Black Lives Matter Toronto:

A Qualitative Study of Twitter's Localized Social Discourse on Systemic Racism

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Abstract

This Major Research Paper examines the Twitter discourse of Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO), a chapter of the Black Lives Matter Movement which addresses issues of racism and police brutality. BLMTO protested in front of police headquarters between April 1st and April 15th, 2016 and used Twitter to document their protest during this time. This paper provides a content and sentiment analysis of 346 tweets collected during this time frame. The analysis of the Twitter content is based on concepts drawn from the scholarly literature on the public sphere, identity and social identity, and framing theory. My findings indicate the following:

1. Black Lives Matter Toronto uses media framing techniques, as well as logical and moral appeals, to build credibility as a strong subaltern counterpublic, an information resource for community building and an influencer online, through sharing relevant statistics, news stories and persuasive rhetoric.

2. BLMTO incorporates calls to action to create publicity and facilitate community mobilization.

3. Key themes in the tweets include the exercise of power in society, the need to build community and create a common sense of right and wrong, and maintaining solidarity.

Keywords: organization; protest; community; gathering; support; solidarity; content analysis

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Dedication

I would also like to thank mypastors for their prayers and support. They always stood beside me through good and trying times. Every day, they encourage me to never give up, have faith and press towards the prize. I would not be where I am today without them. I am also dedicating this paper to my parents, who continue to show me an amazing example and to inspire me to be the best person I can be. Last, but certainly never least; I would like to thank my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is through His grace, wisdom and strength that I can succeed. I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me.

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Introduction

This Major Research Paper (MRP) investigates Twitter social discourse [1] of black experiences in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), by examining the communications of Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO) and those who interact with them. Within this paper, I will study the extent of communications online, how power and identity influence the nature of the discussion and the narratives evoked. This study was inspired by "Black Twitter," a term commonly associated with a group of American black Twitter users who discuss issues of race, fashion, comedy, equality, identity and social justice. Academic researchers such as Sharma (2013) and Lewis (2014) have highlighted important trends and characteristics of Black Twitter.[2] Previous research has focused on the American context of Black Twitter. However, the online conversation has begun to evolve. Since 2012, Black Twitter has highlighted incidents involving police brutality towards black people and racial inequalities that black people face. A collection of such tweets has been shared with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter. In response to the growing online discussions, the activist group Black Lives Matter was formed in 2013 to bring these issues to the public's attention and advocate for change (Robinson, 2015). They have organized numerous protests, and communicated their concerns to news organizations and engaged politicians. This group has a large presence online, with numerous Twitter accounts created with the name "Black Lives Matter" attached to chapters in various cities. These Black Lives Matter Twitter accounts document issues

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[1] Discourse, per Foucault, is ongoing communication that fuels the structure of knowledge, ways of thinking and meaning (Weedon, 1996). Nicki Lisa Cole (2015) describes as communications that impact the way we live, believe, identity and behave. Media, education, law and politics can influence dominant discourses, as well as knowledge and power, as discourse and be introduced by, impeded or shaped by these frameworks.

[2] To avoid confusion between the collective group "Black Twitter" and references to general Twitter activity by black people, the latter meaning will be defined as "black Twitter," with a lowercase "b" in the word "black," in the remainder of this paper.

of race and identity, share community work, and express sentiments[3] regarding specific events and about meanings associated with the hashtag (Votaw, 2015).

This qualitative study will analyze communications of the Twitter account Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLMTO),[4] focusing on shared experiences and/or sentiments[5] of Canadian people engaging with this Twitter account. The local chapter, BLMTO, was founded in 2014 (Battersby, 2016). Since then, it has garnered significant attention by Canadian news outlets, as recent protests and tweets have highlighted instances of racism and police violence towards black people within Canada. While black social justice issues are becoming prominent discussion topics in Canadian society, few studies of Black Twitter attend to the Canadian context. This paper will attempt to address this gap.

This research paper analyzes the activity of BLMTO between April 1st and April 15th, 2016. During this time, BLMTO protested the deaths of Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby, both of whom were fatally shot by Toronto police officers on separate occasions. BLMTO's main campaign at that time was the protest #BLMTOtentcity, during which protesters camped and campaigned outside of police headquarters. In response to the decision not to charge the officers responsible for Andrew Loku's death, this protest called for an end to the police practice of carding, an overhaul of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and a release of the reports surrounding the deaths of the victims mentioned above (Canada Newswire, 2016).

Drawing from theories of the public sphere, theories of identity and framing theory, this study develops a coding scheme for textual and sentiment analysis of approximately 300 tweets

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[3] Sentiments are defined as
[4] Black Lives Matter Toronto may also be referred to as "BLMTO" within this paper.

collected between April 1st and April 15th, 2016. The dataset includes original tweets[6] and retweets[7] from the Twitter account Black Lives Matter TO, as well as mentions[8] from other Twitter users and replies[9] from the BLMTO account. With respect to activities implemented in response to those deaths, research questions to be investigated are as follows:

1. To what extent is Twitter being used by Black Lives Matter supporters as a collective identity building practice?

2. What narratives are being expressed by Black Lives Matter Toronto and those interacting with them through Twitter?

3. What sentiments were expressed on Twitter towards Black Lives Matter Toronto from April 1st to April 15th?

Literature Review

Scholarly work on the Public Sphere

Habermas' (1989) theory of the public sphere explores the convergence of information, communication and media and how they continuously shape, create and maintain social power. The public sphere is defined as "A conceptual network of communicative spaces in which citizens come together, hold a plurality of ideas, resolve disputes, raise and discuss issues they see as

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[6] Original tweets may also be labelled as "OT."

[7] Retweets are tweets from other Twitter accounts that are shared and reposted by other Twitter users. These posts can be publicly viewed on both Twitter accounts.

[8] Mentions from other Twitter users include a direct mention of Black Lives Matter Toronto through tagging their Twitter "handle" or username (in this case, @BLM_TO,) and adding text, video or pictures to communicate their message.

[9] Mentions from the Black Lives Matter Toronto Twitter account will be noted as replies.

relevant and important, and critique the state" (Habermas, 1989, p. 176). Ideally, these communicative spaces function as mediating and governing bodies in society, making the state accountable to society through publicity. With the emergence of this communicative space, private individuals can come together as a collective to freely exchange information, debate, and critique and discuss state activities. At the heart of these discussions is critical-rational discourse which refers to "discursive action through which progress [is made] toward emancipation from unwarranted social control" (Hansen et. al., 2009, p. 38). As media corporations, government and other institutions control the flow and framing of information and technology, an important question for Habermas and his followers is the degree to which citizens can participate in forms of public deliberation which address complex social issues and establish discourse based on facts, a free exchange of diverse perspectives, and rationality.

While this theory is a significant contribution to scholarly understandings of the role of communication in democratic governance, there were limitations identified within the public sphere. For instance, the only people eligible to participate in the ideal public sphere were typically white male members of the bourgeoisie – free citizens owning business and property. People who did not meet those criteria were denied access to participation. Fraser (1990) introduces levels of open access and participatory parity within and outside of the ideal public sphere. She asserts that minorities need to organize and maintain their own public spheres, or *subaltern counterpublics*, to facilitate social discourse relevant to their own needs and experiences. These subaltern counterpublics extend beyond critical-rational discourse to discuss problems of identity in, for example, the literary public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Fraser asserts that multiple publics must exist simultaneously and facilitate quality intrapublic discursive interaction. Minority groups come together to form subaltern counterpublics, which permit them to form "oppositional interpretations

of their identities, interests and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 68). These groups can discuss issues that relate to the common good or something of concern to the participants of the subaltern counterpublic. While normally political and sociocultural spheres are treated as separated entities, BLMTO uses their identity discourse to promote an agenda for social change by influencing politicians and other institutional authorities.

