote their political ideals.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative discourse/content analysis is applied here as the framework for the analysis of contents of the online discourses produced by the MNLA, which gives insights to the nature of the conflicts, value judgement, ideological perspectives and evaluations of the “other.” The “other” in this context includes the Malian government, and the Malian army; ECOWAS action groups, other armed/Islamist movements, and the United Nation’s mission in Mali (e.g., MINUSMA). Particularly, the analysis examines the themes and discursive constructions of the online messages. This type of discourse analysis seeks to reveal implicit meaning of certain digital discourses that could suggest some hidden agenda of the group or capable of escalating the conflicts; their potentials and capabilities; their military capacity and planned actions. The themes of the messages and how they are framed as discourse are identified and presented in tables. The frequency of the identified discourse themes is also presented in tables. Examples of some significant discourses are presented in figures.

The data for analysis comprise “statement,” “communiqué” and “press release” published on the website of the MNLA, as well as the group’s social media contents, between 2014 and 2017. This was the period after the 2013 uprising. The website and social media pages were hosted and maintained by the educated youth members of the group. Some of them lived and posted comments from abroad. The “show location/current city” in the social media profiles of some the members indicated they tweeted and posted comments from France, New York, Algeria, and Niger among others. Many posted from “home” (i.e., Kidal), and from Muslims countries like Libya, Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia, where members and supporter possibly resided. The “MNLA Azawad profiles” on Facebook is more like a data base of member profiles from around the world that post comments on Facebook and participate in discussions and replies. Thus, diaspora educated members contributed actively on the social media, and they wrote in French, which is the official language of Mali; the native language of the Tuaregs is *Tamasheq*.^{*****} Some of the posts are in English and few in Arabic. It is also most likely that non-Malians who

***** See “Sahel Watch: a living analysis of the conflict in Mali: A better understanding of the dynamics and perspectives.” Karlijn Muiderman | February 2016.

have sympathy for the Tuaregs’ struggle have tweeted and contributed to comments and responses on Facebook.

Data from the website were translated using the Google translator, and verified by French experts. Samples from Facebook and Twitter were also translated by these French experts, who are colleagues of the researcher. Samples in Arabic were translated by a Muslim scholar who also happened to be former colleague of the author. The data are organized systematically showing the total number of statements, communiqués and press releases published within the 4-year period as displayed in Table 1 below. Specific publications for each year are shown in Figure 2.

Most of the publications of 2014 and 2015 were signed by Mossa Ag Attaher as the “Spokesperson” and “Communications Officer” of the *Communication Commission of the MNLA* in Kidal. A few others were signed by Ougasstan AG Ahmed and Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, also as Communications officers. Interestingly, some of the press releases and communiqués were posted by the Coordination of Asawad Movement (CAM), the umbrella movement to which MNLA is a member. All the publications in the data for the years 2016 and 2017 were signed by Iiad Ag Mohamed both as spokesperson and communications officer of MNLA/CAM.

Table 1. Data published on the MNLA website: 2014 - 2017

Press Release	78	70.09%
Communiqué	23	20.09%
Statement	09	08.189%
Total	110	

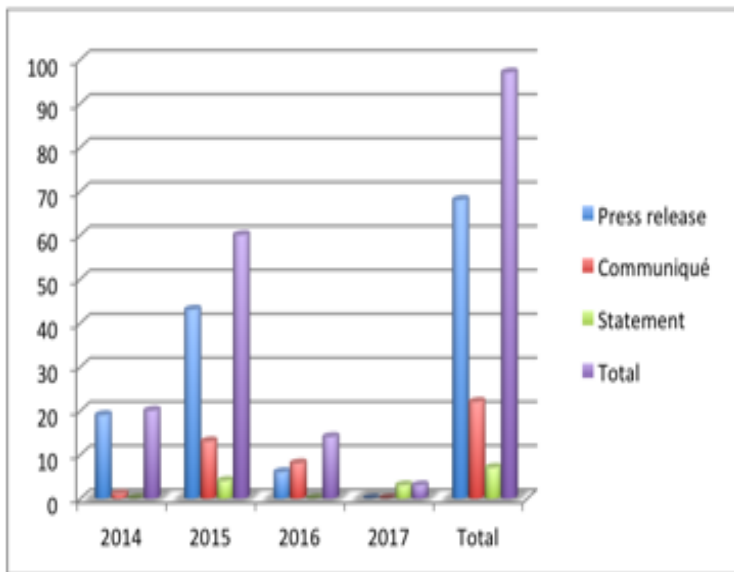


Figure 2. Specific publications for each of the years.

From the chart above, it is clear that most of the publications were posted in 2015 when there was relative peace in northern Mali. This was the period when the Algiers peace accord was newly signed. Generally, during armed conflicts, activities on the website tend to decline. From the table and figure, it is quite clear that press releases were the most published news. However, the choice of what was described as “press release” or “communiqué,” was not professionally determined as what was posted as “communiqué” could as well pass for statement or press release. As is shown in the analysis below, stories of attacks or reports of provocation from the Malian army is published as “press release.” The themes of war and conflict run through the contents of both the communiqués and press releases. As at the time of research, only three (2.72%) communiqués had been published so far in September 2017, activities were more on the social media than on the website.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analyses of the MNLA online discourses are carried out in two parts; namely (1) the discourse frames of the press releases, communiqués and statements/declarations (2) discourse frames of social media messages on *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

Discursive Frames of Press Releases, Communiqués and Statements

The analysis of the various messages contained in the press releases, communiques and statements reveals predominant themes of the messages and their implications; how they advance the course of the resistance; how the messages themselves are framed and what they represent either as threats, complaints, accusations, appeals or simply report events in northern Mali. Ideological constructions, such as in-group representations in relation to other interest groups, and discursive frames that portray them (MNLA) as victims, law-abiding, or committers to the terms of the peace agreements, etc. are also analyzed. The predominant themes and the frequency of the messages in the press releases, communiqués and statements are shown in Table 2 below:

As highlighted above, messages on the subject of war and conflict or the violation of peace agreements are generally framed as deliberate provocative attacks on the Azawad civilian population, where the Tuaregs are constructed as mere victims of the Malian armed forces. Table 3 below outlines the themes (and where they overlap), and how the themes are framed, as well as the discursive functions of the frames (e.g., as a call for the intervention of MINUSMA and the international community, etc.).

Table 2. Frequency of the predominant themes of the website data

Themes of Messages	No. in the data	% in the data
War and conflict	30	27.3
Peace process	25	22.7
Security violation	20	18.2
Violation of ceasefire agreement	15	13.6
Politics/electioneering	10	9.09
Condolence	05	4.54
Health/welfare	02	1.81
Meeting	02	1.81
Compliment	01	0.90

Table 3. Themes and discursive frames

Themes of Messages	Discursive frames and summary
War and conflict/violation of ceasefire agreement	framed as complaint/condemnation of attacks; accusation of Malian government and the Malian army. Report/appeal to MINUSMA and mediation teams, to take proper actions against “repeated fragrant violations of the peace agreement.”
Security violation	Complaint/condemnation of attacks; accusation of MUJAO; Al Qaeda; Gatia and other armed groups. Appeal for the intervention of MINUSMA and other guarantors of the peace process. MNLA are constructed as victims of terror attacks.
Peace process	MNLA is framed as cooperative; welcomes peace processes and interventions; attends meetings with Malian authorities; participates in negotiations and signing of peace/ceasefire agreement documents of May 23, 2014 and July 24, 2015 in Bamako and Algiers.
Politics/electioneering	CMA and MNLA are constructed as non-violent observers of political activities in Mali and Azawad; reports to MINUSMA and international community of illegal politicking by the Malian government (e.g., imposition of legislative election in January, 2016 on the Talatayt community through deployment of soldiers). CMA - acknowledging the planned elections of Nov. 20, 2016 by the Malian government, warning against illegality if certain Azawad populations are excluded.
Condolence	Expression of condolences to families of dead leaders and patriarchs of the CMA. Condolence to Charlie Hebdo and “the journalism family and the French people,” in the 2014 terror attack is a form of propaganda to promote positive public image. By also expressing condolence to MINUSMA over the terror attack of Jan. 17, 2015, in Kidal, MNLA is framed as innocent.
Health/welfare	Report to MINUSMA and the UN, Medecins sans frontiers, Medecins du Monde, and WHO of an outbreak of a fever epidemic in Azawad in 2015 is constructed as neglect on the part of the Malian government.
Meeting	Announcements general/annual meetings of the CMA/MNLA.
Compliment	Congratulatory message to Mr. Roch Marc Christian Kabore on his success in the Burkina Faso Presidential elections. Again, this sounds like a political message.

As highlighted above, most messages that report violations of ceasefire agreement generally accuse the Malian armed forces of illegal attacks (e.g., claimed attack on *Nampala*, on January 5, 2015); regular assassinations and other physical abuse of civilians, such as torture and destruction of homes (e.g., claimed attack on Menaka town on April 27, 2015). Security violations are characterized by “terrorist attacks” and bombings generally blamed on *A-Qaeda* and other Islamist militant groups (e.g., MUJAO). In either of these cases, the MNLA’s position is to act “in self-defence” or to “secure the Azawad population.” For instance, a reported clash between a military unit of the MNLA and the Malian army on the 11th of May, 2015, on the axis between Timbuktu and Goundam resulted in the death of 30 people and injuring many others. After one of the incidents, MNLA warned that “Mali was preparing for a civil war,” following a military attack in some Azawad villages in which they reminded the UN and the international community that Mali had again violated the cease fire of May 23, 2014. However, these discourses suggest that there are no serious threats of war and conflict or the violations of peace agreement on the part of CMA and MNLA. According to them, MNLA re-iterates its commitment to the terms of the peace agreements and had demonstrated a high sense of responsibility in spite of provocation by the Malian army. For instance, MNLA was praised for releasing some “prisoners of war” on June 11, 2016 in compliance with the terms of the ceasefire agreement.

Unfortunately, however, ideological constructions of the “other” generally highlight and exaggerate the bad side of the other and minimize the bad side of oneself (van Dijk, 2001). While MNLA claims victimization and innocence, studies have established that between 2012 and 2015, they carried out 18 attacks in Mali, which killed 65 persons, and injured 137 others. Many of the attacks, which occurred in 2014 had targeted mainly the Mali government, a few private individuals and very few journalist and media houses. Their tactics, which were armed assault and hostage taking/kidnapping changed from mainly armed attacks in 2013 to hostage taking in 2014.^{††††††††††} Thus, they have also contributed a great to the delay of the peace process in Mali.

Discourse of Social Media Messages

The themes and discursive messages of the Azawad movements are similar to those in the websites posted as press release, communiqué and statement (i.e., conflict, security breaches and violence against the Azawad population, among others). However, the messages on Facebook, especially those posted as comments and replies by individuals and supporters appear more radical and incisive in nature. Posts and comments such as the examples below are common on Facebook:

††††††††††

See

<http://terrorist-groups.insidegov.com/l/7385/Azawad-National-Liberation-Movement#MNLA%20Tactics&s=413Dor>.

- (i) “For a referendum for the independence of Azawad now!”
- (ii) “Azawad will be a free country soon,” (Figure 6)
- (iii) “Free Azawad now,”
- (iv) “Life, always remember, ashes to ashes, dust to dust!” (posted by Alb Targui October 15, 2015),

These types of messages are posted by ambitious youths who perhaps have no idea of what peace processes are going on in Mali. So, many of the comments are still asking for the independence of Azawad, even if it involves the act of war. These radical messages are likely to incite mob actions and possibly worsen the security situation in Mali.

Most of the radical messages are accompanied by photos of soldiers and youths, waving the Azawad flag as in Figure 9. Their slogan, “unite-Justice-Liberte (Unity-Justice-Unity) is also sometimes written along with some of the individual comments. The comments are written in English, French and Arabic. Examples are shown in Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7. Most of the MNLA messages are posted by Almou Ag. Mohamed and Moussa Ag. Acharatoumanes. Some of the messages in Arabic (e.g., in Figure 9) are eulogizing some persons who died in the conflicts Azawad, and make emotional appeals to the reader.



Figure 3. Screen shot of MNLA Facebook account.



Figure 4. Screen shot of comments on Facebook.



Figure 5. An MNLA and an individual post.



Figure 6. An MNLA post with a video.

Most of the posts and comments are accompanied by cover photos, timeline and profile photos, as well as videos and cartoons. Some of the photos were shared from *Instagram* and individual posts, while many of the videos were shared from *YouTube*. The photos and

videos reflect the events and activities in Azawad, some reflect economic and security situations, such as erosions, dryness, carcasses of animals, human corpses, armed soldiers, demonstrating youths, and women campaigning for Azawad independence, etc. Figure 9 below is an example of youth campaigners, still asking for independence. These spirited campaigns are capable of escalating the crisis, while negotiations are ongoing.

As noted above, this analysis (i.e., of posts and comments on *Facebook*) reveals that the themes of messages are mostly the same as those on the website. However, Facebook posts and comments are often accompanied by photos, videos and links; and as also highlighted above, they are more personal and emotional than those on the website. Many of the photos and videos are those of socio-political and religious events in Azawad involving youths, women and children. The MNLA Facebook account was created in 2011- the same time the website was put up, so most of all the messages are posted and shared on Facebook.

Table 4 shows the total number of messages and comments posted on Facebook from 2014 to October 16th 2017.



Figure 7. Youth campaigners for Azawad.

Table 4. Facebook posts and comments from 2014 – October 16, 2017

Year	Posts	% of total	Comments	% of total
2014	150	46.29	389	39.85
2015	83	25.61	407	41.70
2016	26	08.02	103	10.55
2017	65	20.06	77	07.88
Total	324		976	

Table 5. Themes and frame of messages on Facebook

Theme of Messages	Discursive frames
Hope	repeated call for the independence of Azawad; discursive agitation for the struggle to continue;
Terrorism	outrage and condemnation of terrorist attacks around the world (e.g., the attack on a Turkish restaurant in Burkina Faso on the 13 th of August, 2017 in which 18 people were killed)*****; construction of Muslims as victims.
Unity	discourse is framed as slogans that express aspiration for the unity of Azawad (e.g., “Vive l'azawad un et indivisible. (Long live, one and indivisible Azawad) (<i>Nelson Mandela, April 6, 2017 at 4.26 pm.</i>)
Freedom	show of support for other separatist groups (e.g., Kurdistan)
Religion	construction of Islam as a non-violent religion.

Table 5 shows subjects/themes of the common messages in the posts and comments that are slightly different in terms of frame (discursive construction) from those posted on the MNLA website. Since the messages are similar in both the MNLA posts and individual comments, the analysis only shows the messages that are posted (not necessarily the frequency of the different themes in the data).

In expressing hope, one of the posts shared by MNLA on April 4, 2017 reads: “*Pour accomplir de grandes choses, Nous devons non seulement agir, Mais aussi rêver, Non seulement planifier, mais aussi croire.*” (To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream, not only plan, but also believe). Thus, the social media not only provide a platform for the MNLA to express formal messages of conflict and resolution, but also share personal messages that reflect their aspiration and hope.

As on Facebook, the predominant themes of peace, conflict, terrorism, ceasefire violations, etc. run through all the tweets and retweets on the Twitter profile page as the analysis below shows.

MNLA on Twitter

The MNLA joined twitter in September 2014. As the group’s twitter screen-shots shows, specifically, there were 558 tweets; 164 following; 2,077 followers and 491 likes as at the time of this research. Also posted were 26 photos and videos, 790 re-tweets and 202 replies. The official twitter handle is “MNLA Officiel,” and username is “@Mnla News” as shown on Figure 8.

Figure 11 shows screen shots of tweets and re-tweets on the MNLA twitter page. Interestingly, tweets and re-tweets and replies were exclusively in French and Arabic. The tweets in Arabic were also translated by the Muslim scholar. The initial google translations

***** See Jason Burke: “Burkina Faso: at least 18 dead in restaurant attack.” <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/14/terror-attack-restaurant-burkina-faso-many-dead>.

were almost the same as the expert's translation. The messages follow the usual structure of the Azawad activist message.



Figure 8. MNLA Twitter account screenshot.



Figure 9. Screen shots of tweets and re-tweets.

The re-tweets are documented media stories about the MNLA struggle, as well as MINUSMA's reports about developments in northern Mali, especially about the progress

of the peace process. These and other stories that are of particular interest to the group are officially re-tweeted by MNLA. Interestingly most of the activities on twitter are carried out by MNLA, unlike the website which features messages from the CMA- the umbrella coalition group. Figure 10 displays examples of some of the re-tweets.

Table 6 shows the themes of the messages, including those already identified on the website and Facebook, as well as others that appear unique to twitter. The messages of the re-tweets are the same as the tweeted messages. Out the total 558 tweets, 390 were purposively selected for analysis since the message contents are the same with those already identified above. Besides, many of the tweets and re-tweets were duplicated, and the duplicates were excluded in the analysis.



Figure 10. MNLA re-tweets.

Table 6. Themes and discursive frames of messages on Twitter

Themes of Messages	No. in the data	% in the data
Peace process	95	24.35
War and conflict	68	17.43
Revolution & independence	49	12.56
Security/ceasefire violation	44	11.28
General information	44	11.28
Compliments, acknowledgements & greetings	33	8.46
Obituary & condolence	16	4.10
Protest/protest mobilization	15	3.84
Meeting/conference	11	2.82
Religion/moral	09	2.30
Accident	04	1.02
Health/welfare	02	0.51
Total	390	

Significantly, tweets and messages on the peace process occur frequently than messages on other subjects, constituting 24.35% of the data. This reflects the importance (and complications) of the peace process, which has been the main issue now in the Malian conflicts. The many discourses on this subject include the various activities, interest and opinions on the implementation of the peace agreement. Unfortunately, there has been renewed fighting between the CMA and the Platform coalition of armed groups. Talks are still in progress about the non-implementation of some key provisions of the peace agreement. Also, new armed groups are seeking inclusion in the interim institutional and security arrangements (see *Security Council Report: S/2016/1137*).