More recent scholarly work on the public sphere helps to highlight the significance of black Twitter. Squire (2002) notes that like the bourgeois public sphere described in the writings of Habermas, the black community also had physical public spheres for dialogue. During the 20th century, during the Jim Crow era,[10] black press, music and churches created spaces for dialogue within the black public sphere. "It is within these institutions that conversations about black publicity, rights, and interests take place and are transformed into strategies to counter the oppression of White supremacist rule" (Squire, 2002, 451). However, following the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the dismantling of the Jim Crow regime, black discourse became fragmented. There were no cohesive emancipation goals, no major leaders and influencers driving communication[11], and no space for dialogue addressing the needs of black working class people, feminists and LGBT people. In addition, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements faced state

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[10] Jim Crow laws were enacted following the decriminalization of slavery and the civil war in the United States. These laws primarily segregated black people and white people in the southern or formerly Confederate (and border) states of America. Everything from drinking fountains to places of business had to be labelled "whites only," "blacks only" and have a strictly segregated system and practices for each group to follow. These laws governed interracial actions and exchanges, and cultural behaviours and practices, as well as firmly established the dominant and subordinate members of society (Pilgrim, 2012). Although Canada did not explicitly have the same segregation laws, segregation and similar oppressive practices were still enforced until the 1980s (Historica Canada, 2016).

[11] Following the deaths of Malcolm X in 1965 and Martin Luther King Junior in 1968, no leaders arose to drive the Civil Rights Movement with similar impact.

repression and social backlash for their efforts. The move from protests in physical spaces to digital movements has, per some scholars, further dampened the movement.

Another limitation of the early literature on the public sphere is that it does not anticipate the Internet and its capabilities for impacting the public sphere. Boerder (2005) notes that while computer-mediated communications have overtaken the traditional spaces for public sphere. Instead of people meeting in churches and coffee shops, they could access online technology to congregate and exchange ideas. Although the press has attempted to facilitate online information exchange, individuals have more agency in the process (of information exchange). Through online profiles, people online can share information neglected by traditional media narratives and act as information resources. Individuals can also use technology to build an online identity, to establish themselves as authorities on a given issue, and to create social connections (Ausserhofer et. al, 2013). In this sense, Twitter at least has the potential to be used by marginalized groups to discuss the actions of the state or powerful groups using critical-rational discourse and thereby develop a strong public sphere. One example of this is the role as a "Fifth Estate," where people can hold both the media and state bodies accountable for injustices, bias and structural discrimination through online discussion and dialogue. These activities reflect Ekdale et al.'s (2010) analysis of blogging, which leverages political communication to provide in-depth local content, opinions and narratives (omitted from the traditional mainstream narrative) to their audiences in a relatable format. The article provides many reasons for blogging: "to critique traditional media, develop ideas, keep people updated, offer alternative news and act as watchdog. (p.10)" Black Lives Matter has managed to leverage these online tools and platforms to build a following audience, to promote their topics of interest, to engage with others online, and to show solidarity with other marginalized groups, while creating social capital and share emotions in their community. Although the

literature on black Twitter has been an important resource for this MRP, much of this literature focused on the American Black Lives Matter movement and in the anti-racist struggle against police brutality in the United States. In BLM's digital spaces, manifestations of police brutality are framed in terms of victimization and emancipation, while allowing insight and dialogue to be generated across racial and ethnic divides. Through hashtags, community members call attention to injustices, mobilize community-building resources, engage in critical dialogue and encourage participation in social movements (e.g. protests) to address structural injustices with more privileged people (Schushke, J. & Tynes, B., 2016).

While the discussions range from resource sharing to advocating for victims and community-building to planning protests and events offline, it is important to address a gap within this discourse: most the discussions on #BlackLivesMatter focus on black straight male victims of police brutality. Initially, BLM only highlighted the deaths of black men killed by the police, such as Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Black female and LGBT victims (of police brutality) did not receive as much attention. At first, they were excluded from online discourse but they are now more frequently included in the narrative and are gaining traction in online discussion (Carney, 2016). To filter and promote their causes as well, other hashtags have arisen, like #SayHerName, #BlackTransLivesMatter and #StopTransMurders, which draw attention to police brutality towards black female and trans people, as well as sharing stories of victims. This allows for greater attention to intersectionality[12] or the complex and interconnected facets of human identity (e.g.

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[12] Intersectionality is an acknowledgment of the complexities of human identity, interactions, and socio-economic conditions, all of which impact their roles and navigation in the dominant systems of power. "Gender, sexuality, race, disability/ability, religion and other factors exist within a context of media, government, laws and policies (Hankivsky, 2014)." Privilege and oppression can manifest in many ways, often enabling the marginalization of minority groups in the existing hegemonic structure.

race, class, gender) while building solidarity within the Black Lives Matter Movement. This shift in the BLM discourse also humanizes the struggles of these groups within the Black American population (Schushke, J. & Tynes, B., 2016).

In analyzing approximately 18,000 tweets, Schuschke and Tynes (2016) note that over 800 results are related to black liberation struggles, with words like "dehumanize," "rights" and "fight" occurring frequently (Schushke, J. & Tynes, B., 2016). The emotional components of these tweets are very evident. To support this aspect of the movement's discourse, Schuschke and Tynes cite McMillan and Chavis' (1986) concept of "armed love," which highlights the ways in which members of the black community show their care and commitment to each other by educating and empowering each other, showing love for the community and police brutality victims, while challenging the oppression facing them. In line with my findings, Schushke & Tynes (2016) point out several opposing commentaries to the black rights and black love movements online (Schushke, J. & Tynes, B., 2016).

Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory

Drawing on the insights of the literature discussed above regarding the democratic potential of online communication, this MRP will analyze black Twitter users' discussion around identity and discrimination in the Greater Toronto Area as well as the characteristics of black public spheres that have emerged through Twitter. How are the interests of a private group represented and discussed via Twitter? How might BLMTO act as an influencer and agenda setter within the black Canadian online public sphere? The theory of the public sphere will serve as an overarching framework for this analysis of the way communications are structured as well as the way information is presented and disseminated within societal power dynamics. To further

contextualize this project, the next sections provide overviews of the theories of identity, social identity and framing theory, which inform the project.

Identity and social identity theories examine the ideas, culture, language and other criteria that make up the individual, and that person's sense of belonging with a similar group. For example, in the classical public sphere discussed by Habermas, those who self-identified and were recognized by others as members of the bourgeoisie associated with peers to exchange information. Social identity theory examines the relationship between the self and social group. Hogg et. al (2004) explain that social identity theory directs attention to the relationship between a person's awareness that he or she belongs to a group and their subsequent self-attribution. In addition, individuals tend to compare the beliefs, values, attitudes, culture, behavioural norms, and roles of their in-group with those of the perceived out-group. Before delving into the online context of social identity, this section will briefly address the historical journey and reconstruction of black identity.

Black identity within North America has been influenced by the changing status of black people in North American society: from slave, to oppressed minority, to legal equal citizenship, to the ongoing fight for black liberation today. Performativity during slavery provides an image of black identity in its historical context. Black people performed a fluid and disposable identity for their slave masters (Walcott, 2003). Frantz Fanon (2008) analyzed the effects of slavery and historical oppression on the black male psyche, highlighting the disconnect between self-identification and the way the world perceives him. While their bodies are no longer owned, or controlled by subjugators, there is still a sense of exclusion, shame, impotence and limited freedom attached to their experience in society. Taylor (2016) notes that while black people are legally free and elevated to equal status, they still face the challenges of institutional racism, which Taylor

defines as "…policies, programs and practices of private institutions that result in greater rates of poverty, dispossession, criminalization, illness and the ultimate mortality of African Americans" (p. 8). Musser's (2012) work build upon the Fanon's critique, indicating that black identity is a fragmented object, restricted by pre-existing organizational and societal structures; black identity is restricted, with fractured foundations of kinship, subjectivity and gender.

Keeling (2014) notes that the production of knowledge and literature adds nuances to lived experiences and emphasizes collective identity. For instance, the historical black public spheres (churches, press, etc.) provided spaces for black people to talk amongst themselves and share insights on their life, culture norms and shared practices. Written and oral discourses build upon commonly accepted knowledge and information to contextualize shared practices and inspire efforts to change unfavourable circumstances facing marginalized people. When analyzing emancipation movements, Poletta (2001) notes that socio-economic conditions, structural frameworks, political engagement and participation can affect and influence collective identity, while culture shapes and cultivates it. In some cases, there is a dramatic incident that impacts a group and propels demonstrations. For example, following the deaths of Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner, Black Lives Matter movements began to facilitate discussions on racism, police brutality and social justice online and offline. They actively opposed police brutality through narratives that highlighted critical cultural insights, socioeconomic factors, instances of mental illness and others to shed more light on the multiple ways in which the black community continues to be marginalized in contemporary society.

In her analysis of race within digital networks, Sanjay Sharma (2013) notes the emergence of vernacular expression about race in the form of hashtags and humor, which provides a medium for black Internet users to chronicle shared practices and provide social commentary. Images,

videos, memes, gifs and other audiovisual aids fuel the casual and serious conversations mirroring and specific to the black American experience. "While this discourse mainly involves black American working class individuals, people of other races and socio-economic groups also participate." (Sharma, 2013, p. 52) While these communications can offer insight into the constantly performed and evolving discourses about race, these specific hashtags can frame (and possibly stereotype) ideas about black culture, norms and identity.

Identity can also be examined through the occurrence of stereotypes, or preconceived notions about a group which affect the way others perceive that group. At the center of the discussion in both the American and Canadian campaigns of Black Lives Matter is the way black people are perceived and treated by police and the public at large (Carney, 2016). Black people, (documented and undocumented) immigrants, and other racialized and marginalized groups tend to have negative pejoratives and images attached to their general perception and identity, which impacts their treatment by the public and state authorities (Cacho, 2012). Images, stories, and other cultural forms can positively or negatively impact collective identities. In mainstream media, black people are often criminalized, deemed as lazy, and seen as a threat.

Zappavigna (2014) argues that social media can influence and express identities while also connecting with others of the same community. In her analysis of the discursive construction of social bonds, Zappavigna highlights a form of "ambient identity" produced through these networks, as those participating and sending messages on social media like Twitter do not necessarily have to be actively social (Zappavigna, 2014, p. 211). In contrast to Habermas, Zappavigna highlights the role of personal feelings and opinions in the negotiation of identity in social media posting, an activity which is shaped by and which in turn communicates group values and promotes social interaction. Identity exchanges are built upon the collective consciousness of groups, which are in

turn supported by shared cultural norms, history, experiences, understandings and beliefs (Korostelina, 2014). These discursive relations interpret the relative positions of the participants (individually or in the group) and the power dynamic between those interacting with each other and society at large.

Framing

As discussed above, a public sphere consisting of marginalized people (what Fraser refers to as a subaltern counterpublic) identifies, critiques and develops alternatives to predominant power dynamics while interacting with others. In this project, identity and social identity theories can be operationalized through the analysis of *frames* and *sentiments*. These analytical tools enable the identification of specific words, images and symbols that shape the way people think, feel and act in relation to social issues.

Information communicated through popular media is often introduced through frames or concepts that organize and shape the meaning of media messages. Frames can include metaphors, stories, traditions and "spins" which influence the way audiences interpret messages (Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996). For example, someone telling a story of their parent's journey to a new country might prepare audiences to discuss issues of racism in relation to immigration. Framing theory explains that media producers highlight certain events and emphasize meanings which they consider to be most relevant (Goffman, 1974). Closely related to media framing is agenda-setting theory, which suggests that the selection and presentation of information in the media shapes the way audiences prioritize issues (Scheufele, 2000). The media's agenda-setting function allows producers to tell audiences what to think about, while framing influences how the information is perceived or thought about. To cohesively gather multiple voices and identity narratives within the Twitter

public sphere, BLMTO leverages a framing process to better communicate its message. Building on Harold Innis' notion of media bias, Pu (2012) notes that the internet supports information exchange, community mobilization, recruitment, participation, expression of discontent and the facilitation of protests.[13] Benford (2000) asserts that activists in social movements can set the agenda of discussion and influence the message by the constant creation and maintenance of meaning. By doing so, activists can make events meaningful, organize or guide social action, and package or tailor their message to garner support among certain groups (Benford, 2000).

Emotions also play a major role in framing information and opinions. Lecheler et al. (2015) examine emancipation, multiculturalism, assimilation and victimization frames in discourses about immigration. Similar frames are used by BLMTO to take instances involving police brutality and attach new meanings to them which highlight their relevance to the black community or to the responsibility of political leaders who oversee the actions of the police force. The words and the language that they use can be leveraged as a political tool (Walcott, 2003). Black Lives Matter Toronto can challenge the stereotypes and narratives presented by traditional media by enabling community members to share their own experiences, knowledge and traditions (Keeling, 2007). Schuschke and Tynes (2016) note that while addressing common misperceptions and misrepresentations, Black Lives Matter groups also address the four pillars of community: "membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared connection" (Schushke, J. & Tynes, B., 2016). By foregrounding identity as a theme of discussion, these online spaces enhance one's sense of belonging and community while sharing common emotions, stories, histories and narratives. By using a variety of frames, BLMTO can build their community, recruit

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[13] Harold Innis' Bias of Communication explains that time-biased media (e.g. oral media) are difficult to transport, which allows for extension across time, but they do not move across distances. Space-biased media (e.g. written word) can be moved across space very easily, but they do not last throughout time (Connor, 2001).

others to their cause and mobilize people to protest or petition their government for change. In this way, the frames and interpretations of events circulated by BLMTO can influence decisions made by individuals and organizations. Through an analysis the predominant sentiments expressed in the tweets, this project explored the extent to which emotional discourses mediate and amplify emancipation, multicultural and victimization frames.

Methodology

Samples of three hundred and forty-six tweets have been collected from the Black Lives Matter Toronto Twitter account. Data collection was facilitated by the Google software Twitter Archiver and manual archiving. Tweets in this data set were posted online between April 1 and April 15th, 2016. This information was collated on an Excel spreadsheet, under columns that indicated the date, text, links and attachments connected to each tweet. Black Lives Matter Toronto launched their #BLMTOTentcity Campaign, during which they protested outside of police headquarters. Coding, content analysis and sentiment analysis were applied to tweets to determine prevalent themes and facets within these communications. Manual analysis, Google Text Mining software (developed from Dandelion API), and theme discovery and keyword analysis from text2data.org (developed from Restful API) all aided the textual analysis and sentiment analysis. Tweets were categorized by type and organized in the following coding structure (see Tables 1 and 2):

Table 1: Types of Tweets

Type of Tweet	Number of Tweets
Original Tweets (OT)	42

20

Mentions	279
Replies	3
Retweets (RT)	18
Text transcribed from screenshot attachment	4

Table 2: Sample Coding Schedule

Date	Tweet Text	Type of Tweet	Twitter Link	Attachments	Retweets	Likes	Theme	Keywords	Sentiment Analysis

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that Black Lives Matter Toronto moderately leverages Twitter as a community building platform, where members can share information, emotions and plan relevant events. Black identity serves as a foundation in online narratives to advocate for and protest on behalf of victims facing police brutality or systemic injustice. For example, BLMTO used their #BLMTOTentcity initiative to express frustration with the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and the Toronto Police and members of the BLMTO community also used Twitter to gather people to protest, donate and support their cause. BLMTO continues to work towards a meeting with Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and Toronto Mayor John Tory to discuss BLMTO's concerns in a transparent manner. BLMTO also uses Twitter to put pressure on authorities to release the names of the officers who killed Loku and Carby and to closely examine the SIU and its investigative procedures.