Tweets and replies/photos with revolutionary and independence themes include those that seek a referendum for the independence of the Islamic state of Azawad, with slogans that express hope and determination. Unfortunately, however, the peace agreement so far has sought the existence of Mali as an indivisible geo-political entity, though with concessions that will guarantee regional autonomy for northern Mali in some aspects of political administration. The ceasefire agreement, (which is frequently violated) was to enable negotiations for the co-existence of all regions and interests in Mali; the negotiations are still ongoing. However, comments and tweets on social media appear to insist on the total independence of Azawad.

Messages that appear unique to twitter as far as this study is concerned include general information, acknowledgment and greetings, protests and protest mobilization, religion and moral instruction, acknowledgments and greetings and reports on accidents. The general information tweets give notices and information on the Azawad social media operations

such as “our YouTube will soon be in operation,” or “follow us on Facebook.” Others are notices of the appointment of certain individuals to administrative positions in Azawad, while some others give information on the expansions and progress of the Azawad networks, such as the public notice of the official opening of the “New World Embassy of Azawad” on September 6, 2014 at Utrecht (Netherlands), and the formal launching of the “Radio Azawad International” (RAI) on November 10, 2014. Interestingly, sports information is also given. An example is a report of the CAN 2015 qualifying football match between Gabon and Burkina Faso in which Gabon won (2:0) in Libreville, thus coming first in group C.

Acknowledgment and greeting tweets include acknowledgements to subscribers who successfully created profiles (e.g., “Good evening, you are now 1118 subscriber on our Facebook page, thanks”). Some of the messages are directed to the “Azawadian prisoners in Bamako prisons,” with a message of hope that often ends with “we think of you.” Similar messages are tweeted as “homage to our martyrs.” One of such messages ends with: “you can kill the revolutionary, but not the revolution.” Thus, social media here functions as a platform for the framing of discourses that reflect social and religious comradeship, a sense of belonging and the expression of collective identity that includes prisoners and even the dead. Some tweets are constructed as a “message of honour to the President of Azawad.” There are also seasonal greetings like New Year messages.

Tweets and retweets with protest themes and mobilization give information about protest plans, and report of offline protest actions organized by women and youths. Examples include demonstrations in Kidal on the 17th of October, 2015 when two Malian ministers visited the region for the official opening of a new classroom block. The women were asking for improved living standards. Another was a “peaceful protest march,” in Kidal on the 1st of November, 2014 seeking the release of an Azawad political prisoner being held by the Malian army. A similar protest was the “Long live Azawad,” women of Ber March of 24th October, 2014 among others. These demonstrations and protest marches take the form of revolutionary initiatives that seek the independence of Azawad.

As highlighted above, some of the tweets have religious themes and give moral and religious instructions. All the religious tweets and re-tweets promote the spread and practice of Islam as a state religion. Sometimes, religious/moral instructions are expressed in proverbs presented as, “pensée de jour,” (thought of the day) such as “L’apprentissage doit durer jusqu’au tombeau,” (i.e., “learning must last until the grave”). Moreover, some religious tweets give information about the Muslim Hajj in Saudi Arabia and offer prayers for the prosperity of Azawad. Some tweets as shown in Table 6 above, give report of car accidents involving the Azawad military vehicles. Some of the accidents were however blamed on the Malian army who were accused of deliberately running into such vehicles.

CONCLUSION

The study of media and digital discourses produced by any extremist or separatist group will reveal their nature as a group, their aspirations, and ideology in relation to other members of the society. The findings show that MNLA presents itself as a separatist group and have cooperated in terms of issues pertaining to the ceasefire and consistently condemned attacks attributed to Al-Qaeda and Ansar Dine. They have also themselves claimed to have suffered series of attacks by these terrorist groups. Predominant themes of the online discourses by the MNLA as shown from their website and social media platforms are war and conflict, ceasefire violations, revolution and independence, and security violations among others. Social media platforms have also served the group for the expression of messages of hope and determination for independence in spite of the efforts of the UN and the activities of other mediation partners. This study argues that the more radical messages in the social media posts by MNLA members may escalate the conflicts. They also posted messages that not only reflect accusation and negative evaluation of the Malian government and other Islamic militant groups, but also messages that reflect collective identity of the Azawadians.

The peace process has been very slow due to the lack of agreement between the ethnic militias, the MNLA and the Malian government. A car bomb which killed 50 people in Gao on 18th of January, 2017 according to the head of the UN peace keeping in Mali, was “a stark reminder of the multiple obstacles hobbling Mali’s ongoing peace process,” and was “aimed at directly derailing progress in stabilizing Mali’s security situation and restoring peace.” It was suggested that the only way forward was to speed up implementation of the agreement on peace and reconciliation in Mali.” The peace process was at crossroads eighteen months after the signing of the agreement and “progress had stagnated due to a lack of trust among the signatories and persistent rivalry among armed groups.”^{§§§§§§§§§§} So far, there is still the situation of “no war, no peace,” in Mali as military attacks from north to central Mali have continued. This necessitated increased diplomatic and military interventions by the international community and the United Nations’ creation of a five-nation counterterrorism military force, the GS Sahel Joint Force in 2017.^{*****}

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH). I remain indebted to the Foundation. I am always grateful to my professor and friend, Prof. Christian Mair (Unifreiburg) for his continual supports and encouragement. I am thankful to Dr. E.

^{§§§§§§§§§§} United Nations document on Implementing Mali Peace Accord Only Way Forward, amid Growing Sophistication of Deadly Terrorist Attacks... <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12684.doc.htm>.
^{*****} World Report 2018, Events of Mali <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mali>.

Abiodun-Eniayekan, who provided expert translations of the French data and Alhaji Aleshinloye Wasiu Abbas who translated the Arabic data.

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Chapter 12

NETWORKED AUTHORITARIANISM IN TURKEY: JDP'S POLITICAL TROLLING AND ASTROTURFING

Mustafa Cem Oğuz^{1,} and Ozhan Demirkol²*

¹Public Administration, Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Niğde, TURKEY

²Political Science and International Relations, Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University,
Niğde, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Developments in information and communication technologies were expected to facilitate the democratization process in authoritarian regimes. However, certain authoritarian regimes adapted to these developments in order to consolidate their rule. By reviewing the relevant literature and analyzing pro-government Twitter accounts, this work demonstrates the strategies of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey to legitimize its increasingly authoritarian rule via the internet. With this aim in mind, we focus on the social media team of the party called the AKTrolls and analyze their strategy of astroturfing.

Keywords: Justice and Democracy Party, AKTrolls, astroturfing

INTRODUCTION

Widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) was expected to increase the transparency of authoritarian regimes, which in turn would contribute to their democratization in the 1990s and the 2000s (Becker 1981; Barber 1998). The internet,

* Corresponding Author address
Email: oguzmustafacem@gmail.com.

like a Trojan horse, was expected to penetrate into authoritarian states and be used as a platform for the opposition to voice popular discontent, which, in turn, would facilitate the democratization process (Ferdinand 2000). However, ‘democratizing effects’ of information technologies did not weaken authoritarian regimes. In fact, authoritarian governments adopted to the changing environment despite the developments in ICTs (Calingaert 2010). This unexpected development may be partly explained by the adaptation of the authoritarian regimes to the challenges posed by the ICTs. In the case of a new form of authoritarianism, called ‘Networked Authoritarianism’, authoritarian incumbents do not completely prohibit internet access but are in compliance with it (MacKinnon 2011). Similar to the oppositional groups, which used the internet as a weapon to express discontent, authoritarian regimes benefited from the internet as a platform to counter the claims of the opposition. Besides, the countries that adopted networked authoritarianism, including China and Russia, created a ‘secure’ and controlled public space on the internet in order to facilitate the communication between the state and the society and to monitor the opposition. In this sense, and against expectation, the internet has been used as a platform to consolidate the power of authoritarian incumbents.

The Justice and Development Party (JDP), which has been ruling Turkey since 2002, came to power with a novel democratic program in line with the ideals of the EU (Dağ 2008). However, since 2013, the JDP gradually drifted towards “an electoral authoritarianism of a more markedly Islamic character” (Özbudun 2014, 156). The Gezi Park Protests, which first emerged as a reaction against the JDP government’s urban development plan and then transformed into large-scale protest, was a turning point on the path towards ‘Networked Authoritarianism’ in Turkey. During this period, the JDP leadership realized the government’s weakness regarding social media and decided to use social media platforms like Twitter as a way to control the political agenda. They have done this by using AKTrolls and astroturfing (i.e., creating a fake grassroots movement that supports a regime’s policies in cyberspace) via bot accounts since 2013 (Saka 2018; Irak 2016).

This study aims to understand and critically examine the astroturfing and political trolling strategies of JDP. It focuses on the strategies and tactics adopted by the internet army of the JDP, namely the AKTrolls. With this aim in mind, we first review the debates on possible contributions of the changes in ICTs, primarily, the internet, to the transition to democracy or the consolidation of democracy. Next, we demonstrate the tactics to be used on the internet by the authoritarian regimes. Finally, we deal with how the JDP government uses its social media accounts and the transformation of the JDP government’s attitude towards social media. With this aim, we review the literature and the newspaper. Our findings indicate that the JDP government has changed its attitude and practices from being restrictive of the flow of information via the internet, towards using it to control the political agenda. This strategy is called ‘the third generation of internet control’ by Deibert and Rohozinski (2010b).

TWITTER, POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

New ICTs, primarily based on the internet, have been shaping not only political and social institutions but also our daily life since the 1990s (Van Dijk 2006). Initial reactions to the ICTs were generally positive. It was hoped that internet-based communication would provide extensive information to citizens and facilitate political participation (Grossman 1995; Klein 1999, 216-217). This, in turn, would provide the ground for civic culture to flourish and force the governments to be more responsive to the demands of the opposition. Some scholars suggested that direct democracy would be re-introduced because of the internet (Barber 1998; Grossman 1995) and the web would be a new arena for participation in public life (Fernback 1997; Poster 1997). One activist published a highly optimistic manifesto in 1996, which stated, “we will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace...more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before” (Barlow 1996, 18). According to such celebratory sources, power would be transferred to the people once they were armed with ICTs, which in turn, would result in the emergence of ‘Digital Democracy’ (Grossman 1995). This new type of democracy would be characterized by several democratic features, including interactivity, global network, freedom of speech and association, construction and dissemination of information, challenge to professional and official perspectives and a breakdown of the nation-state identity (Hague and Loader 1999, 6). After all, traditional political institutions, especially parliaments and political parties, and conventional political processes would change dramatically to the benefit of the masses (Ferdinand 2000).

The emergence of Web 2.0 as a new generation of ICTs in the 2000s boosted the previous optimism about the power of the internet. Social media applications and websites, including blogging, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, were the outstanding features of Web 2.0 (O’Reilly 2007, 24). These applications and websites would turn “tens of millions ordinary citizens around the world into publishers and distributors of content” (Calingaert 2010, 66). In addition, they would provide the opportunity for cooperation among citizens and facilitate discussion and interaction regardless of location. A strong relationship was expected between social media and social capital, as social media enables users to maintain social ties in a cheaper and easier way (Ellison et al. 2007; Donath and boyd 2004). Furthermore, Web 2.0 would create the space for a deliberative democratic process and would be a ubiquitous public and political life via direct and expanded communication. Consequently, the internet and especially social media were expected to provide a broader space for expression and participation than conventional media channels. Therefore, Web 2.0 has been considered as a tremendous potential to empower citizens and to enhance civic activism (Calingaert 2010, 66; Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011).

This optimistic view of social media and Web 2.0 assumes that the internet may not only consolidate democracy and enhance participation, but may also facilitate the transition to democracy. As such, advances in ICTs allow more people to share ideas and aspirations

and erase the borders between people and nations. This extensive interaction arguably creates a ‘freedom virus’, whose spread makes it harder and more expensive for authoritarian regimes to isolate their citizens from the rest of the world (Bremmer 2010, 86). The freedom virus takes a stand against these regimes and forces them to democratize. In addition, social media prepares the ground for the rise of new social movements “by sharing sorrow and hope in the free public space of the internet, by connecting to each other, by envisioning projects from multiple sources of being” (Castells 2012, 2). Through these networks, the opponents of authoritarian regimes would overcome their fear and move towards occupying urban spaces.

Various examples around the world seemed to support this thesis. In the Ukrainian presidential elections in 2004, the opposition used text messages to mobilize against the government, which resulted in the ‘Orange Revolution’. During the invasion of Lebanon by the Syrian government, activists used e-mail to gather one million protesters on the streets. In Iran’s disputed 2009 presidential elections, the opposition organized its reaction via Twitter (Grossman 2009). In the same year, the Moldavian opposition organized large-scale protests against electoral frauds in congressional elections via Twitter (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu 2009). The anti-government ‘Red Shirt’ uprising in Thailand in 2010 followed a similar path: protesters used social media to organize and occupy the city center of Bangkok. And finally, the Egyptian uprising in Tahrir Square in 2011 can be seen as the most prominent example of the role social media can play in organizing social movements (Bhuiyan 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Tüfekçi and Wilson 2012).

DARK SIDE OF THE NET: NETWORKED AUTHORITARIANISM

Contrary to these optimistic expectations, a few observers drew attention to the dark side of the web, which may help authoritarian incumbents to survive. Morozov (2011, xv), accuses the cyber-utopians of ignoring the state in their democratization analysis. He asserts that authoritarian states adjust themselves to the cyber world for the goals of propaganda, surveillance and censorship: “they are beginning to experiment with censorship ... paying bloggers to spread propaganda and troll social networking sites looking for new information on those in opposition” (Morozov 2011, XV). In a similar vein, MacKinnon (2011, 33) states that networked authoritarianism occurs “when an authoritarian regime embraces and adjusts to the changes brought by digital communications.” Accordingly, most of the authoritarian regimes started to use it in order to consolidate their power and to monitor the opposition. In these regimes, the authoritarian incumbents do not simply ban social media and websites, but provide limited freedom for people to debate public issues via the internet, while controlling conversations and following citizens on the net.

Authoritarian regimes increasingly adapt to the cyber world due to higher costs of conventional repression tactics, and the higher benefits provided by using soft power techniques (Kalathil and Boas 2010, 8). Limited freedom of communication and limiting internet access are the most prominent techniques used to increase the legitimacy of these regimes in the eyes of their fellow citizens and international observers (Calingaert 2010; Deibert and Rohozinski 2010b; Karlekar and Cook 2009).

Deibert and Rohozinski (2010a) define three generations of cyberspace control adopted by authoritarian states. First-generation control focuses on denying access to specific websites, by directly blocking access and surveillance of internet cafes by security forces. This method, which has been observed in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and China, has become increasingly unpopular since widespread censorship may easily be detected by international observers and may decrease the legitimacy of governments.

Second generation controls work under the cover of legal norms. Governments may use the laws on slander, copyright and terror to control the content of websites. For example, blasphemy and national security laws have been frequently used to ban access to social media in Pakistan. In addition to legal restrictions, authorities can make formal or informal requests to Internet Service Providers (ISP) to ban certain websites or remove certain unfavorable content. Some governments, including China and Iran, went further in pressuring ISPs to render their services inoperative in order to prevent their exploitation by opposition groups (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010b, 51). And as an alternative method of internet control, governments, including those Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, introduced ‘just-in-time blocking’ (i.e., shutting off the power in buildings where servers are located) during key moments like elections or public demonstrations. This method is attractive since it can be covered under the guise of technical problems, so that governments may avoid the charge of censorship. Finally, governments may use ‘Patriotic Hacking’. Security services of authoritarian regimes can informally hire hacking groups or encourage and approve their actions against the opposition. In Iran, Russia and China, patriotic hackers target websites of the opponents and post pro-regime messages on these services (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010b, 54).

The third generation of cyberspace control is yet more sophisticated, and harder to be detected. Unlike the first and second-generation controls, which are defensive in their nature, third-generation control focuses on the offensive. The most prominent feature of third generation control is that its focus is less on denying access, and more on competing with political rivals through counter-information campaigns that overwhelm, discredit or demoralize opponents (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010a, 27). The first version of this type of control is warrantless monitoring of internet users. For instance, in 1999, Russia introduced a system called SORM-II, which obliged all ISP companies to install equipment that would permit security forces to monitor the internet activity of specific users. Another method of third-generation control is ‘targeted cyberespionage’. Mostly adapted by the Chinese government, this method perpetually monitors human rights activists and separatist

movements by capturing their social media and email accounts through targeted malware attacks (Deibert 2015, 69; Calingaert 2010, 65). The final strategy is ‘astroturfing’, which entails creating a fake grassroots movement that support the regime’s policies in cyberspace (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010a, 28). The main aim of so-called ‘trolls’ is to manipulate, confuse and discredit sources and individuals. By manipulating social media, they struggle to gain consent while discrediting opponents. Since it is difficult for international observers to noticed these, astroturfing and trolling tactics are getting more popular in Russia, China and Iran.

ASTROTURFING

Astroturfing as an internet control strategy has become widely popular among authoritarian regimes such as China, Russia, Belarus, Iran and Turkey. Astroturfing is a “public relations technique used in politics and advertising, in which actors are paid to display apparently spontaneous grassroots support for a particular product, policy or event” (Han 2015, 109). Governments and firms create paid-for cyber armies in order to manipulate public opinion to their benefit. In a similar vein, authoritarian governments may hire cyber armies in order to discredit and threaten the opposition and create government propaganda. China’s ‘Fifty-cent Army’, Russia’s ‘Web Brigades’ and Turkey’s ‘AKTrolls’ are the most prominent examples of such armies.