Sentiment analysis revealed divisions within the BLMO discourse. Sentiment towards Black Lives Matter Toronto appears to depend on how followers connect with the campaign.

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Supporters share positive and empathetic sentiments but detractors also use BLMTO's Twitter account to express negative emotions towards the campaign. Opponents of BLMTO highlight the role of police presence and the significance of all lives. In addition, they tweet objections to decisions made by the BLMTO campaign such as the organization's role in staging a protest at the Premier's private property (Jones and Leslie, 2016), BLMTO co-founder Yusra Khogali's negative tweets towards white people (Khogali, 20116), and BLMTO's decision not to address public concerns and disapproval surrounding the first two incidents.

The following section analyzes the social functions of Twitter in the context of BLMTO. The analysis highlights the role of Twitter in building a sense of collective identity, mobilizing communities, sharing relevant resources, creating or challenging narrative frames, all of which encourage sentiments towards the BLMTO campaign within traditional and new media.

Twitter as a Public Sphere

Twitter allows BLMTO and those interacting with the platform to form an online public sphere. This platform allows for increased levels of communication (compared to offline discussions), information exchange and wider circulation of messages beyond the activist community. Twitter also provides a relatively cheap and easy way to use platform for organizing protests, information-sharing, and the development of interpersonal connections (Steinert-threlkeld et. al, 2015). One aspect of BLMTO that resembles the Habermasian public sphere is the way users interact separately from government, private and state interests to address the needs of civil society. In addition, each hashtag facilitated by BLMTO invites dialogue from individuals of all walks of life. For example, BLMTO used their Twitter platform to share instances of police brutality, structural injustices and reforms pertinent to black minorities in civil society. These

tweets are met with reactions ranging from messages of support to opposition. Sharma's (2012) study of the evolution of communication in the black Twitter community suggests that online communicative spaces showcase cultural content and performative culture which are important resources in the development and negotiation of racialized identities.

However, BLMTO's public sphere diverges from the Habermasian ideal through the content of the conversation. Instead of logical arguments dominating the conversation, many messages have emotional elements attached. Two hundred and forty tweets (out of 346 tweets collected) were labelled under various "expressed opinion" categories in which communication consisted of emotional appeals rather than through logical argumentation or critical-rational discourse. Yet these emotional messages appeared to be important for inspiring civic action and education. To map this emotional but critical discourse, the tweets were categorized according to theme, key hashtag and keyword as indicated in the tables below. This categorization of the tweets subsequently informed the textual analysis and pointed to the importance of, for example, racialized hashtags and other markers of social identity and the forms of information exchange within them. Later in the paper, sentiment analysis will be discussed to more look more closely at the information exchange within this public sphere.

With BLMTO tweets, people can decode these messages, decipher meanings and provide relevant feedback regarding a wide range of topics including the organization of protests, accountability of police officers and politicians, and the safety of black people in contact with

police. A total of 346 tweets were collected;[14] tweets were coded and analyzed through the content

(theme) categories[15] listed below (see Table 3):

Table 3: Descriptions and Examples of Content (Theme) Categories (adapted from Chew et. al, 2010)

Content (Theme)	Description	Example Tweets	Number of Tweets
Accountability	Tweets contain critique of BLMTO strategies or a critique of the inactions of politicians and related organizations.	@BLM_TO Someone better have the decency to address the comment from your Co-founder or all your protesting will be insignificant. Shameful .	99
Agenda Setting	Tweets from @blm_to issuing statements and addressing concerns regarding the Black Lives Matter movement.	This Is Why Black Lives Matter Toronto Is Demanding a Public Meeting with Police http://www.vice.com/en_ca/read/this-is-why-black-lives-matter-toronto-is-demanding-a-public-meeting-with-police … via @vicecanada	38
Community Mobilization	Tweets contain request for support or information regarding a protest or gathering for the cause.	Call to action: today is the city council mtg to discuss action on SIU. Meet us at 1:45pm at Nathan Phillips #BLMTOtentcity	15
Critical or Detractive Comments (Racism, Denial, Stereotyping)	Tweets contain abusive language or strongly negative ideas from detractors, all of which include racist messages; denial of the movement's premise or stereotyping of the movement and members. This allows for alternative voices and discriminatory views within the space.	@BLM_TO blm to better get new leadership as people of Toronto getting tired of your nonsense especially the jihadist Yusra	17

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[14] It is important to note that some users delete past tweets or make their accounts private. This impacts the visibility of tweets. As such, there may be some tweets collected that may no longer be accessed or located on the Twitter platform.

[15] Some tweets were labelled with multiple content (theme) categories.

Expressed Opinion – Emotional	Tweets contain user's personal sentiments, requests for information or experiences with the Black Lives Matter Movement and related themes.	@BLM_TOumm I don't get it, are all of you@m_layton@kristynwongtam @gordperkssilent because you're ok with this?#BLMTOtentcity#ONPoli	100
Expressed Opinion - Personal	Tweets sharing people's personal experiences and interactions with the BLM movement	.@DesmondCole FTR I had audio/video/FOI --but nothing. I'm convinced it's because of BLMTO that I finally got taken seriously. Very grateful	60
Expressed Opinion – logical and impersonal	Tweetings sharing logical and impersonal aspects of the campaign, such as statistical data supporting the movement's cause.	@BLM_TO Please provide the stats of these murders in % by non-black and indigenous ppl. This will prove that others are to blame.	80
Humor/Sarcasm	Twitter user posts a joke with video, text, image or audio outside of person experience.	@BLM_TO don't forget to ask for the review of why the black people attacked the police with knives and hammers ok??	25
Marketing	Tweets containing solicitation or publicity of merchandise, product or service related or unrelated to Black Lives Matter Toronto.	@BLM_TO @Blklivesmatter Follow me I will follow you back @BLM_TO @Blklivesmatter	7
Resource	Tweets contain articles and information regarding the Black Lives Matter Toronto movement.	1/5 Motion for the city to call for SIU reform has passed. A victory for the thousands of people who have been at #BLMTOtentcity for 11 days	54
Solidarity	Tweets contain support for another event, organization or movement	#BlackIndigenousPower #BLMTOIndigenousPower #BLMTOBLACKCITY #Attawapiskat	11
Spam	Tweets contain subject matter unrelated to Black Lives Matter Toronto.	.@daibyday@BLM_TO RACE BAIT: https://youtu.be/JwjoLJsJAbM	11

Most of the tweets that I analyzed could be placed in one of the following categories: expression of opinion, community mobilization, resource sharing, calls for accountability, and agenda-setting (see table 3). In general, tweets are very racialized, with polarizing issues and themes. BLMTO highlights and critiques instances of police brutality towards black individuals, specific to the experiences within the Greater Toronto Area. In my analysis, it became clear that the hashtag (#) and the "at" symbol (@) functioned in BLMTO as key markers of social identity. Multiple hashtags were used during this campaign and are included in the table below (Table 4). Hashtags are an important feature of Twitter because they allow users to categorize and link messages together. Wilson (2009) notes that messages that originate on black Twitter and which are shared beyond this community tend to have the following elements: "(1) A culturally relevant hashtag; (2) network participation (either a comment or a retweet) by rightly linked affiliates (homophily); (3) viral spread to reach trending topic status (propagation)" (Wilson, 2009)[16]. The hashtag appears to be an important factor in generating network participation and wide circulation.

In the case of BLMTO, users circulate "blacktags" alongside their tweets. Blacktags are hashtags with a focus on black issues and narratives. Some of these blacktags are linked to the campaign like #BLMTO, #BlackLivesMatter, or a specific event or movement like #BLMTOblackout and #BLMTOTentCity. Hashtags associated with social movements can attract critics and opponents, particularly as the hashtag becomes increasingly well-known and widely-circulated (Steinert-threkeld et. al, 2015). Information is created, filtered and shared with others through these hashtags. People can see public discourse develop and participate in it if they so choose. Yardi et. al (2010) suggest that the development of the hashtag opens opportunities for

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[16] As Yardi et al. (2010) explain, the principle of homophily refers to the idea that communication amongst like-minded individuals tends to reinforce shared understanding and social bonds.

improving access to public discourses about current events and increasing the diversity of views within those discourses. For instance, Twitter users who challenged the narrative of #BlackLivesMatter occasionally used hashtags to contextualize their point as well, like #bluelivesmatter[17] and #alllivesmatter[18], hashtags that stress the importance of police lives and human life in general. In some cases, users included information alongside these hashtags to qualify the message while in other cases the hashtags were added to messages to expand their reach. BLMTO uses hashtags to promote and express solidarity with other movements, like indigenous protests (e.g. #BlackIndigenousPower, #BLMTOIndigenousPower, #Attawapiskat and #OccupyINAC). These hashtags become calls to action that link marginalized groups together. Activists are also able to directly contact representatives through Twitter, as this platform offers a decentralized and horizontal conversation structure (Theocharis et. al, 2015). The following tables highlight the key words and hashtags that emerged throughout this two-week period.

Table 4: List of Key Hashtags

Key Hashtags	Description	Example Tweets	Number of Tweets
#BLMTOTentcity or #BLMTOblackcity	This hashtag chronicles the BLMTO protest and occupation outside police quarters.	i never have & know that i never will experience anything like #BLMTOTentCity filled with love. filled	#BLMOTentcity = 20 #BLMTOblackcity = 8

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[17] The #Bluelivesmatter hashtag emerged after the shooting death of two police officers in December 2014. It should be noted that the shooter was black. His motive for the killing was retaliation for the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, two black males who were fatally shot by police earlier that year (Mueller, 2014). Since then, the hashtag arises as a response to #blacklivesmatter, particularly after a black assailant targets or fatally shoots police officers.

[18] Both #bluelivesmatter and #alllivesmatterhashtags struggle with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter for control of the dominant Twitter narrative (around police brutality). While The former two hashtags seek to omit an analysis of race, #blacklivesmatter (and affiliated hashtags) identify race, stereotypes and negative labels and pejoratives as factors in the systemic oppression and violence they face on a regular basis. Carney (2016) notes that while the most dominant group might think that colour-blindness offers a more truthful and objective narrative, she asserts that certain knowledge can be more readily accessible to those marginalized while dominant groups may be blind to these details.

		with gratitude. filled with energy	
#BlackLivesMatter, #BlackLivesMatterTO or #BLMTO	This hashtag chronicles instances of police brutality towards black individuals in North America. The hashtags with the letters "TO" included highlight these experiences in the Greater Toronto Area.	Read this by @anima_tk: The difference between Toronto's @BLM_TO and America's #BlackLivesMatter movement	#BlackLivesMatter = 3 #BlackLivesMatterTO = 2 #BLMTO = 3
#ONpoli, #cdnpoli or #TOPoli	This hashtag discusses political issues in the contexts of Ontario, Canada and Toronto.	@BLM_TO We Demand Action Now! Participatory Democracy?NOT HERE #cdnpoli #Toronto #onpoli End Structural Violence & Institutionalized Racism!	#ONpoli = 3 #TOpoli = 3 #cdnpoli = 2
#Loku, #justice4loku	This hashtag shares information about the shooting death of Andrew Loku by Toronto Police as well as the campaign aimed at addressing this incident.	@rodneydiverlus Yes, didn't the witness say that @TorontoPolice opened fire within seconds of arriving, before #Loku could say anything?	#loku = 1 #justice4loku = 1
#BlackIndigenousPower, #OccupyINAC,	These hashtags show solidarity with indigenous protests occurring in Canada.	#InOurOwnVoice Our youth = our future (heart emoji) #InSolidarity with #Attawapiskat #OccupyINAC #BlackIndigenouspower @BLM_TO	#BlackIndigenousPower = 5 #OccupyINAC = 5
#BlueLivesMatter #AllLivesMatter	The #bluelivesmatter hashtag was created after the shooting	.@DesmondCole The @BLM_TO has a problem with Police	#BlueLivesMatter = 1 #AllLivesMatter = 2

	death of police officers in December 2014. It highlights the importance of police lives and work. The #AllLivesMatter hashtag highlights the importance of all human life. Both hashtags are used as responses to the Black Live Matter movements in North America.	enforcement period! They will always hate... #BlueLivesMatter more than thugs, out!		
#Facts	The #facts hashtag is used to share information to others, often in a sarcastic, superior manner.	@BLM_TO More than 96% of the black people marching here don't/didn't have fathers. #Facts Check the crime in your own communities. FOH!!		2
#carding	Carding[19] is a controversial police practice of engaging people and collecting identifying information (without charge or arrest) in the GTA. BLMTO opposes this practice and shares information on how they protest against it.	.@BLM_TO re #carding "The Ministry's initial plans didn't even include directly consulting Toronto" Honest oversight, I'm sure...		2

Table 5: List of Keywords

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[19] Essentially, carding is a random police check or engagement that result in "contact cards" being created and stored in a police database. Personal details collected from targeted people, like friends and physical description are included in these reports. The contact cards expand with each encounter with police. Even if no arrest or charge has been made, this information stays accessible to the police. There are questions surrounding the legality of said practice, and the targets of this system, as the disproportionate number of black people targeted during this procedure (MacLellan, 2015).

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Keywords	Concepts	Number of Tweets
Andrew Loku	Justice, black, police brutality	11
Black	Protest, crime, injustice, justice, identity	60
Meeting, private, public	Accountability, justice, discussion, debate	Meeting = 14 Private = 8 Public = 17
Police	Brutality, justice, injustice, law, legal	35
Race, racism	Justice, human,	Racism = 42 Race = 6
Solidarity	Support; identity; empathy	7
Tory; Wynne	Leadership, responsibility, accountability	Tory = 16 Wynne = 5
Yusra, Co-founder	Racism; comments; apology; responsibility; tweet	Yusra = 9 Co-founder = 4

BLMTO as Networked Public Sphere

As a platform for the public sphere, Twitter acts as a mediator between users, offering a collection and articulation of individual experiences and cultural practices (van Dijick, 2012). One can observe the context of a Twitter account to draw meaning from each individual tweet. In the case of BLMTO, their posts, retweets and who they follow helps to tell a story about their personal narrative (Bonilla, 2015). Cultural content enables users to express their interests, likes and dislikes (van Dijick, 2012). Twitter users have the opportunity for discussion, collaboration and feedback.

Social capital and trust are generated here too; as members engage in ongoing discussions with each other; they build interpersonal connections and form networks between cities and between organizations and social movements. These growing networks can also influence government and the broader culture if there are opportunities for open and inclusive dialogue. In this way, BLMTO empowers individuals in marginalized groups to engage in discussion about their own collective development (Benkler, 2006).

Twitter users have the choice to become "passive" or "active" participants in each stage of facilitated discussion. In the Twitter context, users had varying levels of participation ranging from reading, liking or retweeting posts to contacting the group directly through a mention or a direct message or participating in opportunities to donate or protest. As active participants gather offline and strengthen bonds, Twitter can mediate online and offline communications (van Dijick, 2012). In my analysis of BLMTO content, there seemed to be a significant amount of user engagement with tweets from the BLMTO's Twitter account. Each tweet had an average of 10 retweets and 10 likes per post. Original tweets had a higher level of engagement, with an average of 61 retweets and 60 likes per post during this two-week period. Indeed, many users chose to engage with the campaign through the Twitter reply function; the ratio between replies and original tweets in my dataset was 35:1. The communications between BLMTO and their audience varied through this two-week period. Overall, it was evident that BLMTO fostered discussion and coordinated action among users rather than merely broadcasting of messages to a "passive" audience.