The Chinese government has adapted astroturfing in cyberspace since the new millennium (Han 2015, 112). In 2004, the municipal committee of Hunan province began to hire internet commentators. In order to post and comment in favor of the government, these commentators were paid a monthly salary plus 50 cents for each post, leading them to be called the ‘Fifty-cent Army’. Loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party was the main precondition for recruitment to this army. A good commenter must “have a solid political stance; be good at cyber language; be familiar with the work of the party-school system; accept the supervision and guidance of the party school frontline channel” (Han 2015, 114). The basic mission of this army is to post positive comments on social media, to disrupt criticism against the Communist Party, and to disseminate misinformation about domestic or international political opposition (Weiwei 2012). According to a recent report, 99.3% of pro-regime comments on cyberspace were made by civil servants, whose numbers may range between 300,000 and 2 million (Benedictus 2016).

Russia’s ‘web brigades’, the Russian commentators paid to post pro-regime comments and discredit the opposition, are also known for their support to Putin’s regime. Since 2003, there have been doubts about the existence of a cyber army sponsored by the Russian Intelligence Service. In 2012, it was revealed that the Kremlin’s Youth Movement ‘Nashi’ spent thousands of dollars to pay bloggers and commenters (Gunitsky 2015, 45–46). Furthermore, in 2013, a school for internet trolls called ‘Internet Research Agency’, with

an obvious link to Nashi, has been established in St. Petersburg. According to a newspaper report, this school has 600 employees trained and paid to smear Putin's opponents, both at home and abroad. Besides, they were expected to post on news articles 50 times a day (Benedictus 2016). Each of them has at least six Facebook and ten Twitter accounts through which they post comments on behalf of Putin's regime. Moreover, Nashi pays trolls to vote against anti-regime videos on YouTube and to leave pro-Putin comments below negative stories about Putin (Gunitsky 2015, 45). The main aim of these efforts is to create a popular and legitimate image for Putin and the regime. A former employee of this organization states that the trolls not only deal with domestic issues, but also post about international events (Walker 2015). The Ukrainian and Syrian crises have been the most prominent themes for Web Brigades since 2013, and they have been routinely posting pro-Kremlin comments on columns of the *New York Times* and BBC (Walker 2015).

TRANSFORMATION OF THE JDP: FROM THE IDEALS OF DEMOCRACY TOWARDS COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

JDP was founded in 2001 by the dissident members of the outlawed Virtue Party. Rooted in political Islamism, the party left its Islamist discourse behind, and defined itself as a conservative democrat with the mission to consolidate Turkish democracy and facilitate Turkey's membership of the European Union (Patton 2007, 343). Dissatisfaction among Turkish voters with deteriorating economic conditions in the early 2000s and the political instability caused by coalitions in the 1990s resulted in the victory of JDP in the 2002 general elections, which received 34.3% of the votes, and 365 out of 550 seats.

Once in government, the JDP conformed to IMF prescriptions, stabilized the economy, and the reduced inflation of the economy. In addition, the party pushed on with its political reforms in order to maintain the start of the negotiations with the EU, which was achieved in 2005. However, prior to the election of the Turkish President in 2007, the Turkish military issued an 'e-memorandum' declaring its opposition to the election of a pro-Islamist figure as the new president (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 91). In return, the JDP government called for general elections in the same year, which resulted in the party's victory once again by obtaining 46.7% of the votes and 341 out of 550 seats. Additionally, the constitutional referendum in 2007 introduced popular elections for presidency with 68.95% of yes votes. That time around, the Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court launched a closure case against the JDP in March 2008, but failed. Simultaneously, the start of the so-called Ergenekon trials raised doubts about the military's intentions to conduct a *coup d'état* (Hale and Özbudun 2010, 93–95). These events led the JDP government to conclude that the judiciary and the military should be re-organized in order to overcome military and judiciary tutelage (Bakiner 2017). Hence, the JDP motioned a new constitutional amendment in 2010 in order to prevent a potential closure case against

the JDP (Kalaycığlu 2011, 275). The amendments were voted in by way of a popular referendum that received 58% of popular support.

Once again, the JDP won the 2011 general elections by receiving 49.8% of votes and 327 seats. The period starting with the 2011 elections has been considered as Turkey's shift from tutelary to delegative democracy (Taş 2015) and the JDP leadership's shift towards competitive authoritarianism (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016). Developments such as a legislative draft to tighten the law on abortion, which increased the number of honor killings of women, and stricter regulation of the sale of alcohol, radicalized the secularist constituency (Yörük and Yüksel 2014, 109) and resulted in the alienation of the liberal democrats from the JDP (Özbudun 2014, 158). Then, the polarization among the secular and religious sectors of society reached its peak during the Gezi Protests. When the JDP government overcame these protests, it received another serious blow from the Gülen movement as a result of a major criminal investigation involving the sons of three ministers, businessmen and bureaucrats (Özbudun 2014, 158). Despite these, the JDP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan managed to receive the majority of votes in the presidential elections in August 2014.

Following Erdoğan's presidency, Ahmet Davutoğlu became the leader of the JDP and the new prime minister. However, in June 2015, the party lost the parliamentary majority for the first time by receiving 40.8% of votes and 258 out of 550 seats. After the failed negotiations between the JDP and the Republican People's Party, which is the major opposition party in Turkey, President Erdoğan called for early elections to be held in November 2015. In June 2015, the negotiations between the Turkish government and the separatist Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem broke down. This was followed by terror attacks on major Turkish cities staged by the PKK and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In return, the Turkish government resorted to military measures to cope with increasing attacks, leading to further authoritarian measures (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016). In the general elections of November 2015, JDP received 49.5% of votes and 317 out of 550 seats. Despite the success of JDP under the leadership of Davutoğlu, the JDP leader resigned from his post and Binali Yıldırım was elected as the new chair of the party in May 2016.

The most important development in JDP's move towards competitive authoritarianism was the failed coup attempt on June 15, 2016. After the suppression of the coup attempt, the JDP government introduced a nation-wide state of emergency to arrest the supporters of the coup, which were primarily members of the Gülen movement. Until the state of emergency ended on 19 June 2018, the JDP government was criticized for violating fundamental rights and liberties by various international organizations, including the United Nations (OHCHR 2018), Amnesty International (2018), Civil Rights Defenders (2018), Human Rights Watch (2018) and the US Department of State (2018). What is more, the JDP government gradually enacted legislation in line with Erdoğan's demand to transform the Turkish political system from a semi-presidential, to a presidential one. The

new JDP leader Yıldırım campaigned for the introduction of presidentialism in Turkey. The campaign framework for the opposition was restrictive, and the opposition's efforts to support the campaign against presidentialism was obscured by several state agencies (OSCE/ODIHR 2017, 2). In addition, the claims of the opposition were not reported by mainstream media, but dominated by the public news agency and by private television channels and dailies that "are often owned by business groups that depend on public contracts" (OSCE/ODIHR 2017, 15). Under these conditions favoring 'the Yes campaign' (OSCE/ODIHR 2017, 15), the referendum resulted in the victory of the JDP's initiative with 51.41% yes votes and the consequent introduction of the presidential regime. Next, the JDP government and its new leader President Erdoğan pressed for the early presidential and parliamentary elections to be held in 2018. Supported by the two nationalist conservative parties, namely the Nationalist Action Party and the Great Union Party, the JDP called for early elections. This move was unexpected by the opposition parties. Once again, the state of emergency favored the incumbent party (OSCE/ODIHR 2018) and resulted in the election of the JDP leader Erdoğan as Turkish president.

GEZI PROTESTS AND THE RISE OF CYBERACTIVISM

The Gezi Park protests were a turning point for how the JDP approached its use of the internet against the opposition. In 2013, the Istanbul metropolitan municipality governed by the JDP attempted to turn Gezi Park, a small park located in Taksim Square, into a shopping mall. Attempts to demolish the park met with large-scale protests that were brutally resisted by the police in late May. In the summer of 2013, the events turned into large-scale protests against the government throughout Turkey (Gençoğlu-Onbaşı 2016, 273).

The reluctance of mainstream media to cover the protests and police action during its first days was a point of criticism. This attitude was a consequence of the JDP government's strategy to control mainstream media. By using a mixture of "coercive (i.e., prosecution of media professionals, closing down of media outlets, expropriation of assets, and levying of fines) and non-coercive strategies related to the discretionary allocation and/or withholding of state largesse (subsidies, tax breaks, advertising, and privatization deals) to/from media organizations," the government tightened its control over the press (Yeşil 2018, 240; Corke et al. 2014, 9-10, 11-12; Erdem 2015). Consequently, the number of newspapers and TV channels supporting the JDP government gradually increased (Adaklı 2010; Silverman 2014). The result was an atmosphere of complicity, censorship and outright stenography on the part of the mainstream media, which did not provide news about the Gezi protests in its early days (Corke et al. 2014).

Unable to voice their dissatisfaction through mainstream media, protestors used social media, and primarily Twitter, in order to organize and spread their messages to other

countries under the hashtags ‘#direnceziparki’ (resist Gezi Park) and ‘#occupygezi’ (Ayhan 2015, 62). In addition, given the reluctance of the TV channels to cover the events, the protests were webcasted under the name ‘Çapul TV’ (Seize Much TV), which was watched by more than 1.5 million people (Özsoy 2012). Facebook, Instagram and YouTube were the other social media platforms used by the protesters (Hacıyakupoğlu and Zhang 2015).

The success of the protestors in voicing their demands showed the JDP leadership that the party’s control over mainstream media was not sufficient to suppress the opposition, and that social media could be used effectively by the opposition. However, the so-called ‘17-25 December’ events and the use of social media, primarily YouTube by the Gülen movement, underscored the importance of controlling the media to the JDP leaders. On 17 December 2013, the Financial Crime Unit of Istanbul Security Directorate detained 47 people, including the sons of ministers and public officers, under the accusation of corruption. The JDP considered the accusations as a plot to bring down the government and blamed the Gülen movement as the force behind the conspiracy (Özbudun 2014, 159). A second wave of corruption investigations that included the son of JDP leader Erdoğan was expected to take place on 26 December, but the police refused to carry out the orders of the public prosecutors. In February 2014, just one month before the local elections in March 2014, recordings of phone-taped conversations were leaked on the internet. In these, Erdoğan could be heard instructing his son to dispose of large amounts of hidden funds (Letsch 2014). Again, the majority of media organizations remained silent about these voice recordings (Taş 2015, 783). The use of YouTube to spread these recordings showed once again the importance of controlling social media.

The JDP government’s immediate action against social media after these two events was to resort to restrictive measures and to increase its control over the press and the internet (Corke et al. 2014, 15). As early as 2007, the JDP enacted law No. 5651, entitled ‘Regulation of Publications on the Internet and Combating Crimes Committed by Means of Such Publications’, in order to tighten governmental control over the internet. Although the law’s initial aim was to protect families and minors, it also encompassed other crimes, including incitement to suicide, facilitation of gambling and narcotics, obscenity, and crimes against Atatürk. The law required all access and hosting providers to acquire a license from the main regulatory body BTK (the Information and Communication Technology Authority). More importantly, TİB (Presidency of Telecommunication and Communication) was founded as a subunit of the BTK, responsible for internet censorship.

The main task of the TİB was to observe and monitor the internet and take necessary measures to prevent harmful or illegal content from being accessed. If the web page or the hosting company was outside the country, the TİB did not need any court decisions for blocking access. In order to block the website or hosting within the country, the TİB needed a court decision. However, in case of an emergency, a prosecutor could demand a ban on the website with harmful content provided that a court order was instated within 24 hours.

While the TİB could block or ban websites for alleged catalog crimes (child pornography, obscenity, suicide, gambling, drugs, prostitution, dangerous goods, and material perceived as disparaging Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic), independent courts could ban any website that violated Turkish laws and regulations (Akgül and Kırılıdoğ 2015, 6-7).

The introduction of the law No. 5651 and the TİB, which was closed in 2016 and transferred its power to BTK, brought a substantial increase in the number of blocked websites. The number of banned websites was four prior to the enactment of this law, but that number jumped to 87,669 in 2015 (Özdemir 2015). During this period, YouTube was blocked for more than two years and Twitter was banned for two weeks. Access to Wikipedia has been blocked since 2017 and Facebook was banned in 2009, although this decision was not implemented (Akgül and Kırılıdoğ 2015, 7-8).

The increase in the number of bans is closely related to the government's intention to restrict the flow of information following the Gezi protests and the 17-25 December events. The JDP amended the law No. 5651 in 2014 in order to centralize and speed up the process of banning a website and introduce the fast banning of websites in relation to privacy and personal rights (Akgül and Kırılıdoğ 2015, 11). The protection of the esteem and honor of individuals against defamation on the internet was used by the JDP to demand a ban on the phone-taped conversations of alleged corruption, leaked on Twitter and YouTube. In addition to the use of TİB, the government forced Twitter to block accounts that shared phone-taped conversations about the government's alleged corruption, which was partly accepted by Twitter. The government also seems to exert pressure over the courts. A court decision to block Twitter came about immediately after JDP leader Erdoğan's statement targeting Twitter, although the Turkish Constitutional Court removed the ban two weeks after the decision.

FROM CENSORSHIP TO ASTROTURFING: THE EMERGENCE OF AKTROLLS

JDP's internet policy since the introduction of the law No. 5651 in 2007 may be evaluated as what Deibert and Rohozinski (2010b) call 'second-generation control'. However, since the Gezi protests and the 17-25 December events, a, third-generation control method, namely astroturfing, has been increasingly popular for the JDP. During the Gezi protests, the JDP supporters realized that social media was actively being used by the opposition, while the JDP remained voiceless and deprived of popular support on the internet. This situation was first noticed by a JDP supporter, whose social media agency was working with the JDP municipalities (Saka 2018, 5). This JDP supporter later met with pro-government journalists, after which they decided to manage a campaign to increase the government's popularity on the internet. Paradoxically, during the same period JDP leader

Erdoğan continued to perceive the internet as a medium to be restricted. He stated that “Today there is a trouble called Twitter, it is a spring of lies; social media is the worst menace to societies” (NTV 2013).

Three months after that meeting, news started to report about the internet army of the JDP. On September 16, 2013, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Turkish government had formed a social media team that consisted of 6000 members. According to the newspaper, the JDP was “gradually bringing young, tech-savvy party members to Ankara to train them in classrooms to act as volunteer social media representatives” (Albayrak and Parkinson 2013). These representatives would post mainly on Twitter and Facebook to defend the JDP perspective and ‘correct misinformation’ spread by the opposition. Two months later, *Hürriyet*, a Turkish newspaper, announced that the Research and Development Department of the JDP was picking up the JDP members from all the local units and training them as social media experts in party headquarters. The department’s main aim was to create a social media army to fight against information pollution about the JDP and the government (Hürriyet 2013).

At about the same time, the phrase ‘AKTrolls’, which implied JDP’s social media army, began to circulate among the opposition, with a pejorative connotation. After 2014, this phrase began to appear more frequently in the media and criticism of the AKTrolls increased. One of the issues questioned in the media was the revenue source of the AKTrolls. According to the news, JDP had created a financial pool from the commissions received from pro-government businessmen, and a share of this pool was allocated to AKTrolls (Sözcü 2014). The wages differed between 800 and 4000 TL (400-2000 dollars) and some successful trolls were hired as bureaucrats (Sözcü 2014). In 2015, just before the general elections in June, the JDP officially set up an office named ‘New Turkey Digital Office’. The office employed 200 persons and was composed of four main units: content production, social media interaction, reporting and campaign ambassadors (Daily Sabah 2015).

The relation between AKTrolls and the JDP is widely acknowledged. However, the nature of this relation is not transparent. In 2015, an independent research group conducted a Twitter network analysis of AKTrolls in order to investigate their relationship. The network map prepared by the researchers showed the most well-known AKTroll Twitter account at the time, namely @esatreis, to be at the center of interactions. According to the map, ‘@esatreis’ was primarily in connection with the then President’s advisor Mustafa Varank’s official Twitter account, ‘@varank’ (Diken 2015b). Twitter messages flowed from Varank’s official account to first @esatreis and then to other AKTrolls. AKTrolls were followed by JDP deputies, pro-JDP bureaucrats and journalists. Through this network of connection, the JDP could try to dominate Twitter’s agenda, and highlight messages or news that the party desired, or make the opposition into a scapegoat or even criminalize them. The research group concluded, “AKTrolls were designed as an opposition to free information circulation and confirmation mechanisms of public knowledge, which we

grasp very well during the Gezi Protests.” Therefore, researchers also termed the activity of trolls as ‘contra-activism’.

AKTrolls employ various tactics. Firstly, they conduct political campaigns for the JDP. They create social media content, including hashtags, memes and posts in line with the political agenda determined by the JDP headquarters. These contents are delivered to other AKTrolls via Twitter’s message function. Finally, the remaining AKTrolls disseminate the content and make it a trending topic on Twitter (BBC 2015). For example, before the 2015 general elections, AKTrolls created hashtags for each province where the JDP held a party rally. In addition to these hashtags, AKTrolls created messages about the contributions of the government to the provinces where the JDP rallied.