BLMTO embodies elements of "weak" and "strong" public spheres as conceptualized by Fraser. Weak publics facilitate public discourse, engage in debates and form public narratives, but they don't typically move beyond that point. When analyzing the Twitter communications from BLMTO, discourse appeared rather "top heavy." Messages, information and opinions were shared

from BLMTO, but BLMTO organizers did not engage in debates taking place on their social media account. If an issue was consistently brought to their attention, organizers would usually respond by creating a general post addressing the issue instead of communicating with individual users directly. For example, dozens of tweets questioned why BLMTO wanted to meet publicly with the police and the reasons behind Yusra Khogali's angry tweet from February 2016. To address the concerns of the audience, BLMTO chose to tweet the following messages on April 8[th,] addressing these situations:

> April 8th Tweet from @BLM_TO: Why this 2-month old tweet was taken more seriously than police brutality #blmto
>
> April 8th tweet from @BLM_TO: This Is Why Black Lives Matter Toronto Is Demanding a Public Meeting with Police-Sarah Ratchford

These tweets also included links to articles with lengthy explanations for the public. After issuing these statements, no replies were made to the comments, questions and insinuations that ensued after these statements. While BLMTO mobilizes the community, and addresses public leaders and in this sense operates as a strong public sphere, there are barriers in communication between these two groups. Whenever BLMTO's messages are expressed, detractors immediately react with negative comments. Questions would be responded to with sarcastic answers and accusations. While there is dialogue, it seems shallow at best. There does not appear to be much empathy or interest in better understanding each other's perspectives. In addition, BLMTO does not always communicate effectively with supporters. There will be questions and supportive comments directed to them, but sometimes they go without being addressed, or another member of the community will answer the question[20].

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[20] However, it should be noted that there is the possibility of Twitter users communicating through direct messages as well. That could be a possibility as to why messages were not addressed through Twitter replies.

BLMTO as a Subaltern Counterpublic

Black Lives Matter Toronto can be conceptualized as a subaltern counterpublic which attempts to influence the dominant public sphere, as discussed by Fraser (1992). BLMTO is comprised of a marginalized group (black people) members of which gather online to discuss issues relevant to their daily experience. As a disadvantaged group in society, and as their message is very critical of government and police practices, they would not have much access to traditional media as a channel to voice concerns or motivate social change. Mainstream media do not typically offer a platform for dissent; when dissidents are included in mainstream media, they are often shown in a negative light (Goh et. al, 2016). BLMTO creates a space and organized voice online by enabling users to share their viewpoints, exchange information, and receive information from the Twitter users who follow the hashtag. BLMTO embodies both alternative protest culture, where activists seek a place to exist within the current hegemonic structure, and oppositional protest culture, which seeks to change circumstances within this space. Information, communication and power intersect within the public sphere. Communication and information are directed to Twitter users in Toronto, BLMTO participants, local politicians, the Toronto Mayor, the Ontario Premier, local news organizations and allies. BLMTO draws from the socialist-anarchist tradition, by sharing complex viewpoints that are underrepresented and excluded from mainstream public discourse (Ruiz, 2014).

In the following tweets, BLMTO shares intersectional and alternative narratives within their movement:

April 10th Tweet Women, trans folk, and queer folk are shaping the global movement for black lives. (article attachment)

April 13th Tweet Indigenous activists are occupying INAC offices in solidarity w/ Attawapiskat & other communities that have declared states of emergencies

April 13th Tweet Coroner's inquest into death of Andrew Loku is a victory, but let us remain vigilant & demand more. His family deserves more #BLMTOblackcity

These tweets illustrate the way BLMTO attempts to integrate underrepresented viewpoints within their movement. Typically, in the BLM (online and offline) space, black cis male perspectives are at the forefront, specifically through a victimization lens. If the media ever mention BLM movements, they will typically identify the victim, report on the events leading up to his death, and discuss the ensuing protests. Names like Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown and Eric Garner are at the forefront of discussions in the United States like their Canadian counterparts Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby in the BLMTO discourse. However, intersectional black voices fade into the background. On April 10th, BLMTO tried to highlight alternative narratives within the movement, sharing the struggles and the efforts of black female and LGBT voices in the movement. They also join the struggles of other Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, not only by sharing information about their protests and emancipation efforts, but also by circulating information and narratives about the dire circumstances facing these communities. BLMTO also works to contextualize the identity of the victims, by sharing stories about the victim, passing along messages and wishes from the family and highlighting key issues like mental health. In the last tweet mentioned above, BLMTO uses a confrontational protest culture, encouraging others to demand and antagonize the powers that be to ensure that justice is served. Agenda setting is a key tool in their communications strategy, as they try to influence how their listeners (and broader audiences as whole) think about the victimization of black people by police. In an April 13th tweet, BLMTO writes:

[Too much has been shrouded in mystery from the SIU. this ensures the public &
family get more information on his murder #BLMTOblackcity](#)

Within the above tweet, BLMTO uses contestation protest culture to discuss the SIU investigation

of Andrew Loku's murder, arguing that the lack of openness, honesty and transparency from the

organization paints an inconsistent picture. They also included a narrative of justice, indicating

that the family will never truly be vindicated without the full disclosure of the events leading to

Loku's death. In including a hashtag of their April protest, they initiate a localized event within

their coalition movement.

One of the key functions of BLMTO is community-building, or the establishment of

interpersonal connections and social capital which can support emancipation movements to better

the situation of the collective. BLMTO leverages Twitter as a platform for sharing information and

viewpoints among community members about discrimination and violence against minority

groups, which tends to be underreported in mainstream media. To influence the broader public

sphere, the community also uses Twitter to organize and facilitate protests and other activities that

raise public awareness and motivate change (Theocharis et. al, 2015). For example, on April 1st,

2016, BLMTO tweeted the following: "Call to action: today is the city council mtg to discuss

action on SIU. Meet us at 1:45pm at Nathan Phillips #BLMTOtentcity." This message was sent

within the context of the political Twittersphere, through the noise of other tweets, and packed

with messages encoded for the intended audiences: BLMTO supporters and BLMTO Tentcity

participants. There is a strong and direct call to action, indicating a time, place, key players,

objective and campaign. In terms of sentiment, the post is neutral but with a strong subjective

element. Such community-building messages are important as they inform supporters about the

event and encourage participation. Finally, Twitter also acts as a record of the community's interventions in the public sphere; I observed numerous tweets in which users documented their protest activities at city meetings, their requests for support, and their demands to meet with politicians like Premier Kathleen Wynne, Mayor John Tory and MPP Yasir Naqvi. This kind of pressure exerted by BLMTO attempts to break open the decision-making process so that it involves a wide range of actors – not just government officials but also citizens and community leaders. Thus, in addition to community-building and information-sharing, BLMTO also strives to engage political leaders and government officials and hold them publicly accountable.

In some cases, attempts by BLMTO to influence the broader public sphere were met with containment strategies on the part of government actors. One major issue discussed on BLMTO is transparency, which focuses on ensuring public oversight of those in political power. The issue of transparency was particularly evident in the discussion surrounding the appropriateness of a private versus a public meeting with government officials to discuss concerns about police brutality. While Premier Wynne and Mayor Tory both expressed interest in meeting with Black Lives Matter Toronto, they have also expressed their preference for a private meeting to discuss the issues. The word "transparent" or "transparency" were mentioned 3 times in the sample tweets; "meeting" was mentioned 13 times; "private" was mentioned 9 times and "public" was mentioned 20 times. In *Emotions, Technology and Social Media,* Schuschke and Tynes (2016) note that participants in hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName often try to humanize victims of police brutality through their posts and draw connections with victims (Schushke, J. & Tynes, B., 2016). In this case, Andrew Loku's name was mentioned 11 times in the tweet sample, while the word "police" was mentioned 35 separate times. Another instance where the theme of transparency became pronounced in the sample was when BLMTO demanded that officials

disclose the name of the officer that killed Andrew Loku. Supporters and detractors of BLMTO have discussed this issue in detail. While supporters wish for the officer to be identified to ensure repercussions or even an apology for the victim's family, detractors are concerned that this is an invasion of privacy. In addition, detractors do not trust BLMTO to use appropriate methods to address the officer in question, referencing an incident earlier in 2016 when BLMTO chose to protest at the premier's residence.

From an ethical perspective, BLMTO plays a radical and "asymmetrical" role when communicating messages; BLMTO provides asymmetrical information in online debates to challenge the ethics and privileges of economically and politically powerful people (Grunig, 2014). Through protests, BLMTO demands greater representation online, in public spaces, in media, and in political meetings (Ruiz, 2014). They also demonstrated what McMillan and Chavis (1986) call "armed love" through social responsibility and serving communal interests (as cited in Schuschke & Tynes).

Social Identity in BLMTO Discourse

Identity relates to the awareness and construction of self. Through online messages, BLMTO works to frame and present black identities and experiences in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in relation to social justice issues and the struggle against the hegemonic privileges of dominant groups and institutions (Brock, 2012). Yardi et al. (2010) note that Twitter replies "between like-minded individuals strengthen group identity, whereas replies between different-minded individuals reinforced in-group and out-group affiliation" (p. 316). As discussed above, much of the content on BLMTO consists of emotional and personal messages, offers of support, and positive experiences, as well as replies to such posts, all of which help strengthen group

identity, build trust, personal connections and other forms of social capital, and develop a critical public discourse.

Other tweets by BLMTO participants and supporters focused on the marginalization, structural hindrances and oppression facing black people in Toronto. They documented personal experiences of racism or highlighting well-known injustices at the forefront of the movement. For instance, on April 10th, 2016, Black Lives Matter Toronto tweeted the following: "In memory of Andrew Loku, we will fight against the systems that killed you and all black life in this city." As suggested by this tweet, one major topic of discussion during the two-week timeframe (April 1st - 15th, 2016) was the shooting of Andrew Loku by a Toronto police officer. At that time, Loku was the most recent victim of police brutality in the GTA. Out of 43 original tweets (from the BLMTO Twitter account), 10 of those messages were related to Loku's death and the SIU investigation surrounding his death. Loku was painted as a hero as BLMTO, CAMH and *The Toronto Star* described his journey as a refugee who survived the Sudanese War. They also touched on his mental health issues, which also humanizes and expounds upon his experience. Other stories from traditional news outlets simply addressed his encounter with the police and subsequent death. Detailed stories such as these set the stage for people to come together and act as a community to address the other organizations and institutions such as the SIU, police headquarters, members of parliament, the mayor and premier and others.

Social identities are also articulated through the style of discourse used in the Twitter campaign. As discussed above, BLMTO tweets are often emotionally-charged but logical and moral appeals are also important means by which BLMTO persuades users to participate in protests or provide donations and other support. Logical appeals present facts, case studies, anecdotes and statistics to make and support claims and constitute a form of political oratory by

which BLMTO encourages the members of the public to act against racial discrimination and violence (Meyer, 2012). BLMTO discourse also articulates a sense of moral selfhood by representing certain virtues and moral principles as shared by members of the community which can help subvert and dismantle the cycles of oppression and violence towards marginalized groups. I could see an example of this in a tweet posted on April 10th by @BLM_TO: "Public needs answers. Coroner's Inquest into the death of Andrew Loku is necessary #justice4Loku #BLMToblackcity." Here, BLMTO uses moral appeals to gain support for Andrew Loku's cause. The phrase "public needs answers" is not so much an appeal to reason or to readers' curiosity but a way of highlighting the moral failure of public authorities and the BLMTO communities' shared desire for justice.

As Machado et. al (2012) explains, membership within a given community depends on access to a shared language is thus cultivated in specific cultural contexts. One way in which sign-use communicates identities in BLMTO is how users refer to themselves and others as members of a racialized group; of 346 tweets collected for this study, the word "black" was mentioned 75 times. This Twitter signification is a performative practice of black identities. Brock (2012) notes that black Twitter tends to integrate discourses around humour, values, vision, spectacle and/or crisis and, in the American context, uses African American Vernacular English (AAVE), or Ebonics to communicate within the group and to communicate group identities. Based on the BLMTO tweets collected for this study, Ebonics seems to be less prevalent in Canadian black Twitter communications. Slang words and acronyms appear regularly in the sample, but these words are common to North American vernacular and are not specific to AAVE (Brock, 2012). However, there are still some key words, symbols and phrases that build the collective black Twitter identities. BLMTO often uses familiar and casual language to give supporters of the group

a sense of belonging or membership in a community, as seen in the following tweet posted on April 1st by @BLM_TO: "We need hand warmers tonight! If you can help us out, that would be beautiful. Thank you, community! #blmtotentcity."

While there is no distinct language that sets this subaltern counterpublic apart, there is a clear shift in the key topics that emerged throughout this timeframe. At the beginning of the two-week period, BLMTO discourse focused on agenda-setting through calls to action and sharing timely information about protests related to the SIU investigation. These tweets were followed by questions from users about the campaign and how they could offer support. However, calls to action were also met by tweets on BLMTO from detractors who attempted to discredit the campaign. It was at this point that tweets began to emerge highlighting BLMTO co-founder Yusra Khogali's negative tweets towards white people. The criticism of Khogali was followed by a wave of tweets that were generally supportive of events and protests from allies, all while remaining silent about the situation surrounding Yusra. Towards the end of the timeframe, BLMTO shifted from setting the agenda (by emphasizing the urgency of protesting the police shooting and the SIU process) to maintaining solidarity and responding to the critiques of their campaign and leadership. Khogali tweeted an explanation of her controversial remarks but tweets that mocked and criticized the campaign increased in response. In the call and response between supporters and critics of BLMTO, distinct narratives emerged in the online discussions.

Key Frames in BLMTO Discourse

Through framing, BLMTO communicates key events and shapes their meaning within their online public sphere. Snow et. al (1968) describe framing as "… [the ability of individuals] to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Snow et. al, 1968, p. 464). A key step toward effecting social change is to frame occurrences or

events as social problems that require organized action (Fuchs, 2006). Frames encode the beliefs of an organization or community in communication about events and issues (Brock, 2012).

One of the key frames used by Black Lives Matter to shape the significance and meaning of police violence can be summarized as "Blackness and Safety." In the United States, there is a growing number of black people dying in police custody or during police interactions. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the number of black people dying following police engagement is rising. According an SIU analysis facilitated by the Toronto Star, "Toronto's black population is approximately 9 percent, but represents 35 percent of fatal police shootings" (Gillis, 2015). The Twittersphere offers a space for discussion about the disproportionate number of black people who are targets of police violence and about appropriate responses to this situation. As discussed above, BLMTO offers moral and rational appeals to bolster their argument. The safety frame emphasizes the difficulty of navigating public spaces as a minority and the right of black individuals to be safe during (and live through) police proceedings.

Transparency, another key frame in the tweets collected for this study, tends to be used to emphasize differences in the communications of the BLMTO community and those of officials and institutional authorities. In this context, transparency refers to the level of openness, visibility and honesty between the speaker and audience. The more transparency a movement or an organization conveys in its communications, the more likely it is that audiences will trust, follow and identify with a given action or campaign. Ruiz (2014) notes that the model of the public sphere values transparency, as it offers complete publicity and disclosure and accommodates everyone on an equal level (Ruiz, 2014). In the tweets analyzed in this project, BLMTO draws attention to a lack of transparency to critique government officials and the police force. However, the tension between secrecy and openness also shapes the discourse of BLMTO itself. Organizers must present

themselves in an authentic manner but at the same time they must filter what is shared and seen by their audiences. The more information that is shared, the more opportunities there are for criticism, feedback and demands for accountability from audiences. Ordinarily, Twitter users do not discuss political or polarizing topics to avoid offending their follower base (Marwick, 2011). While BLMTO does engage in controversial subjects, there are topics that they choose not to comment on or share; selective secrecy is a key strategy for maintaining some degree of control over the message conveyed by this campaign. For instance, BLMTO shares some of their meeting places for protest, but sometimes they simply announce that they are already protesting at a certain location. Another thing that they do not mention online are their rallying cries. When BLMTO protests, members tend to shout different slogans or expressions together. These expressions are not shared (i.e. transcribed) online, save through a video recording of their protest. While transparency (or the lack thereof) is a key frame for criticizing authorities, it is also clear that transparency within this subaltern counterpublic is limited and carefully constructed.