The most common strategy of the AKTrolls was to occupy Twitter trending topics in order to glorify the JDP leader Erdoğan. In 2016, when Erdoğan went to the USA to attend the Nuclear Security Summit, there were rumors that Obama would not meet with Erdoğan. During the summit, AKTrolls created the hashtag ‘#WeLoveErdoğan’, which managed to become a trending topic on Twitter in a relatively short time, though Twitter removed it for being generated by automated bots (The Straits Times 2016). In another case, AKTrolls launched the #DEVAM (Carry on) hashtag as a response to the opposition’s #TAMAM hashtag, which meant ‘enough to Erdoğan’s leadership’ (The Guardian 2018). The #TAMAM hashtag emerged just after Erdoğan stated that “If one day our nation says ‘enough’, then we will leave the government.” Following that statement, the opposition posted the #TAMAM hashtag almost two million times in two days. In reaction to this, AKTrolls created the #DEVAM hashtag, which amounted to 300,000 mentions. In addition to these, the AKTrolls constantly created hashtags that directed attention to the JDP leader, such as #receptayyiperdoğan, #reis (captain), #milletinadamierdoğan (people’s man Erdoğan), #yedirmeyeceğiz (we will not let you go down). They engaged in an effort to get these hashtags trending on Twitter, especially during the referendum periods and electoral campaigns.

Another tactic of AKTrolls, related to political campaigns, is using Twitterbots (i.e., software programs that sends out automated posts on Twitter). According to an internet security company’s report in 2017, Turkey ranks the fourth in automated bot usage and İstanbul ranks the second in the list of cities (Norton 2018). Using automated bot accounts allows AKTrolls to control many Twitter accounts, which, in turn, increases their efficiency to shape public opinion (Bulut and Yörük 2017, 4104). Detecting automated bot accounts is quite easy because these accounts post common hashtags with random and irrelevant words. A typical example was a hashtag #millelseninlecesuryürek (The Nation is with You Brave Heart), which praised Erdoğan during the 2018 presidential election campaigns with meaningless content (Figure 1). However, this tactic has been losing its effect due to Twitter’s war against bot accounts since February 2018 (Gulf News 2018).



Figure 1. An example of automated bot accounts of AKTrolls posting irrelevant words together with hashtags. Second tweet includes the words talking, granules, coding, resisting, #milletseñinlecesuryürek.

Targeting particular individuals in order to discredit them is another tactic adopted by AKTrolls. Maeve Shearlaw, a *Guardian* journalist, reported that two thousand cases of online harassment, smear campaigns and hacking by pro-government lynch mobs were logged in 2016. When a journalist criticizes the government, posts a comment contrary to the government's policies, or shares news that disturbs the JDP, hundreds of AKTroll accounts "mobilize quickly, creating offensive hashtags and pouring on slurs to intimidate the critic" (Kızılkaya 2013). It is common among the AKTrolls to label the opponents as traitors, terrorists or Zionists. The International Press Institute (IPI) reported 950 instances of online threats and harassment against the journalists in Turkey, including 176 instances of threats of violence since 2016 (On the Line 2018). In addition to threatening real persons, they also threaten legal entities. Right after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in France, an AKTroll account threatened *Leman*, a weekly comic magazine, to take a lesson from the *Charlie Hebdo* events (Diken 2015a). In other cases, a pro-government journalist may finger a particular individual in order to trigger the attacks of AKTrolls. For instance, journalist Pelin Batu had to suspend her social media accounts due to threats and insults from AKTrolls that started with the targeting of pro-JDP journalists (Türkiye 2016). Furthermore, as indicated by Shearlaw (2016), journalists or popular figures are forced to

express their support for the government's particular policies or support the AKTrolls' hashtags.

As an extension of discrediting opponents, AKTrolls also hacked the social media accounts of the opponents of the JDP. According to the report of the Freedom House (2016), many opponent websites and journalist accounts were hacked by pro-government cyber armies. Among the hackers, the most prominent one was the 'AyYıldız Tim' (Star and Crescent Team). Although the relationship between JDP and the AyYıldız Tim is not clear, the accounts hacked by the AyYıldız Tim mostly post pro-JDP messages and share the picture of the JDP leader. Journalists that take an anti-governmental stance are among the main targets of the AyYıldız Tim. For example, the Twitter account of a prominent journalist and a critic of the JDP, Hasan Cemal, was hacked and a message stating Cemal's apologies for betraying the Turkish nation was posted (Milliyet 2016). Similarly, on November 2017 the Twitter account of Cengiz Çandar, another prominent critic of the JDP government, was hacked (Milli Gazete 2017).

AyYıldız Tim does not only target the so-called internal enemies but also hack social media accounts of the supporters of 'external enemies'. After the recent tension between the USA and Turkey in relation to the detainment of Pastor Andrew Brunson, AyYıldız Tim began to attack foreign journalists (Berger 2018). In January 2018, Twitter accounts of two former Fox News hosts, Eric Bolling and Greta Van Susteren, who are both supporters of American President Donald Trump, were hacked by AyYıldız Tim and were filled with statements like "We love Turkish soldiers, we love Erdoğan, and we love Turkey" (Herreria 2018). The team's attacks on foreign journalists increased in August 2018, when Trump announced that Turkey would be sanctioned if Brunson was not released. Elizabeth MacDonald from Fox, Tom Keene from Bloomberg, Vanessa Friedman from *The Times* and Peter Alexander from NBC were among the victims of the AyYıldız Tim. Hackers posted tweets and videos in support of Turkey and Erdoğan on the social media accounts of these journalists (Fazzini 2018; Phillips 2018). In addition to hacking social media accounts, AyYıldız Tim also targeted these accounts because of their relationship with the Trump administration. When AyYıldız Tim hacked an account that was followed by US President Trump, the hacked account immediately sent malware or deceptive links to Twitter accounts belonging to the president in order to hack his Twitter account. In this sense, Twitter accounts of both 'internal' and 'external' enemies are being targeted by the supporters of the JDP government.

CONCLUSION

Increasing costs of blocking the internet and other attempts of authoritarian regimes to increase their legitimacy resulted in a phenomenon termed 'Networked Authoritarianism' by MacKinnon (2011). These regimes are aware not only of the cost and possible reactions

against internet censorship, but also of the potential of the internet to increase the regime's military, economic and technical power. In order to compete with the opposition without attracting domestic and international criticism, these regimes have started to use the strategy of astroturfing.

Up until 2013, law No. 5651 with its surveillance, censorship and banning, demonstrated the main tenets of the JDP government's internet policy. Since the Gezi Protests, the JDP government changed its strategy from silencing the opposition by such means, towards increasing the government's legitimacy online. During the protests, the JDP became aware of its weakness in cyberspace and turned to astroturfing to cope with criticism from the opposition. Although the JDP never owned up to the exact nature of its relation with the cyber army called AKTrolls, various observers have noted that the two are closely associated. This cyber army has two basic missions. Firstly, AKTrolls aims to convince domestic and international audiences about the high level of support for the JDP and its practices. In order to do this, AKTrolls have launched hashtags and posts on Twitter to support the agenda determined by the party and its leader. In order to take over the domestic and international most trending lists, they have resorted to automated bots that post and thus promote their own hashtags. Secondly, AKTrolls' mission is to discredit political opponents on Twitter via online harassment, smear campaigns and by hacking their accounts. Recently, several journalists writing for the opposition have been harassed and near-to lynched on Twitter, and their accounts have been hacked for JDP propaganda.

It may therefore be concluded that JDP's current internet policy has shifted from second-generation methods of control to third-generation methods, following Deibert and Rohozinski's (2010a) classification. As such, the JDP regime can be considered to have shifted from a classical authoritarian regime to Networked Authoritarianism.

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Chapter 13

SOUSVEILANCE TWITTER: CHALLENGES TO PRO-DEMOCRACY GOVERNANCE FROM BELOW IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Helia Asgari and Katharine Sarikakis*

Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

During the Middle East uprising, scholars argued that pro-democracy movements would not have taken place without social media, hence naming them the “Twitter Revolution” in Iran and “Facebook Revolution” in Egypt. Although social networking media have provided one more platform on which civil society was able to challenge dominant, centralized and hegemonic ideologies, understanding the complexity of the impact of media platforms, such as Twitter, for social movements, in both authoritarian and democratic societies, requires us to move beyond technology-centric analyses. This means that there is a need to situate the relation of activism and Twitter within the context of domestic legal structures and the political culture within a country. This chapter focuses on political activism through the lens of Twitter as a contested medium in Iran. In particular, it discusses the issue of safety of activists and journalists, and the reasons why twitter has proven to be questionable for their safety.

Here, the continuity of offline and online communication spaces affecting the lives of activists and journalists is discussed. The socio-political conditions in the country have impacted online activities of civil society compromising the safety of activists and journalists.

Keywords: Twitter, surveillance, Sousveillance, safety of journalists, autocratic regimes, civil society

* Corresponding author: E-mail: heliasgari@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of safety of journalists and activists specifically in autocratic regimes has attracted the attention of the international community. Authoritative monitoring and analytical reports show that the attacks against journalists and those involved in acts of journalism and generation of information for the public have been increasing steadily, between 2000 and 2016 (MediaGovernanceLab 2017). Moreover, the annual reports by Freedom House, Reporters without Borders and the special report on human rights situation by the United Nations as well as coverage by news agencies and human rights institutions draw attention to the violation of human rights and the threats journalists, activists, and public writers, such as bloggers and citizen journalists face for their online activities (Freedom house/freedom on the net 2013-2017; Reporters without border 2013-2014).

In particular, when examining the threats to civil society, on the top of the list of actors responsible for the violation of the protection of the safety of journalists are repressive governments and institutions under their authority. Authoritarian regimes control the resources, and enjoy the legal authority to persecute those who oppose them and challenge their power (Asgari 2017). Evidence shows that attacks against journalists and activists have become more severe after the emergence of social media and their usage by social movements (Ibid). Despite the fact that initial analysis considered that social media are a useful tool in the hands of civil society and the public, especially with the aim to gain ground on their social and political claims, there is another aspect, less researched and understood: this is the case whereby social media are not considered desirable means of connection but are rather avoided by civil society or are treated as tools of government surveillance. The following discussion aims to shed light on some of the contradictions surrounding the use of Twitter as one of the most important social media forms in the hands of reformist activists in Iran and to highlight the reasons why this form of social media, while in theory providing possibilities for empowerment, also presents important limitations compromising the safety of civil society actors.

ACTIVISM, CAMPAIGNING AND TWITTER

The “Iran’s twitter revolution” became quickly a popular slogan, a shortcut to refer to the Iranian uprising, and a headline in Western media after the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 (Esfandiari 2010). The reason why this headline and the debate it generated were highly charged was the observation that the usage of new media in the Middle East uprising was crucial to the emergence and action of civil society actors. Social media had been seen as playing an almost mythical role during the social and political uprising in the Middle East and North Africa (Ben Moussa 2013). The wave of protests demanding freedom,

dignity and social justice that was sparked by a national event in Iran and local event in Tunisia spread strongly to the MENA region and were certainly amplified by the use of social media.

During the Green Movement, new media became the platform where reformists could express dissent, capture and disseminate the scene of violence of the victims of police and security forces brutality specifically, the protestors. The video of Neda Agha-Soltan (CNN 2009) being shot in the chest while participating in a demonstration on 20 of June 2009 was disseminated over the Internet as well as news agencies and media in the world, such as CNN, BBC and Fox news. It quickly became the rallying reference for political opposition (Time 2009).

During that time, activists and journalists organised public demonstrations, using Facebook and Twitter to send invites. Users retweeted them or shared them in their profiles and news was circulated in the online sphere, rapidly. Users confirmed their attendance for demonstrations, which were planned, first in the virtual sphere and then in the offline world. Avatars were changed to reflect political events; for instance, on June 2009, around 30000 tweets encouraged Twitter users to change the color of their avatars to green - the symbol of the Green Movement (Pew 2009), spread tweets “#whereismyvote” next to #Iraelection or added this slogan as their avatars (Ibid).

Scholarship on the use of social media in non-democratic countries is rather under-theorized. However, it is increasingly understood that social media play a significant role in a process of governance from below and sousveillance, specifically in authoritarian countries, not only at the time of political crises, but also in everyday life of resistance against social, political and cultural forms of domination and subordination (Asgari 2017).

It is widely accepted that online media can provide a platform for activists and journalists, as well as citizens, to resist state actions relating to information control. In autocratic regimes, they can create a space for connection between domestic and diaspora activists and journalists, and among prodemocracy groups in international communities. By breaking the monopoly of state media, where even the use of satellite is prohibited, social media can provide the possibility of distributing news and information, as well as analysis of social and political issues and events from the point of view of socially and politically marginalised groups (Ibid). The aim of reformist activists and journalists through the use of social media is to represent diverse social and political demands regarding the public interest in increasing public awareness. This diversity of ideas and attitudes can promote public and civic awareness and political engagement in society, can challenge the dominant top-down discourse in the country, and develop practices to resist surveillance (Ibid).

However, strongly positive views of the effects of social media are based on a technology-centric, techno-utopian view of social media and social change. Any study of the impact of social media on politics requires us to consider the socio-political context, which provides a framework to discuss the space for online deliberation and forms of

governance from below. The concept of “governance from below” can be understood to refer to a bottom-up approach of practices that aim to generate a ‘regulatory’ effect on media, by counteracting or otherwise influencing the ways in which citizens access or modify media content and media structures. On a macro level, this bottom up approach can be further understood as a counter-balancing process to state power. Governance refers to the process of social change, which has at its core the sum of activities that has a regulatory effect (Sarikakis 2004; 2012). As such, governance is not the exclusive realm of a government or of law, but rather a realm of struggle over influence and in which ideological dispositions, values and ‘soft law’ have as strong a role to play as hard law and the state. Governance from below reflects on citizens’ side of governance to explain the complex role of state and non-state actors in the process of governance through behavioural practices and functions of non-state actors (Lea and Stenson 2007) and, in a broader sense, the role of citizens. Citizenship, as the basic building block for contemporary democratic society, is the right that enables people to act as agents (Lister 1998). Due to increasing citizens’ participation in public life, new features of citizenship are defined as the exercise of power and responsibilities in the arena of public policies in the context of governance (Moro 1999b). “Active citizenship is the capacity of citizens to self-organize in a multiplicity of forms for the mobilization of resources and the exercise of power in public policies for the protection of rights to achieve the end of caring for and developing common goods” (Ibid). The bottom-up approach to the involvement of citizens in the political process as an essential part of democracy considers the opportunity for both government and citizens to construct new ways of governance, based on effective citizen participation (Dahlgren 2014). In authoritarian structures, there is limited space for debate or spaces are controlled and allow for limited participation (Pausch 2012). Therefore, the concept of governance from below, refers to the role of society and its ability to resist regulation and impositions of the state and government intervention and provide an answer to the question about the ways in which the public responds to their marginalization and exclusion (Nekola 2006).

Citizens, through resistance, attempt to define their identity, disrupt the dominant discourse and play a meaningful role in the governance process. However, comprehensive control of offline world makes it significantly difficult for opposing voices to the state, under conditions of authoritarianism, to participate in social and political actions, to establish contact with each other, and more difficult to organize resistance. Thus, new media may indeed enable citizens to look beyond the state in order to influence state’s decisions and affect public affairs (Asgari 2017).

The nature of social media and its role in governance from below is not a stand-alone factor. Understanding the full complexity of governance from below and the implication of new media for such political action, in both authoritarian and democratic societies, requires us to move beyond the treatment of technology as a sole or core driver for social change. The implications of communication technology for social movements are examined in combination with the role of external factors, such as the social and political

context and conditions which surround citizens' online and offline activities. Examining those reveals that social media are used not only by reformist activists and journalists, but also those who aim to promote freedom, human rights, justice and dignity. Interestingly, however, social networking sites are also used by authoritarian governments to not only trace social, cultural and political goals, but also for surveillance purposes leading to a chilling effect, even repression of civil society.

PRO-DEMOCRACY GOVERNANCE FROM BELOW

For a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of safety of pro-democracy groups in Iran, the records and reports about assaults on journalists and activists in Iran provide a measurable evidence about the degree of violation of freedom of speech, and ultimately human rights. The value of such reports is high because of the historical records they provide. Nevertheless, these annual reports focus more on aspects of technology, which states use to control, censor or filter communication in cyberspace, as well as a circumvention tactics online users employ. Moreover, these reports focus rather on numbers of arrests and imprisonment, meaning visible, quantifiable and measurable factors. Satisfactory answers about the safety of journalists and activists cannot be given solely on the basis of these reports, so it is important to explore more closely the processes that lead up to or seek to resist assault and incarceration. The role of social media in this process is being examined through the lens of the experience of affected parties, i.e., the journalists and activists themselves, as they reflect on the online-offline processes of communication. This discussion aims to identify the factors, which seem to indicate highest danger for democracy groups in Iran through the lens of reformist activists and journalists. There are five reasons why qualitative interviews were used as the primary data collection for this project: First, qualitative interviewing offers a way to understand a social actor's behavior and perspective and at the same time provide a description of Iranian civil society's experiences (Lindlof and Taylor 2002: 172); Second, qualitative interviewing is used to study people's understanding of meanings in their lived world (Kvale 1996: 105); Third, information about things or processes that cannot be observed, but can be gathered (Patton 1987: 196); Fourth, not everything is captured in eyewitness reports, thus to inquire the past, qualitative interviewing is helpful to fill out the gaps (Lindlof and Taylor 2002: 175); And finally, interviews allow for triangulation of information gained from other sources, something that increase the reliability and validity of study findings (Merriam 2001).

By utilizing qualitative method and semi-structure interviews, participants were asked to become narrators of their experiences relating to Twitter, political activism and sousveillance in autocratic political context. Hence, we entered the research process with questions about the usage of Twitter for political purposes in Iran which is understood to

be a non-democratic country; interested in the ways in which and reasons why journalists and activists who are under direct state control, use new media to represent their social and political concerns.

Interviews were conducted with well-known and influential activists and journalists who were supported by international communities when they were in jail also through social media and Twitter hashtags campaigning for their release. Also, following the hashtag #JournalismIsNotACrime which supports journalists and activists in Iran we could find reliable and informative cases.

In this chapter, Grounded theory is adopted for investigating the process of governance from below and all data derives from qualitative interviews with pro-democracy/reformist activists and journalists who experience arrest and imprisonment due to their online activities during the years 2008 to 2017. Interviews were conducted with Iran based journalists and activists who experienced various threat such as arrest, imprisonment, forced confession, torture, were banned from working, banned from studying, were in exile or prevented from leaving country due to their online and offline activities.

‘Reformists’ and ‘pro-democracy group’ are the two main terms that are used in this chapter to describe the participants. These terms refer to the discourse, which derives from the 1997 reform movement in Iran (Ebadi 2006: 180). It has arisen in the tendency of modernity that is underpinned by an emphasis on individualism, freedom, equality, rationalization and professionalization, the development of the nation-state, and democracy challenging the dominance of tradition and religious ideas in Iranian society (Abrahamian 2008:186).

According to the pro-democracy group, online sphere and social networks are only tools to represent political claims and generate a public debate with other netizens, in a situation whereby broadcast media are run directly under the supervision of the Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran (Freedom House/Freedom of the press 2016) and where all print media are published under the direct supervision of the Culture Ministry (Ibid), both promoting the conservative doctrine. Satellite is illegal within Iran and there is no domestic arena for privately owned broadcasters to exist (Small media 2012). Also, there is no independent newspaper that can present views contrary to the state’s conservative views (Freedom house/Freedom of the press 2015).

Based on interviews, contents which the pro-democracy group shares in Twitter are mostly about: Freedom of expression, safety of Journalists, legal protection and legal restriction of the activities of civil society, arbitrary rules and practices related to the activities of journalists and activists.

Arrest, imprisonment, hunger strike and the status of political prisoners in prison are the most important topics tweeted by the pro-democracy group, as mainstream media refuse to publish this kind of news and information. The hashtag for political prisoners is started with #free and then the name of the detained journalist or activist is written such as #freeJila, #freemeysami #freesaba #freenarges.

Another important concern in Twitter is women's affairs. They talk about women's economic-equality, equal access to sports events, political participation, education rights, marriage and divorce rights, polygamy, married women permission to depart the country, child custody, compulsory Hijab, acid throwing and violence against women. Since 2009 and the usage of Twitter by civil society, many online campaigns on Twitter are related to women's affairs.

As an example, civil society with the hashtag #women_Stadium (in Persian #زنان_ورزشگاه) discuss ban on women in stadiums, and, even debate this issue is considered a violation of the 'red line'.

A Tehran based journalist (male, 34) tweeted: "access to stadium is a civil right of women"; and a Tehran based feminist (female, 33) tweeted: "something which is normal in this world, is a dream for us #women_stadium. #NoBan4Women, #OpenStadiums, #LetIranianWomenEnterTheirStadiums and #LetWomenGoToStadium are other hashtags related to this issue. Criticizing the government, the debate on economic crises, corruption, poor performance of ministries, ethnic and religious minorities are topics, which the civil society debates on Twitter.

Below, we discuss in detail the ways in which Twitter became more than a debating tool, but a tool to jeopardize the safety of activists and affect the sense of safety of the civil society.

THE ONLINE AND OFFLINE CONTINUUM

It is widely understood that the aim of authoritarian regimes is to mute the voice of pro-democracy social groups and force them to the margins of political life or to exit the political scene. In the first instance, the government restricted access to social media and websites, particularly domestic news sites, which exercise critique, international news sources and online sources, which differ from the state doctrine (small media 2016). Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are also blocked (Xynou, Filastò, Alimardani, Kouhi, Bowen, Vmon, Sabeti 2017). Hence, Telegram became the most used social network, followed by Instagram with over 40 million users (Esfandiari 2017). Telegram was blocked on May 2018 as the Iranian government claimed the usage of Telegram endanger national security (Erdbrink 2018).

Due to the absence of independent media in the country, Twitter has been mainly used as a tool to disseminate news and information about public protests and updates on government's reaction to demonstrations during the Green Movement. twitter is still mostly used by Iranian activists and journalists, in order to disseminate news about political prisoners, ethnic and religious minorities, human rights issues and debate about news and information, which remains under- or unreported by mainstream media (Freedom House/Freedom on the Net 2017). Although Twitter is filtered and intensively monitored

by the government, it still maintains its character as a space for politics. Equally is seen as a vital space by the Iranian authorities to maintain their presence, as Iran's heads of authority, the Supreme Leader, President and most politicians use it.

Hence, while new media and electronic communications provide better, easier and faster means of communication for journalists, they are also the means of control by security forces to trace activists and journalists' moves. In this respect, the issue of safety of civil society in the online environment is important. The reasons are manifold; whereas in previous technological eras activists and journalists might have used physical locations generally anonymously, the rise of the of mobile Internet and mobile communications in recent years means that everyone is physically traceable, effectively, since everyone is carrying a GPS in their pocket at any point, everywhere. Moreover, due to the sharing of a high level of personal information in social networks, data can be monitored and processed and mass surveillance has become easier, faster and cheaper and has put social media users at greater risk.

When activists are on online media and share their political opinions, they are creating material that can be used against them as security forces can collect it easily and use it against them in interrogation. Widely known activists and journalists come under direct state control, thus security forces are able to "comb through" their personal accounts and online activity (Gambrell 2018) and are being held for questioning over posts, tweets and 'comments' they make but also and 'likes' they receive for their posts and tweets. On the basis of these communications, they are charged with intention to endanger national security and disturbing public order. A Tehran-based feminist (female, 42) said: "I was summoned and interrogated on the charge of disturbing public opinion due to the comments and likes that I received under my posts in social networks; why was I motivating the public to criticize the political structure? I had to answer to both the content of comments and the people that wrote them: why did I have connections with these people and why did I not delete their comments?" (Asgari 2017)

Self-censorship and being forced to exit the political scene are extensive among Iranian civil society due to the widespread tough sentences on the basis of online activities. A significant number of journalists, activists, citizen journalists and ordinary users are interrogated, arrested and imprisoned for their online activities and in many cases with little or no explanation (Reporters Without Borders 2015). Since 2009, the international community and organizations have reported the prosecution and detention of activists for online activism. The UN Human Rights Council placed Iran 173rd out of 180 countries on the world press freedom; as of January 2016, at least 47 journalists and Internet users were reportedly imprisoned in the country (UN Report 2016). The Middle East Eye's report also mentioned: 'Iran has "arrested or summoned" around 450 social media users over their online activities in 2016 (Middle East Eye 2016). Soheil Arabi, Facebook activist was arrested in 2013 and sentenced to death in 2014 for "insulting" the prophet Muhammad in his Facebook profile (Freedom House/Freedom in the world 2016), and Sina Dehghani,

who was arrested in 2015, has been sentenced to death, due to the series of public messages he had posted online (Freedom House/Freedom in the world 2017).

Iranian laws restrict the right of access to information, freedom of speech and online social and political debate in practice and specify tough punishment for online activism. Indeed, the level of interference in public speech is not limited to acts of surveillance and monitoring, but extends to forms of criminalisation through legal frameworks: the country's Computer Crime Law (CCL) (Article 19 2012) is related to online surveillance methods, which the civil society argues are used to repress dissent. Shaheed (2013), the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran between 2011-2016, pointed that the 2009 Computer Crimes Law appears to determine permissible expression and information for Iranian audiences in the light of the government's political, religious, or cultural standards. Making limits on expressions of the rule, rather than exceptions, have resulted in arrests, detentions and even death sentences against individuals accused of developing and maintaining such websites, and Iranian citizens who speak out against the Government on the Internet (Ibid).

It should be noted that the media law, which includes the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, press law and also cybercrime law, do not provide precise definitions of key terms denoting offense, such as "Illegal access", "disruption", "public morality", "government interest". This lack of precision leaves ample room for ad hoc interpretation and creates an environment of uncertainty among civil society actors, in the country (Ibid). Legal changes have been accompanied by the establishment of "The Iran Cyber Police (otherwise known as FATA Police)" in January 2011 in compliance with the Cyber Crime Laws and is tasked to prosecute users engaged in illegal Internet activities, as described by the Committee for Determining Offensive Contents (Cyberpolice 2010). FATA monitors the activities of ISPs, track and combat cybercrime, monitor Internet cafes, collect and process data on Internet use and gather intelligence on Internet users. Their mandate is to also educate users and inform them of security risks in cyberspace, prevent violations of societal norms and values and protect and preserve the religious and national identity of Iran (Small media 2013). Civil society actors point out that the methods of surveillance and generally of the work of FATA are not entirely clear. Meanwhile, as activists and journalists attest, all issues related to religion and cultural customs are considered 'holy affairs', hence taboos.

Although some topics are explicitly banned from publication in the media by the Supreme National Security Council, most 'red-lines' are unclear and depend on the "political climate" of the time. However, experience from the past is used as a compass for writers to self-regulate 'how to talk' or how to present political claims - ultimately when and how to perform self-censorship. They are aware that all issues related to religion and cultural customs are considered taboo; hence, challenging various social issues is by definition a risk. In general, any kind of criticism of the supreme leader, political structure or governmental institutions, or any act of social and political activism or civil engagement,

may lead to arrest and imprisonment. These activities are framed as intentions to disrupt national security, public order, and as propaganda against the state, insulting the supreme leader, dissemination of false rumours, or acting against the Republic.

As collective action can reinforce the strength and influence of civil society, journalists and activists argue that the suppression of activities through arrest and imprisonment and ‘unusual’ sentences, create an atmosphere of repression and fear in the society. Besides arrest, imprisonment, torture and false confessions among others, activists have been banned from pursuing social and professional lives, even from pursuing higher education degrees. Further pressure on activists and journalists is the harassment of their families by security forces. This method of suppression also applies for diaspora activists and journalists. Although the diaspora is normally beyond the direct reach of the Iranian State, they are still subjected to intimidation. Their families still living in Iran have come under sustained harassment and persecution from the Iranian authorities. By this method, the state can exercise pressure on diaspora activists and journalists, to exit the political scene, which was the case for BBC Persian service staff in August 2017, when the Iranian government prevented the BBC staff and their families from buying or selling their properties and cars in Iran (BBC 2017).

These factors do not only put pressure on their lives, but also there is indirect harm arising from unlawful imprisonment that has the same impact on the lives of activists and journalists like direct pressure has. These reasons can deter activists and journalists from active participation in the political and social spheres. Moreover, some Iranian activists and journalists have suffered mental illness after their release from incarceration; some have faced family challenges, such as divorce and some unemployment. A journalist and women’s rights activists said: “who would have thought there would be this number of activists and journalists arrested, imprisoned and banned from working due to protests against the presidential election results, and sentenced to one to fifteen years in prison, banned from working for between three and thirty years... Because from one side, the state suppresses us and on the other side, ordinary people do not support us because of the fear and atmosphere of repression in society...” Thus, lack of protection of the right to freedom of speech and the application of arbitrary practices spread the sense of fear and hopelessness in the Iranian society.

TWITTER AS A BATTLEGROUND

In addition to censorship and forms of intimidation in the offline world, the cyber sphere is used to promote state’s doctrine, conservative ideas and religious value (BBC Persian 2012). It is increasingly understood that online space is conducive for autocratic authorities to abuse activists and journalists and curb dissent. Moreover, Twitter is riskier for journalists and activists, because not only do government and security forces trace

reformists' activities, but also Twitter enables groups and individuals to create unsafe and hostile environments for journalists and activists.

Since 1997, the Conservatives and Reformists are the two main political groups in Iran. During these years, Iranian politics has been characterized by continued struggle between them. In theory, the conservatives believe in formal tradition and resist fundamental structural changes in social, cultural and political affairs; the reformists, on the other hand, believe that reform can lead to the emergence of a new political system and a new social paradigm (Duffy 2007). The debate about Islam is one of the fundamental conflicts between the conservatives and the reformists (Bruno 2008). For conservatives, Shia Islam is an inseparable element of the political structure, which impacts on law, regulations and practices of administration of the country, an issue which the reformists criticize and argue for a lesser role of religious power and interference in policy making (Bruno 2008).

Another ideological disagreement between the reformists and the conservatives is their approach to "Western paradigms". While the conservatives are against westernization, modernization and secularization (Del Giudice 2008), the reformists attempt to change these key terms in public discourse (Abrahamian 2008: 186), which was founded after the revolution.

The ideology of each group impacts on the response and reaction to all social and political affairs, which can be around national or international issues such as women's rights, human's rights, the independence of the judiciary, US-Iran relations, nuclear disarmament and negotiations. Also, the status of political prisoners and Green movement's leaders who are under house arrest are the core battlegrounds between the reformists and conservatives in recent years.

As an example related to women's rights, women are barred from sport stadiums in Iran; conservatives agree with this rule, but reformists criticize it (Asgari 2017). Or in relation to the rights of Muslim women and in particular Iranian women to choose their own garments, reformists believe that hijab is a matter of choice for Muslim women and it is only advised by Quran, but on the other hand, conservatives consider hijab as a mandatory issue for women (Kar 2010).

The tension over such fundamental theoretical issues have expanded into practical clashes and now into online sphere as conservatives as well as ultra-conservatives joined Twitter (Center for Human rights in Iran 2017). Conservatives viewed social media as a platform in the hands of dissenting groups to challenge state policies and have long opposed the availability and accessibility of social media. However, after the supreme leader and conservative politicians joined Twitter, conservatives changed their mind. For instance, the website of the "Soft war young officers," - a group aligned with Iran's security forces, published an article stating: "more than 10 years have passed since the supreme leader issued commands to prevent the harmful impact of cyberspace. However, opportunities have been lost and the government's ineffective policies have not worked. Now the opportunities on Twitter cannot be ignored. Through Twitter, the citizens of the

Islamic Republic must display their power on the international stage and called supporters of the Islamic Republic of Iran to fulfil their patriotic duty by using Twitter to counter pro-reform voices” (Center for Human rights in Iran 2017).

Through Twitter, political camps interrupt the online social and political discussion with the aim to intimidate and silence the reformists and civil society (Asgari 2017). According to a Tehran-based journalist (male, 38), “this kind of activity by the conservatives in Twitter is collaborating with security forces to trace dissent in cyber space, which jeopardizes the safety of the civil society.”

Indeed, the struggle and tension between the conservatives and the reformists caused that groups and individuals consider political scene as a battleground to show their power wherein confrontational social and political groups take place and attempt to eliminate other groups and individuals and fight to hold on to power.

In this situation, the possibilities and limitations of social networks, in particular Twitter amplifies tendencies of polarisation between conservatives and reformists. Twitter brings critics of the dominant discourse in a dangerous situation and so becomes a battlefield, a space for hate speech, defamation and verbal abuse, dissemination of rumors and misinformation, instead of a space for rational debate towards consensus. A Mazandaran based activist (male, 34) believes that “Iranian users find a platform on which to talk about their ideas and beliefs without intermediaries and discuss issues, which they could not talk about before, because they did not access any media and were not allowed either. Now both conservatives and reformist access social media, where they can react to each other and talk directly about various issues. This situation has caused online debate to descend into angry mob rule, and hate speech that is offensive and abusive, which also can jeopardize the safety of civil society.”

The most important feature of Twitter and in general all social networks is that these platforms enable users to create their own domain in the online sphere with like-minded followers a situation which Pariser called “filter bubble” (Pariser 2011). In this situation, users are separated from news and information that are in conflict with their ideas, viewpoints and values and impact on their online activities. As Pariser said: “democracy requires citizens to see things from one another’s point of view, but instead we are more and more enclosed in our bubbles” (Pariser 2011).

Iranian journalists and activists use the term “remote island” as a metaphorical description of a situation in which existing views and ideas are amplified and reinforced by repetition inside a closed sphere where sameness of ideological positions increases and differences with those outside it are sharpened (Asgari 2017). This term describes online social and political activities of both conservatives and reformists group. The situation which each group enclosed in their “island”, isolated from the other group where not only they cannot communicate with each other, but also there is no tendency to hear the voice of other groups (Ibid). Twitter contributes to this feature, because users follow accounts, topics and hashtags they agree with as well as generate contents to reinforce their ideas and

viewpoints. They do not listen to the dissenting voices but rather aim to dominate the online social and political discussion.

In this situation, the question arises: in which ways does activity on Twitter jeopardize the safety of civil society in Iran? And in which ways do groups and individuals create an unsafe environment for journalists and activists?

Twitter has been an open space for networks topics and ideas. However, in safety terms, the open space of Twitter is rather a negative feature, because, unlike other social networks which are restricted to the people users know, Twitter enables users to allow open connections with anyone. In online campaigns on Twitter, identifying activists and journalists as well as individuals who criticize the government becomes easier. By following a hashtag or related keywords, security forces can trace people who react and respond to the social, political and economic events of the day.

Furthermore, unlike the print media where journalists take responsibility for their publications, in online media anyone can publish any kind of content about people and groups, without evidence, and cause harm to their image and activities.

As a Tehran-based journalist (Female, 39) observed: “Many social and political events occurred that we as journalists and activists support. Some of us react and write about such events, like elections, arrests of journalists and activists, women’s issues, such as the wearing of the Hijab, women in sports stadiums, Iran’s nuclear negotiations. If it happens that we react to some of them or do not support others, after a while, if the desired result is reached and we did not support that event, we would be held responsible about why we did not support it. If we supported other political events and the desired results were not reached, we would again be held responsible about why we supported them. In fact, we are afraid to react to social and political events or support or boycott them, because not only the state observes us, but our colleagues also check on our activities, to use them against us.”

Acting against a group or person is enabled on twitter through discussions supported by hashtags against individuals and groups; spreading private documents such as photos, private chats and recorded voice in twitter as a public domain; and through spreading misinformation without evidence. This phenomenon creates a chilling effect which can be catalytic in a fragile political climate.

According to a Tehran-based journalist (female, 38). “it becomes common that conservative users who can also be journalists that published the reformists debate about social and political issues or retweet them, ask security forces to trace a journalist, on the basis of the intent to disrupt national security, disturb public order, spread propaganda against the state and act against the Islamic republic.”

Under these conditions, conversations often turn to hostility between groups, the public and activists. Groups criticize each other on the basis of their political background and existent viewpoints and use inflammatory language against them. Rivalry, hostility, discrediting of opponents form the common phenomena compromising the extent to which a genuine public debate can be held online.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on political activism through the lens of Twitter as a contested medium in Iran. In particular, it discusses the issue of safety of activists and journalists, and the reasons why Twitter has proven so questionable for their safety. The socio-political condition in the country has impacted on online activities of civil society and compromised the safety of activists and journalists. This happens in two ways: Firstly, Twitter like other social media is under direct state control; thus, activity on Twitter is potentially dangerous. Through surveillance, the state can collect information about activists and use this information against them. New media provide better, easier and faster platforms for security forces to trace activists and journalists in Iran.

Secondly, dissenting the Iranian regime means also attempting to get ahead of other groups within a multipolar political conflict: the new media create spaces for such conflict, through defamation campaigns that utilize the platform architecture of Twitter, such as hashtags against individuals and groups, or through spreading misinformation without evidence. This phenomenon creates a chilling effect, and further destabilizes attempts for the emergence of polyphonic and pluralistic society.

Under authoritarian rule, the state neither permits nor encourages individuals to participate in public decision-making, by creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, which means the public and specifically activists and journalists cannot gain power to challenge the dominant ideology and represent political claims for social justice. Beyond the external pressure that restricts the activities of democracy groups in Iran, the internal challenges and political struggle as well as social tensions impact on social relationships and weaken solidarity and connection. Further, the function of Twitter as one of the most important social network is defined according to the social and political system of the country.

Fear and uncertainty among pro-democracy groups due to state surveillance, and the struggle between the pro-democracy group and hardliners not only affects the private and social life of this group, but also forces them to perform self-censorship or exit the political scene - at least temporarily.

Empowerment is a bottom-up process by which people become aware of the power dynamics, develop skills and capacities, and voice their needs and interests (Rowlands 1995: 102). It also implies a process to increase personal, interpersonal and political power,

which helps individuals and communities to take action to improve their society (Gutierrez 1990).

Empowerment through the lens of the pro-democracy group in this project is not the gaining of power to dominate others; but is a process of increasing influential participation and interaction among the marginalised social and political groups, to have a voice in the process of shaping society and making decisions. Empowerment concerns the equality of representation in the process of governance, including the freedom to speak out about the concerns and demands, and have the right to engage in political actions. In other words, empowerment means the transition from a passive group to an active, participating group, and a process that enables activists and journalists to identify their social and political identity and give meaning to the process of governance.

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Chapter 14

**FROM FREE SPEECH TO FREED SPEECH:
TWITTER'S ETHICS OF FREEDOM
IN THE AFTERMATH OF NOVEMBER 2015 PARIS
ATTACKS THROUGH THE LENS
OF THE ANONYMOUS COLLECTIVE**

M. Sébastien Moutte

Department of sociology, TTSD, Lerssem, University of Paul Valéry,
Montpellier, France

ABSTRACT

The following chapter aims at questioning Twitter's approach to freedom of speech as far as political commitment and activism are concerned. To do so, we intend to focus on the investigation of the aftermath of the November 2015 Paris attacks on Twitter from two angles: Twitter's official retaliation concerning regulation and the implication of accounts claiming the Anonymous collective identity. These catastrophic events triggered a global indignation that was particularly intense on Twitter. It enlightened a sociological phenomenon - the *process of indignation* – that we observed from a double angle. First, such a process actually set on fire the Anonymous collective's desire to get involved and thus made clear Twitter's digital activism capacities. Second, it implied Twitter's official involvement. As the online social network established participative moderation standards like the @safety page, that invited every user to get involved on a voluntary basis, it revealed its ambiguous commitment towards free speech.

This study is based on an empirical approach towards Twitter and springs from comprehensive and qualitative methods mixing online interviews with Anonymous activists led in November 2016 and active daily observations of the network's official initiatives and announcements on the @safety page in the aftermath of the attacks.

Keywords: Twitter, participative activism, commitment, identity, Anonymous, free speech, indignation

INTRODUCTION

On the 13th of November 2015, terrorism brought chaos into the French capital: a series of coordinated attacks claimed by ISIS struck Paris all at once in different places. Several bars were attacked along with the famous music venue called “Le Bataclan” during the show of the rock band “Eagles of Death Metal”. The Saint Denis stadium surrounding area was also attacked during a football match. More than 130 people were killed in the evening. Within a few hours, the disaster was palpable on the Internet too, especially on Twitter where mixed feelings of indignation, fear, sadness and solidarity rushed in all at once, as posts flooded the online social network. As Western democratic beliefs had been badly injured, thousands of users around the world connected to their accounts and posted their immediate thoughts as a way to do something, to avoid passive behaviors and idleness, and to share their grief with the community. The same online grief and indignation could be noticed a few months earlier, back in January 2015, when Charlie Hebdo newspaper’s premises were severely attacked.

The following study aims at understanding the *process of indignation* that has been taking place within the Twitter users community in the aftermath of Paris attacks, particularly through the lens of accounts related to the anonymous collective. As an organization claiming a daily life commitment towards the struggle in favor of online freedom of speech and against terrorism, the masked collective represents a good overall illustration of such issues. The variety of Anonymous’ unstructured methods is particularly obvious on Twitter. It constantly mixes – on both individual and collective scales – political activism, participative journalism, hacking campaigns and isolated forms of apolitical, uncommitted indignation. Thus, it enlightens paramount issues regarding freedom of expression on online social networks and raises the following problematic questions: Can we study Twitter as an actual participative activism platform facilitating online commitment? Where should freedom of speech start and stop on the social network? Can Twitter prevent ISIS from using the network and rely on the First Amendment at the same time? Can Anonymous be committed to the course of freedom of speech and lead censorship operations at the same time? Did ISIS achieve its attacks thanks to websites like Twitter? In the aftermath of Paris attacks three years ago, these questions hit the headlines as online social networks became the core of every debate regarding the relationship between freedom of speech and terrorism.

This chapter begins with the question of freedom of expression as it was claimed by Twitter itself at that time, and then deals with both the actual presence of ISIS on the social network in 2015-2016 and how Twitter has handled such issues. Then, it studies Anonymous as an illustration of the process of indignation that has been taking place among Twitter users in the aftermath of the attacks, in order to understand how freedom of speech has been received on both individual and collective scales and how it has been working as far as ISIS is concerned. Finally, this study aims at understanding to what extent Twitter and the Anonymous collective are paramount issues that illustrate the debates around freedom of speech and the spread of terrorist organizations on the Internet. In the end, Paris attacks aftermath on the Internet shows that *freed* speech devices like Twitter do not necessarily mean actual free speech achievements.

METHODOLOGY

This paper results from a nine-month research on Twitter, from November 2015 to August 2016. All the sources, data and Internet links used here^{††††††††††} send us back to this precise period of time and are meant to help us understand the online mood in the aftermath of the attacks. They were obtained mainly from participant observation methods on Twitter. The point was, on the one hand, to get in touch with Anonymous and lead online short interviews during the November 2015 momentum. On the other hand, the point was to understand, from a non-activist point of view, how people used Twitter at the same moment as a means to share indignation. Such a comprehensive methodology is to be compared with some observations and analysis concerning Twitter's official statements and initiatives regarding free speech, and are meant to help us understand the online social network's ambiguous position.

For the most part, the paper focuses on the direct aftermath of the November Paris attacks, but finally, the nine month length of the research gave us the benefit of insight regarding free speech through the lens of the process of indignation on Twitter. What seemed obvious in November 2015 did not look the same in August 2016. Our observation methodology and analysis were then influenced by time itself, which became another meaningful data. It enlightened the paper's *freed* speech main theory and provided new discoveries regarding Twitter uses.

^{††††††††††} Some online sources may not be available any more because of the unpredictable aspect of both Twitter and the Anonymous collective spheres. We noticed during the pre-submission process of the chapter that some of the Twitter accounts that are studied here were created during the November 2015 momentum and then shut down or left behind a few months later.

1. TWITTER: AN AMBIGUOUS SOCIAL NETWORK

1.1. Freedom of Expression on Twitter

Paris attacks stressed the role of Twitter as a gathering cyberspace where people rush into when they feel they have something to say that is worth sharing. The very structure of Twitter is meant to give everyone the opportunity to share ideas and debate in a very simple way. Such a social system is rooted in Web 2.0 ethics of freedom and springs from the Internet freedom of speech ideals^{††††††††††}. Every user can post whatever one wants as long as it does not imply “shocking” contents. The Twitter website contains an official document entitled “The Twitter Rules” that is supposed to define the boundaries of freedom of speech. It says:

We believe in freedom of expression and in speaking truth to power, but that means little as an underlying philosophy if voices are silenced because people are afraid to speak up. In order to ensure that people feel safe expressing diverse opinions and beliefs, we do not tolerate behavior that crosses the line into abuse, including behavior that harasses, intimidates, or uses fear to silence another user’s voice^{§§§§§§§§§§}.

It then categorizes seven different types of abuse: “Violent threats (direct or indirect)”; “Harassment”; “Hateful conduct”; “Multiple account abuse”; “Private information”; “Impersonation”; “Self-harm”. The website’s policies rely on these seven categories in order to define the actual *limits* of freedom of speech.

In the aftermath of the second wave of Paris attacks in November, Twitter obviously took part of the huge debate regarding the presence of terrorist communications on mainstream online social networks. As one of the two biggest social platforms worldwide at that time, along with Facebook, Twitter had to claim the biggest implication possible towards freedom of speech issues on a daily life basis. Its official page ‘@Safety,’ which aims at “helping you stay safe on Twitter”^{*****}, has been making such an implication obvious. The main official reaction from the website itself in the aftermath of the attacks took place on December 29th 2015, when its headquarters officially announced on @Safety that the “Twitter Rules” had been updated:



Figure 1^{††††††††††}. Twitter gets officially involved.

^{††††††††††} See for example Twitter’s front page saying “we believe in free expression and think every voice has the power to impact the world”, https://about.twitter.com/en_us/values.html (assessed October 1st 2018).
^{§§§§§§§§§§} Twitter. 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety>.
^{*****} Twitter. 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety>.
^{††††††††††} Twitter. 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety>.

The blue link below the text presented in Figure 1, leads to a text illustrating in details Twitter's point of view regarding freedom of speech at the time and explaining the content of the update. It says:

Today, as part of our continued efforts to combat abuse, we're updating the Twitter Rules to clarify what we consider to be abusive behavior and hateful conduct. The updated language emphasizes that Twitter will not tolerate behavior intended to harass, intimidate, or use fear to silence another user's voice. As always, we embrace and encourage diverse opinions and beliefs – but we will continue to take action on accounts that cross the line into abuse.

The update itself, emphasizing the restrictions within the “Hateful conduct” category, is an obvious response to the mainstream institutional press pressure that Twitter faced since the Paris attacks in November. The category appears the following way ever since:

Hateful conduct: You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories*****.

Back at the time of this update announcement, we noticed that neither the Paris attacks nor the presence of ISIS supporters on the network were mentioned on an official way. Even though we know that Twitter wanted to appear as a clearly committed website in regard of freedom of speech and online safety issues, no official page claimed any commitment related to identified terrorism issues until, as we will see, February 5th 2016. This update was officially announced one month and a half after the coordinated attacks in Paris – and almost a year after the Charlie Hebdo disaster – but it was not presented by Twitter as a direct consequence of these unfortunate events. Anyway, it *is* a clear response to the waves of criticism the website had to endure because of its seemingly lack of initiative in front of ISIS uses of the network between January and November 2015. But the question is, what does Twitter actually *did* – apart from a clearer but still vague definition of “a hateful conduct” – in order to prevent ISIS from spreading its message?

1.2. Twitter's Individual Empowerment Initiatives

To answer these complicated questions, Twitter did much more than a simple and minor update of its official rules. Two different strategies can be studied in order to understand Twitter's position during the year 2015. The first one is focused on the users themselves and on the way they used the network on an individual scale.

***** Twitter. 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://support.twitter.com/articles/18311>.

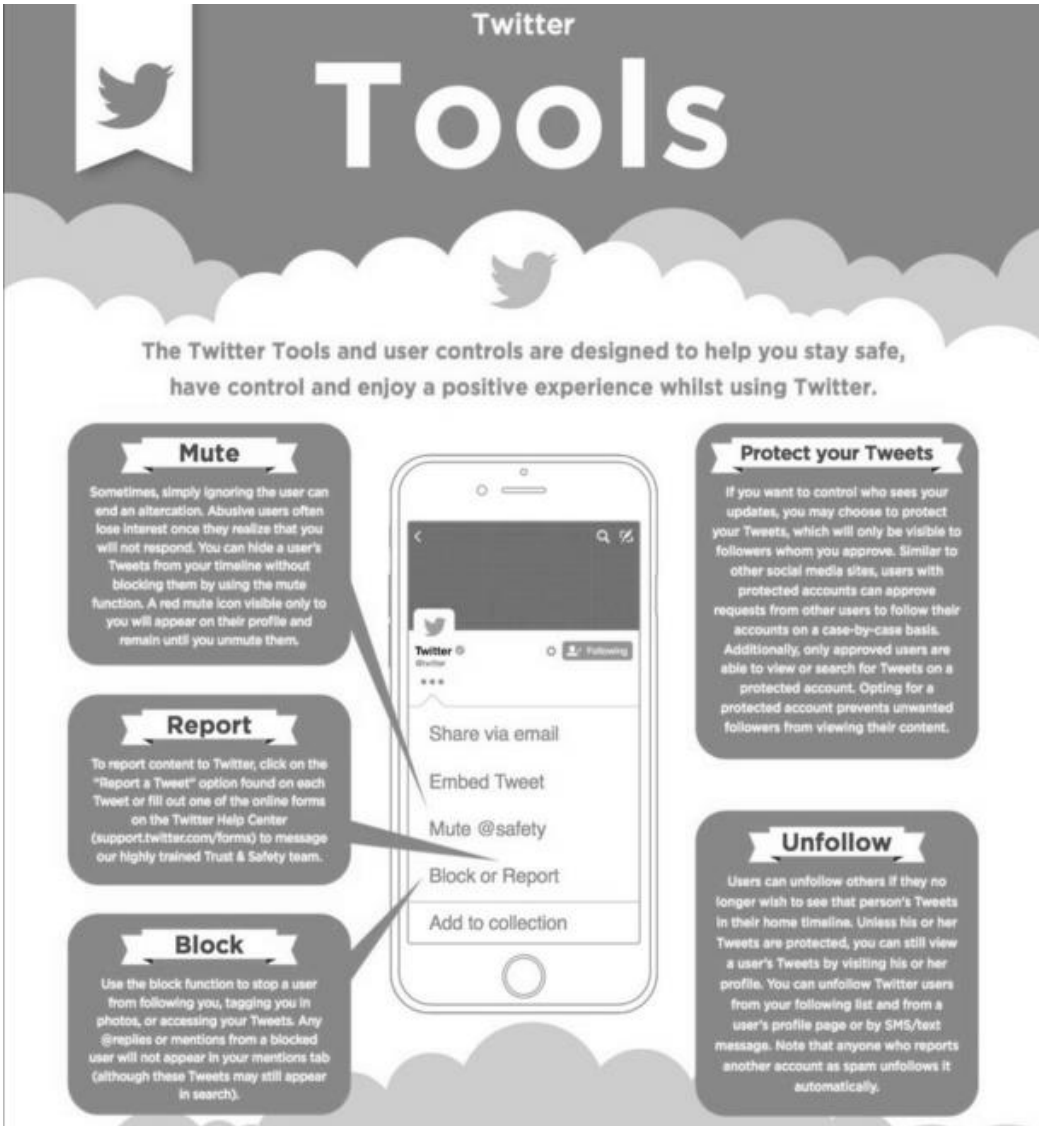


Figure 2. An official list of participative regulation tools of Twitter.

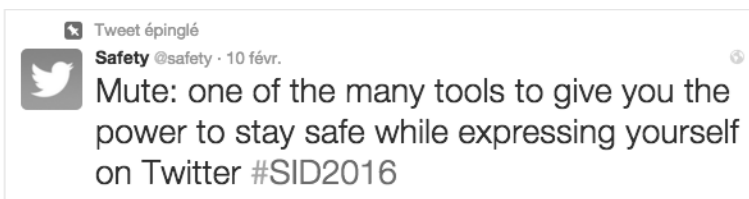


Figure 3. Twitter's users empowerment strategy.

Twitter. 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety>.

Twitter. 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://twitter.com/TwitterSafety>.

it clear that this type of behavior, or any violent threat, is not permitted on our service”*****. Here, we noticed that Twitter positioned itself differently: they assumed that ISIS had been using their network and that Twitter might not be as safe as they claimed despite the participative activism initiatives. Thus, the “combating violent extremism” document, clearly depicting Twitter’s core problem, aimed at recovering its former reputation after the huge waves of criticism referring to the network as “a primary tool for ISIS to spread its message and [that] can even be used to recruit new members” (Greenberg, 2015). It also aimed at showing Twitter’s actual commitment towards the struggle against the online spread of terrorism. The document quickly explains how Twitter, on a global scale, has been trying to lower the influence of ISIS on their network: “Since the middle of 2015 alone, we’ve suspended over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to ISIS”*****. It also relies on external institutions that have recognized Twitter’s commitment towards the struggle against ISIS, for example the FBI:

We cooperate with law enforcement entities when appropriate. In July 2015, FBI Director James Comey recognized Twitter’s commitment to blocking terrorist content, praising us as “very good and thoughtful and hardworking at trying to shut down [terrorism-related] accounts”*****.

In the end, we noticed that no official statement or online documents giving the scale of ISIS presence on Twitter were to be found among these tactics aiming at recovering Twitter’s worldwide legitimacy. Further researches showed us that such documents actually exist...

1.3. ISIS on Twitter and the Exploitation of Freedom of Expression

Before Twitter officially stated its concerns about terrorism, posting the “Combating violent extremism” document, the second wave of Paris attacks took place and badly shook public feeling of safety on Twitter. This is what terrorism is meant to do, even on the Internet. Twitter was pointed at because of its seemingly lack of concerns regarding the exploitation of social networks in a terrorist perspective as people among the Twitter community finally realized on a global scale that ISIS had been using mainstream social networks instead of some dark unknown corners of cyber-space.

Researches about ISIS presence on Twitter had been made before the events in Paris and proved that the terrorist group actually used the network to get organized. But since no one had drawn an obvious link between actual terrorism on the field and online statistics

***** Twitter. 2016, “Combating Extreme Violence” document, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism>.

***** Twitter. 2016, “Combating Extreme Violence” document, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism>.

***** Twitter. 2016, “Combating Extreme Violence” document, accessed March 1st 2016, <https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism>.

yet, it did not trigger any mainstream global debate, and Twitter's policies remained loose in regard of such growing problems. In March 2015, an analytic study based on empirical research entitled "The ISIS Twitter Census. Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter" was released. This study shows in very precise details the presence and influence of ISIS on Twitter. Though the statistics presented in the study are estimates, it gives a general scale of ISIS use of Twitter. It assumes that around 46,000 "ISIS overt supporter accounts" and around 90,000 accounts suspected to support ISIS could be found on Twitter between October 4th 2014 and November 27th 2014 (Berger and Morgan, 2015, 9). The statistics also demonstrate ISIS activity and influence on the network, with an average rate of 2,219 tweets per user "over the lifetime of the account" and an average rate of 1,004 followers per account (*op.cit*, 9). These activity data are based on a sample of 20,000 accounts "analyzed for demographics information" (*op.cit*, 9), 92,3% of which were supposed to be ISIS overt accounts.

Such statistics should have alarmed Twitter much earlier. We noticed that Twitter, back in the second half of 2014 (from September to January 2015), might not have been aware of the alarming amount of ISIS overt active accounts. Even though we know that Twitter led internal moderation campaigns against ISIS, they did not take officially part of the global free speech campaign that already set other big Silicon Valley companies on fire at the time. The study led by Berger and Morgan shows the scale of these internal moderation campaigns. They noted that only 790 accounts had been suspended between September and January, 678 of which were part of the "demographics information" sample (*op cit*, 9): "In short, the original network suffered only a 3.4 percent loss in membership between the first collection and January 2015" (*op cit*, 34). These figures show that even if Twitter's internal moderation teams had already begun to raise concerns about the situation, they might have underestimated its scale. The study shows that among the 20,000 accounts used for the sample, 11,902 had been created in 2014, 3388 of which within September only (*op cit*, 16). Not even Twitter itself could have predicted such an online demographic boom.

2. ANONYMOUS "TWEETS ITS WAY" AND GETS INVOLVED

2.1. Historical Background

The two waves of Paris attacks in 2015 resulted in huge debates around the questions of freedom of expression and security on the Internet. However, Twitter has played a key role and appears today as an archetypical illustration of the issues at stake. We saw that the social network, claiming official commitment to both free speech and the cyber battle against the spread of terrorism on its network, has actually given everyone the opportunity to get involved and *do* something on an individual scale. Such a process makes the platform a paramount online space where political issues are dealt with from both collective and

individual perspectives. Indeed, we regularly noticed throughout our research on the network – relying on participant observation methodologies – that users connect to Twitter in order to raise and share their political worries, interests, commitments or simply make remarks. Journalists – participative as well as institutionalized ones – often sign in and share their latest articles; politics and committed activists share their ideas and programs; artists share their latest news, etc. In the end, Twitter plays a key role as far as political commitment is concerned. Relying on the *freed* speech process, the online social network actually frames one’s desire to get politically involved and provides easy ways to stay tuned on a daily life basis. That was particularly obvious in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, especially from the perspective of the Anonymous collective.



Figure 4^{*****}. Anonymous’ official logo.

To try and make a long story short, the Anonymous collective was born on a North American image board called *4chan* around the year 2006. *4chan* relies on anonymity and each user appears the following way: “Anonymous” followed by a random number. One connects on the website in order to share images with sub groups set up in different categories. The famous Anonymous collective was born within the “/b/category”⁴: the random uncensored page where one can post whatever one wants. Among many childish jokes and thousands of unbearable images posted as a means to simply shock other users, some of those who connected to “/b/” began to know each other, though anonymously, and got organized. This is how the paramount *lulz* philosophy appeared. The word springs right from the Internet *geek* subculture and is derived from the word “lol” (Laugh Out Loud). Described by Gabriella Coleman as “a deviant style of humor and a quasi-mythical state of being” (Coleman, 2014, 2), the *lulz* is to be understood as a subcultural identity and an online way of life that implies doing bad jokes to the detriment of others: “Lulz of course meant fun

⁴***** Clubic, 2016, accessed March 1st 2016, <http://img.clubic.com/05334306-photo-anonymous.jpg>.

at someone else's expense, typically through embarrassment" (Olson, 2012, 33). One can legitimately wonder what such seemingly childish online jokes have to do with our research. But it represents the starting point from which some individuals from the Anonymous sphere finally got politically committed. Anonymous is to be understood as a loose, leaderless organization claiming a particular form of anarchy.

Some *Anons****** have always refused to see the whole thing as a serious matter, whereas other ones have finally exported the *lulz* subculture out of the *4chan* boundaries and made it a matter of political activism. It all started in 2008 when Anonymous declared war on the Church of Scientology***** and gave birth to the first Anonymous operation (Op.): 'Op.Chanology' (a mix of *4chan* and Scientology)*****. Anonymous has become a matter of commitment ever since. Those among the collective who believe in its anarchist, revolutionary and activist potential have been organizing operations keeping in mind the humorous philosophy of disturbance implied by the *lulz*. These operations can have a global scale like Op.Payback in 2010 against Paypal and Mastercard in the aftermath of the WikiLeaks scandal, or a local one with hundreds of smaller, decentralized operations organized all around the world since 2008. Most of the time, they rally on individuals identifying to the hacker subculture, for Anonymous is mostly known as one of the biggest hacker collective. But even though some clichés around Anonymous and the way it is received by the mainstream culture remain rooted, one must know that the collective is not *only* made of lonely skilled hackers isolated in a dark bedroom. In the aftermath of Op.Chanology, some of them got socialized out of *4chan*, others even hit the streets relying on older ways to protest and claim discontent.



Figure 5*****. An example of Anonymous' typical imagery.

***** The word *Anon* refers to members of the collective.

***** In the United States, the Scientology organization is seen as an actual religion, hence the use of the word "Church".

***** Anonymous' commitments always have the shape of official operations ever since, even though it might imply only a few individuals within the collective.

***** Blogpost, 2016, accessed on March 2nd 2016, http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-gX211dYS8OU/V1BY2KqpxwI/AAAAAAAAAb8/II_VYHa9Adg/s1600/anonymous-hacker-isis.png.

Anonymous inner ideals claim open-mindedness, even among hackers, and may assume many different shapes. Moreover, the collective illustrates the culture of mix inherited from the Web 2.0 ethics. The French Internet researchers Dominique Cardon and Fabien Granjon analyzed the phenomenon in terms of a “politicization of popular cultures” (Cardon, Granjon, 2013, 159)*****. One typical example is the use of Guy Fawkes mask (see Figure 5) as a definite proof of someone’s commitment to the Anonymous political cause and a distortion of Hollywood’s codes*****. This famous mask promotes a global sense of belonging among those who identify with the cause all over the world. Wearing the mask is a way to remain on sight, though anonymously, and to have oneself embody the collective’s ideas and ideals.

2.2. Inform and Protest: An Example of Participative Campaigning on Twitter

In this research, it is particularly interesting to observe the way Anonymous dealt with one of its main causes – freedom of expression on the Internet – in the aftermath of Paris attacks. Firstly, online freedom of speech has always been one of their main concerns. They have always *claimed* commitment towards the battle to protect free speech and have been leading communication campaigns to have people informed of their achievements. Indeed, apart from pure hacker methods – that represent the substance of the online protest –, what is paramount to understand is the way they manage to communicate outside of the movement. Paradoxically, Anonymous is not strictly restricted to hidden IRC networks*****, even though cyber manhunt have been occurring since the day they started to embrace civil disobedience and to disturb the established order – putting some major *Anons* in prison cells††††††††††††††††. Indeed, Anonymous have been using Twitter as its main communication platform and connection to the outside cyber-space. The collective informs the press and civil society of its projects and achievements, and thus manages to take part and weighs in public debates.

Even though Twitter is a seemingly mainstream device that lets very little freedom to digital dissent and online activities labeled as *illegal* by mainstream consensus, Anonymous made its way through the network and managed to make it its display window. Here again, Twitter’s structure remains very loose and its main gates are wide open in the name of freedom of expression. From November 2015 to August 2016, we have been leading daily researches on the network aimed at understanding what Anonymous’

***** Translated from the French sentence: “Politisisation des cultures populaires” (*Op. cit.*).

***** The mask’s imagery is derived from an English tradition called the “Gun Powder Plot”, that was exploited by Hollywood in the Warner Bros movie “V for Vendetta” produced in 2006.

***** Internet Relay Chat. IRC networks are the main chat devices used by the collective, along with the mainstream online social networks Facebook and Twitter.

††††† Many *Anons* have been arrested and trialed according to the American law restricting the uses of computers: the CFAA (Computer Fraud and Abuse Act).

presence on Twitter consists of. We opened an account called @AnonsResearchLab and used the participant observation sociological methods in order to try and get in touch with Anons. The account was created on November 1st 2015, only a few days before the Paris attacks. We did not know at that time the account was successfully put online that an imminent disaster was about to set Anonymous on fire and enlighten our problematic. The very first thing that we noticed was the huge amount of overt accounts claiming belongings to the collective, and the obvious and palpable sense of excitement and anger in most of Anonymous overt accounts that were visited in the aftermath of the attacks (see Figure 6).

During the second part of November 2015, Anonymous drove into a corner the very notion of freedom of expression and showed the full potential of the participative structure of Web 2.0. Huge waves of participative energy and solidarity flooded the network as the process of indignation made its way through the Anonymous accounts. Inside this heated atmosphere, the collective had a double impact on the community that illustrates its two main commitments, relying on free speech: inform and protest.



Figure 6*****. An example of Anonymous' rhetorical tweet during the November momentum.

As a leaderless decentralized organization, Anonymous played the role of an informative rallying point on Twitter in the direct aftermath of the attacks. The collective's activities illustrated most of the typical uses of Twitter. One could find mixed feelings of solidarity, anger, sadness and a fierce desire of revenge behind the online masks. Some famous Anonymous accounts like @AnonymousPress and its more than 350,000 followers or @YourAnonCentral assumed their usual roles of unofficial journalists covering the news and informing the Twitter network. Other accounts like @AnonymousIA or @Discordian aimed at having its followers think and put things into perspective through online polls and debates, whereas many other accounts informed the others of what they knew and thought on a daily life basis. Some overt accounts like @AnonymousIA remained very active on the network, so that Anonymous appeared on the front of the collective cyber battle in favor of free speech and against ISIS.

Here, Twitter is to be understood as the collective's main informative board. Thus, the collective managed to exist from a mainstream perspective out of its subcultural cyber corners and achieved what Gabriella Coleman calls its "primary goal" (Coleman, 2014, 182), which is to "gain publicity for their causes" (*Ibid*). The collective has been using Twitter as a way to have the mainstream press share their latest achievements. Informing the informers by tweeting

***** Twitter, 2016, accessed November 20th 2015, <https://twitter.com/AnonymousIntelA>.

links has been assuring the collective that its online attacks and cyber protests would get to mainstream knowledge, get heard and would not stay ignored. The whole process rests on a triangular relationship between the Anonymous collective, institutional press and freedom of expression. In the aftermath of Paris attacks, this relationship was paramount and illustrated the process of *freed* speech through the eyes of the collective. At the beginning of 2015, Anonymous launched Op.ISIS only a few days after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, followed a few months later in November 13th by Op.Paris. Anonymous declared war on ISIS, sticking to its usual provocative “*lulzy*” rhetoric and imagery:



Figure 7*****. An example of *lulzy* imagery related to Op.Paris and Op.ISIS.

Whereas Op.ISIS was already active during the first months of 2015, it got much bigger in the aftermath of the second wave of attacks in mid-November when Op.Paris was launched. Their main objective was to prevent ISIS from getting organized online, and to shut down its main communication tools so that it could no longer spread its message. Op.ISIS meant using freedom of expression as a weapon against terrorism and getting organized in order to publish lists of ISIS overt websites and Twitter accounts, and shut them down (Figure 5) – using the key words *Tango Down* –thus help the seemingly overcharged and ineffective official teams of Twitter moderators.

Both the core strategy behind these operations and the reason why the mainstream press got involved are to be found in the participative structure of Web 2.0. The essence of online freedom of expression is to be found in this notion. Anonymous has always managed to mix together participative social systems and elitist hacker subcultures and created a new kind of online protest. Op.ISIS and Op.Paris are clear examples of the concept of *participative hacktivism* that gives anyone who strongly wishes to get committed to the Anonymous cause the opportunity to get involved, whatever their hacking and computer

***** Anonymous France, 2016, accessed March 3rd 2016, <http://www.Anonymous-france.eu/IMG/affiches/daesh/anonymous-france-fuck-daesh.jpg>.

kills. Even though many hardcore subcultural hackers never acknowledged such practices, Anonymous' hive mind and main achievements to the eyes of the mainstream definitely spring from this notion rooted in the Internet amateur culture. In the aftermath of Paris attacks, Anonymous embraced once again its beloved participative strategy in order to gather as many people as possible online and thus to ensure that the mainstream press would get involved and cover the movement's achievements. They tweeted open source instructions so that any interested Internet user could *do* something, giving this way a much wider impact to the notion of cyber gathering:



Figure 8. Anonymous' participative hacktivism initiative.

Here is the essence of the leaderless collective. These instructions were classified within three categories explaining what to do and how under the Op.ISIS and Op.Paris banners: The “Noob guide” explained the basis of hacking. The “Searcher guide” explained how to find overt ISIS websites on the Internet. Finally, the “Reporter Guide” explained how to install a bot on a Twitter account meant to automatically trace down ISIS suspected accounts all over the network. The third guide is particularly interesting in the present study, for it made Twitter a definite participative tool meant to bring the online battle against terrorism on mainstream cyber spaces. Indeed, thanks to major Anonymous related accounts like @OpIcelISIS or @TeamDestroyISIS claiming official operation status and hundreds of overt Anonymous accounts dedicated to the operations' cause; the collective as a whole managed to actually *do* something and got involved along with Twitter's official moderators:

We noticed at the time that these statistics presented in Figure 9 were not bound to the few “official” Op.ISIS accounts. Once the statistics were known, many smaller accounts actually reported the news themselves through the “re-tweet” function mainly – as the sense of belonging between old-timer *Anons* and new comers strengthened within the Twitter community.

Twitter, 2016, accessed March 3rd 2016, <https://twitter.com/OpIcelISIS>.

Ghostbin, 2016, accessed March 3rd 2016, <https://ghostbin.com/paste/jrr89>.

Ghostbin, 2016, accessed March 3rd 2016, <https://ghostbin.com/paste/uhbxh>.

Ghostbin, 2016, accessed March 3rd 2016, <https://ghostbin.com/paste/vt5zz>.

Though the collective claims its leaderless structure, one can observe here unofficial forms of hierarchy based on what the hacker subculture calls “do-ocracy”. Indeed, those who happen to be the most active hackers necessarily become unofficial leaders to the eyes of the less experienced followers. The same meritocratic hierarchy can be noticed among the Anonymous users on Twitter.

out of this situation, necessarily focused on Twitter. Let us analyze the example of Gregg Housh, one of the very few openly identified old-timer *Anon* speaking in an interview for the *Washington Post* led by Callum Borchers on November 28th 2015. The journalist asks him the reasons why Anonymous has been focusing on shutting down ISIS accounts on Twitter. He answers:

Do you know how hard it is to get followers on Twitter? They keep having to reintroduce new accounts. I think shutting down their channels to talk to impressionable youth around the world is a smart move. It definitely creates more work for them. If just a few kids don't get caught up, I'd be happy (Borchers, 2015).

Such a point of view demonstrates Anonymous' ambiguous involvement in the global struggle against the online spread of ISIS. The whole thing actually depends on one's point of view. Nevertheless, the criticism that Anonymous had to face is not limited to its potential lack of concern regarding the Intelligence agencies' work. People among the mainstream press system who had followed the operation from the beginning in January 2015 also targeted Op.ISIS as a whole and questioned its actual efficiency. The French newspaper *Le Monde* was one of them. Martin Untersinger revealed in an article (Untersinger, 2015) that one of the main lists of ISIS related Twitter accounts published by Anonymous in November was in fact a copy of the list Op.ISIS had already published in March 2015. Such news – revealing someone's attempts to gain publicity for the whole collective by declaring what we call today “fake news” – aimed at moderating the growing excitement around Anonymous on Twitter and among the mainstream press and illustrates another way of the limits of a decentralized open collective. Today, it shows us that the notion of freedom of speech through the lens of social protests and Twitter definitely depends on one's definition of it. Indeed, it can be a matter of either unity or division among online communities.

2.4. The Notion of Commitment

As online participative platforms and *freed* speech devices like Twitter enhance freedom of speech and let the process of indignation flow through online communities, the question of identity becomes paramount on both individual and collective scale. What does freedom of speech on Twitter mean apart from giving the users the opportunity to express themselves and defend a cause? From an individual perspective, it leads to the question of one's commitment. The social and political heated atmosphere in the aftermath of Paris attacks encouraged many people to get involved on their own and do something in the name of solidarity. As far as Anonymous is concerned, some people read news about

Anonymous' Op.ISIS and Op.Paris and thought it was a proper way to actually try and achieve something on a collective scale. Even though we can wonder about the actual efficiency of Op.ISIS' results, it definitely succeeded in two main goals: gathering people and keeping the collective open to external unskilled support. Here again, people could connect and manage to *do* something on Twitter. But to do so, they had to get individually committed. The notion of commitment is very ambiguous here but remains paramount to understand the individual process of indignation that Twitter allows. Indeed, the question is: why did people get committed to the cause? Online commitment results from the Web 2.0 ethics of freedom and is made seemingly easy to achieve. The November solidarity momentum went further as it made commitment a natural thing to do online.

During our participant observation research on Twitter, one *Anon* happened to be particularly talkative and interested in helping us deal with Anonymous and the question of commitment from a scholar perspective^{*****}. He^{*****} ran an account called @AnonymousIA that happened to be very active in November and December 2015. We had two long private chats on Twitter on November 6th 2015 and November 9th 2015. Even though we noticed that he scarcely talked about himself during these conversations, he depicted his own implication in the collective as a “firewall for the collective mind”, his account aiming at “making people stop and think”. In regard of the relationship between freedom of expression and Anonymous' commitment and identity, he said:

In defending those rights of freedom of expression, free from those pulling the strings, my commitment is never ending. As for my vision, it will simply be shared for debate through comments and video. It will be for each Anon to choose whether it is for them or not.

@AnonymousIA used Twitter in order to provide meaning to the collective as a whole. Whereas many other *Anons* act like warriors on the cyber battlefield or like journalists, he stepped back and shared his thoughts and analysis as some kind of an Anonymous philosopher. We noticed that very few *Anons* claimed such a position on Twitter. As we talked, the question of commitment was dealt with as the leaderless aspects of the collective repeatedly came back to his mind:

I would say that [Anonymous] is a mechanism to manipulate people. Sure, some people buy into it, but their personal experience has little to do with the objective view of those pulling the strings. Take Op.KKK or Op.ISIS, who is pulling the strings here? It may be good in principle to be a heroic vigilante, but when this is scaled up, we end up with

***** Our research methodology on the field of cyber-space relies on Jean Claude Kaufmann's and Bernard Lahire's sociological theories regarding interviews (Kaufmann, 2011) and sociological research through the lens of plural, moving and interactive identities (Lahire, 2005).

***** The use of a masculine here is purely arbitrary, for we didn't actually know @AnonymousIA's gender. Asking this *Anon* his true gender did not seem a relevant thing to do during our interviews, since Anonymous focuses on one's ideas to the detriment of one's singularity.

totalitarianism. In this respect, it is less of a social movement and more of a weapon composed of the gullible.

As he stepped back and put into question the leaderless aspect of the collective, our conversation problematized one's commitment towards the general cause. Then, the question is: *why* did external people choose to get committed to Anonymous during Op.ISIS? Analyzing external commitments as "the gullible" who may hope to find one's moment of glory becoming online "heroic vigilante", @AnonymousIA showed us that freedom of speech within online civil society communication systems is not *only* a matter of solidarity on a collective scale. Here, we can draw a parallel with Evgeny Morozov's notion of "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2009). The author depicts a particular kind of online activism practices focused on individualism and self-staging. This sociological point leads to the distortion of freedom of speech codes and ethics in an egocentric perspective.

As far as Anonymous and Twitter in the aftermath of Paris attacks are concerned, slacktivism was actually part of the whole process. It made the decentralized aspect of Anonymous both its strength and weakness, and illustrated the inner ambiguities of freedom of speech issues. During the November momentum, some users exploited Twitter's *freed* speech devices as a means to boast their individual commitment to something big. Anonymous became some kind of a participative banner through which anyone feeling the growing sense of general belonging could claim anything on anonymous tweets, whatever the collective coherence of the whole process. In most of the Anonymous related Twitter accounts that we followed, there was a heated atmosphere of massive daily-life communication as hundreds of tweets flooded @Op.ISIS and @Op.Paris. Nevertheless, only a few of these accounts, like the well-known hacker crew *GhostSecurity******, seemed to *lead* actual moderation campaigns, whereas many others kept communicating about it.

Thus, our research implies a sociological distinction between Anonymous committed users who actually *did* something in the name of Op.ISIS and Op.Paris and other Anonymous committed users who *said* – or rather *tweeted* – that the collective, as a matter of fact including themselves, had done something. Thus, as Anonymous and Twitter allow anybody to say "I am Anonymous", to claim one's belonging to the collective and to embody the cause through collectively identified tweets, the very notion of commitment is rooted on the dual goals of the movement, namely to inform and protest. The resulting identity rests on both communication and action initiatives, but necessarily at the same time. During the November momentum, some very active accounts were keen on tweeting news about what other ones did and achieved in the shade of social networks, without necessarily doing it themselves; hence our study of Twitter as the perfect interactive illustration, on the mainstream field of global free speech, of Anonymous identity's inner ambiguities and discrepancies.

***** Ghostbin, 2016, accessed March 4th 2016, <http://ghostsecuritygroup.com/>

CONCLUSION

From *Freed* Speech to Standard Indignation

Many disasters related to terrorism happened between January 2015 and August 2016 in the world. The aftermath of January and November Paris attacks were more attacks making the question of free speech a matter of endless global debates caught in a cycle of perpetual online indignation. Our digitalized era has to make up with a growing, institutionalized fear of terrorism while our occidental civil societies find themselves caught in an ambiguous online vicious circle in which terror, indignation, activism and leisure are mixed up in the same free speech communication platform. In the end, we can see *Pokemon Go* Hunters, activist's awareness campaigns, food recipes, fascist messages and cats photographs all mixed together on a single news feed page on Twitter and Facebook... This research gave us a glimpse of what the process of *freed* speech implies: people grieve on the Web and have fun at the same time as Web 2.0 gives the users the opportunity to switch from one feeling to another in no time. Indignation and solidarity have become online habits on mainstream ergonomic platforms keen on making standardization and easy-access their ultimate priority. When the French city Nice was attacked on July 14th 2016, the process of indignation that took place on Twitter and Facebook happened to be similar to the aftermath of the Paris attacks. Only one element differed: its duration. Messages like "Pray for Nice" or "I am Nice" were posted hundreds of times, but indignation and solidarity seemed to fade away much faster. Sharing one's feeling in the aftermath of such horror has become an online norm based on freedom of speech, but the notion of commitment that is supposed to spring from these waves of solidarity and indignation was much less visible on Twitter by the end of July 2016 – right in the middle of the French summer vacations...

Our nine months research focused on the processes implied by freedom of speech in our social and political heated context, which necessarily led us to the final notion of *standard indignation*. How many French people "prayed for Nice" on vacation using standardized tool simplifying massive solidarity, sharing at the same time both their "grief" and photographs of themselves lying on the beach? This is another reality related to free speech in our societies. We have the opportunity to get involved in huge solidarity momentum, thanks to social platforms like Twitter making it an easy thing to do. But here again, what does it mean on an individual scale? Apart from incredible waves of online solidarity noticed from global scales through Twitter, free speech becomes *freed* speech anytime one tweets one's immediate grief, anger, indignation or solidarity without necessarily going further. The resulting process is the *standardization of indignation*, mixed up with hundreds of different every day life habits on online social networks. Thus, getting outraged and becoming a committed activist seem like an easy thing to achieve on Twitter, even a pleasant thing to do as far as one sticks to its standardized structure and

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Innocent Chiluya

Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

Prof. Innocent Chiluya is Professor of Language (discourse analysis) and Media/Digital Communications in the Department of Languages & General Studies, Covenant University, OTA, (Nigeria). He also serves as Dean, College of Leadership Development Studies (CLDS). He is a Research Fellow and Digital Expert of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) (Bonn), and a visiting Professor in the Department of English, University of Freiburg, Germany. His research interests are discourse analysis and conflict studies; social movement studies; social media and society; cyber civic engagement, online activism, terrorism and political violence; online deceptive communications, particularly those associated with phishing, email scams and misinformation. Prof. Chiluya has published books and edited volumes in media studies, social media and society, conflict studies and deception studies and published extensively in reputable peer-reviewed journals. He has also contributed several chapters in books and encyclopedia. He has attended and presented papers at professional/academic conferences around the world. Email: innocent.chiluya@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Dr. Gwen Bouvier

Maynooth University, Co. Kildare, Ireland

Dr. Gwen Bouvier is Assistant Professor at Maynooth University and researches on social media, news, social semiotics and Critical Discourse Studies. She is Associate Editor of the journal *Social Semiotics* and Review Editor of the *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*. Her latest publications include Bouvier, G. (2019) 'How Journalists Source Trending Social Media Feeds: A Critical Discourse Perspective on Twitter', *Journalism Studies*, 20(2): 212-231; Bouvier, G. and Machin, D. (2018) 'Critical Discourse Analysis and the Challenge of Social Media: The Case of News Texts', *Review of Communication*,

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special issue CDS and/in Communication, 18(3): 178-192; and Bouvier, G. (ed) (2016) *Discourse and Social Media*, London: Routledge. Email: Gwen.Bouvier@mu.ie; gwen.bouvier@gmail.com.

Prof. Le Cheng, Wei Shaoxiang Chair Professor, is a concurrent professor of legal discourse and translation, and professor of law at Zhejiang University. He also serves as the Director of the Institute of Cross-cultural and Regional Studies, of the Center for Legal Discourse and Translation, and of the Center for Contemporary Chinese Studies at Zhejiang University. He is Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Legal Discourse* (De Gruyter), and Editor of the *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (Springer). His research interests and publications are in the areas of discourse studies, semiotics, terminology and legal translation. Address for correspondence: School of International Studies, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, 310058, China. Email: chengle163@hotmail.com

Prof. Dr. Katharine Sarikakis is Professor of Communication Science with specialization in Media Governance, Media Organisation and Media Industries at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna. She leads the Media Governance and Industries Research Lab, which aims to research and analyze issues, contexts, actors and impacts of media and cultural governance and their underexplored interconnections to citizenship, autonomy and control as they are articulated in the shapes of media landscapes and the relation of citizens-at-large to dimensions of interlocution.

Katharine is the founding and twice elected Chair of the Communication Law and Policy Section of the European Communication Research and Education Association. She is currently an elected member to the ECREA Executive Board. Katharine is also an elected Member of the International Council of IAMCR. She is the Co-Editor of the *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*. Email: katharine.sarikakis@univie.ac.at

Dr. Helia Asgari conducted her PhD research on the subfield of “governance from below” at the University of Vienna. Specifically, she explored citizens' strategies and forms of controlling communicative environments in zones of crisis, with the specific case of Iran. Her interests concern the area of media governance, public sphere and social movements in Middle East. Helia has worked as an artistic director and media educator by Children United Dreams, an institute for media literacy and media education. Also, she worked as a Document film researcher, director, Editor and photographer. She has attended and presented in summits and conferences and work on democracy, social movements and women's issues in Middle East especially on her case study Iran.

Dr. Pietro Luigi Iaia is Adjunct Professor and Researcher of English Linguistics and Translation at the University of Salento (Italy). He holds a Ph.D. in English Linguistics

applied to Translation Studies from the same University. His research interests focus on the cognitive-semantic, pragmatic and socio-cultural dimensions of multimodal translation, on ELF variations in cross-cultural audiovisual discourse and computer-mediated communication, and on multimodal strategies of scientific popularization. His publications include: *Analysing English as a Lingua Franca in Video Games* (Peter Lang), *The Dubbing Translation of Humorous Audiovisual Texts* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing), and “Linguistic and Extralinguistic Strategies of Hybridization, Simplification and Reformulation in English and Italian Multimodal Popularized Discourse” (in *ESP across Cultures* 14). Email: pietroluigi.iaia@unisalento.it

Dr. Tedla Desta has an interdisciplinary research and teaching background including international development, journalism, sociology and human rights. He completed his PhD in Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Ireland in 2015, researching the communications, conflict and peace nexus from a multidisciplinary perspective. He lectured and was a researcher in Trinity College Dublin and Maynooth University, Ireland, Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Pretoria, South Africa, and Queen's University, Canada. Email: tedla.desta@mu.ie

Shushu Li is a PhD Candidate in Children’s Literature at the University of Glasgow, School of Education. She obtained her Master’s Degree in Comparative Literature from the University College London (UCL). She is a member of International Research Society for Children’s Literature and British Fantasy Society. Her article about humanity and young adult in Dystopian literature was published in the *British Fantasy Society Journal* in 2018. She is also an academic translator, her translated articles were published in academic journals of different disciplines such as in South Asian Studies, Economic Geography, Global Law Review, and Ethno-National Studies. Email: 2318831L@student.gla.ac.uk

Christa L. Jennings completed her Master of Arts in Professional Communication from Purdue University in May 2019. Her research interests in social media are in the areas of politics, social identity, and culture. Prior to her study at Purdue, Christa enjoyed a career in marketing and branding in her home city of Tacoma, WA. She is the proud mother of a precocious 9-year old daughter whose imagination keeps her inspired. Email: jennc01@pfw.edu.

Isioma Maureen Chiluwa is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English studies, University of Port Harcourt, and an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Languages and General Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria. Her research interests include multimodal discourse analysis, online civil engagement, social media and political activism. Email: isioma.chiluwa@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Olaniyi Trust Ayodele is an Assistant Lecturer and PhD candidate with the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University. His research interests are ICT policy, digital activism and social movement studies. Email: olaniyi.ayodele@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Dr. Paromita Pain is an Assistant Professor of Global Media Studies at the University of Reno, Nevada. Her research focuses on alternate media and global journalism practices from feminist perspectives. Before receiving her Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Austin, she was a journalist with The Hindu Newspaper, India's most respected broadsheet. Interested in epistemological concerns raised by emerging forms of media that are hybrids between old and new forms, between citizen and professional news practices, she has published various book chapters on the intersection of gender and social media besides looking into areas of online commenting and uncivil behavior and its impact on journalistic practices. Email: paromita.pain@gmail.com

Dr. Çiğdem Erdal is currently working as an Assistant Professor at Harran University, Department of Cinema-Television, Şanlıurfa Province of Turkey. After working as a translator, journalist and page editor for newspapers for many years, she went into academy to use her skills in academic production and teaching. With this aim she earned her master's and doctorate degrees in television studies. Her research interests are television audience, political economy of internet and the audience transformation in digital era. She is also carrying out duties as the vice Head of the Department of Cinema-Television at Harran University, as well as teaching undergrads photography. Email: cigdem.erdal@outlook.com

Dr. Floribert Patrick C. Endong is a research consultant in the humanities and social sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria. He is a reviewer and editor with many scientific journals in the social sciences. His current research interest focuses on advertising, cinema and globalization, international communication, gender studies, digital media, media laws, international relations, culture and religious communication. He is author of more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters in the above-mentioned areas of interest. He recently edited a collection titled *Exploring the Role of Social Media in Transnational Advocacy* published in March 2018 by IGI Global (Hersey: USA). Email: floribertendong@yahoo.com

Allen Munoriyarwa is a PhD candidate in the Department of Journalism, Film & Television, at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He is also an Assistant Lecturer in the same Department. His research interests are in peace journalism, conflict communication, new media and politics technology and state surveillance. Email: allenmunoriyarwa@gmail.com

Dr. Mustafa Cem OGUZ is Assistant Professor of politics at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University/Turkey. He received his BA and MA degree from Hacettepe University and Ph.D from Ankara University. His academic interests focus on history of political thoughts and comparative politics, especially with respect to the issues of authoritarian regimes. Email: oguzmustafacem@gmail.com

Dr. Özhan Demirkol is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. He is the co-editor of *Party Politics in Turkey: A Comparative Perspective* (Routledge, 2018). His articles appeared in *Turkish Studies* and *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. His research interests include party politics, party finance, political communication and Turkish politics.

Sebastien Moutte is a doctoral candidate in sociology and communication in Montpellier, France. He also teaches communication and sociology in Montpellier and Toulouse Universities. His Department is University of Montpellier III Paul Valery, TTSD, LERSEM Laboratory. His research interests include digital activism, whistleblowing, subcultures, and alternative media. Email: sebastienmoutte@gmail.com.

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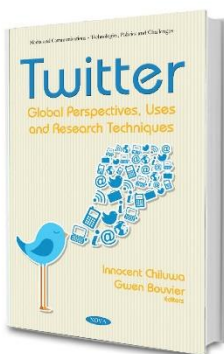
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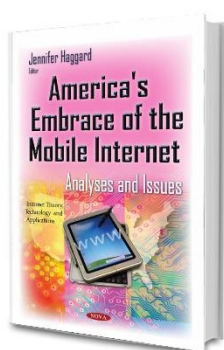
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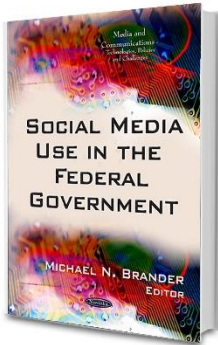
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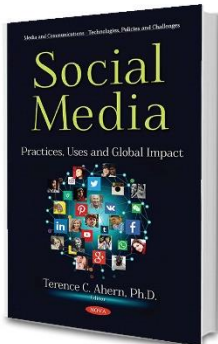
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