Justice is another key frame within these tweets. Justice is an effort to correct a wrong through civil, legal and organized action. To evoke sentiments from people online, inspire people to demand justice for police brutality, and instigate legislative reform, BLMTO emphasized right from wrong using frames of victimization and emancipation. BLMTO and their supporters consistently shared stories about their struggles to address institutional racism and its manifestations. For example, BLMTO demanded that the police involved in these incidents of police brutality are named and dealt with by their departments, either by dismissal, suspension without pay or an indictment through a court of law. Accountability is also shaped by the justice frame in BLMTO discourse. BLMTO uses and represents their platform as a way of holding officials and leaders accountable of their action (or inaction). For example, during the timeframe

of my sample of tweets, John Tory had yet to meet with BLMTO publicly regarding police brutality, carding and other injustices. Kathleen Wynne had neither met with them nor connected them with the appropriate government representative. Other MPPs and regional representatives were relatively silent about the issue. The only news outlet giving them substantial coverage was *The Toronto Star*. BLMTO framed this inaction in terms of justice, accountability and transparency (or the lack thereof) and BLMTO followers started to tweet at the mayor and premier and mentioning BLMTO. Their messages include very strong calls to action. In a similar manner, BLMTO drew attention to inaction on the part of media to provide adequate coverage of the issue of police violence and of BLMTO's mobilization. *The Toronto Star* was the only newspaper acknowledged by BLMTO for giving them some exposure in the mainstream press.

In advocating for justice and accountability, BLMTO also encouraged solidarity with other marginalized groups fighting for equal treatment in society, namely Idle No More - the grassroots campaign for indigenous rights. To align itself with the Idle No More Toronto movement, BLMTO shared livestreams of protests and information concerning their cause. BLMTO and Idle No More Toronto are distinct movements but both acknowledge that they are marginalized and could amplify their voices by collaborating. This also enables organizers of both movements to build on a larger community base as supporters of both groups will be more informed and be inclined to participate in each other's protests.

As communication in modern societies are not usually face to face, senders must imagine their audiences and craft cultural messages that evoke connection and participation (Marwick, 2011). To mobilize sentiments, BLMTO leverages value amplification: they clearly establish their mission, highlight relevant events (e.g., instances of police brutality or community mobilizations like #BLMTOTentcity), and celebrate ethnicity (blackness) and community to contextualize their

points of view. Values of safety, equality, accountability, justice and significance of black lives are key supporting undertones in the movement. Sentiments ranging from support and encouragement, to frustration and disapproval can be clearly seen in the data collected. Per Snow (1968), these values and sentiments can be used in local campaigns to gain traction within the community. As Snow et al argue, "Once such sentiments were validated, amplified, and diffused, periodic mobilization of neighbourhood constituents to engage in other organizational activities, such as signing petitions, carrying placards, and participating in media displays of neighbourhood solidarity, became considerably less problematic." (p. 469). While social media can be effective in garnering support for BLMTO at the beginning, sentiments ultimately need to be more widely diffused to enable broader social change. One way BLMTO attempts to do this is by framing the attitudes and options of the broader public as part of the problem facing the black community. Some examples of this type of framing include the following tweets on April 14th, 2016:

> Majority of Torontonians support Black Lives Matter: poll https://t.co/XEQ7A2xYBu #BLMTOblackcity
>
> Are we going to talk about the 30% of people who do not believe that systemic racism exists? or the 20% who responded "don't know?"
>
> What more proof do people need to get to accept that racism exists? more murdered Black bodies? More Indigenous youth suicides? More MMIW?

In the tweets, above, Black Lives Matter Toronto introduces a new idea: the "general" Torontonian's opinion of the movement. While they reference a poll featured in a news report, BLMTO takes a different angle than the news media. Instead of focusing on the 55% of people who supported the group and the 50% who agreed that systemic racism existed, BLMTO highlights and frames as problematic the 30% who did not believe in systemic racism and the 20% who didn't know what to believe or think. Here, BLMTO sets the agenda of discussion using a diagnostic

frame, as the injustice or moral and social problem, the wronged party, and those deemed responsible for this wrong are identified. This frame allows people to see the injustice through the eyes of the injured party as well as the reason why it is morally wrong (Goh et. al, 2016). The injustice is systemic racism, which marginalizes black individuals. In this series of tweets, the parties to be held responsible are those who do not believe or know that this injustice is real, despite evidence to the contrary (murders, missing people, suicides, etc.). The tweets are also emotionally-charged; BLMTO publicly airs grievances, anger and a sense of betrayal at the blithe way others view their cause, and emphasizes harm and emotional suffering directed towards them as a collective (Goh et. al, 2016).

Critiques of Black Lives Matter Toronto

Despite the strategic use of frames to organize meanings on BLMTO, there were strands of BLMTO tweets that diverged from the campaign. For example, individuals periodically attempt to co-opt the identities narratives within BLMTO for their own purposes. Some people leverage the BLMTO campaign purely for self-promotion, although in this two-week period, such tweets comprise less than one percent of the data sample. Self-promotion consists of Twitter users trying to promote books, music and merchandise using the BLMTO twitter handle. Other than the inclusion of the "Black Lives Matter Toronto" name or corresponding hashtag, these tweets bear no correlation with the messages and sentiments shared by this public sphere. These tweets are generally ignored – no one admonishes them for co-opting the discussion for personal use.

A more significant strand of tweets that diverge from the key frames of BLMTO are those challenging Black Lives Matter Toronto with counter-frames. One of the points of contention raised by detractors concerns the Yusra Khogali's angry message tweeted in February 2016: "Plz

Allah give me strength not to cuss/kill these men and white folks out here today (Khogali, 2016)." The offending tweet was posted in February, but the conversation surrounding the tweet continues. Another Facebook post also started circling the web, with a strongly negative and racist message targeting white people. As BLMTO continued to post information regarding their protests, issues of police brutality and the like, people began to call for comment on this post. As the request for information and explanation went ignored, posts started becoming very angry and hateful towards Yusra Khogali.

Another concern raised by critics was the decision to protest outside of Premier Wynne's home. The Globe and Mail reported that on March 30th, BLMTO staged a vigil outside of her home, leaving behind pictures of Andrew Loku, wreathes and other paraphernalia on her driveway. BLMTO briefly discussed this on Twitter, stating that this protest was a necessary step, as their previous attempts at communication with the Premier were ignored. However, other Twitter users have condemned the action as an invasion of privacy and an inappropriate means to get their point across. In this scenario, the social standards of morality and ethics are in question. The detractors pose the following questions: Do the ends justify the means? Is it acceptable to do anything it takes to be heard or to get your point across?

Detractors also focus on areas absent from the BLMTO campaign, like "black on black crime," a phrase used to describe crimes involving a black victim and a black perpetrator. The words "black," "racism" and "police" were the three top keywords within tweets, with 60, 42 and 35 mentions respectively. With the detractors' tweets, the major issue seemed to be that while BLMTO was quick to condemn police brutality towards black people, violence within the black community was largely ignored. An example of this discussion can be found in a tweet from Twitter user @chrissa2 on April 4th, 2016: "@metromorning @sandela @BLM_TO carding was

helping solve crime in dangerous neighbourhoods where black on black crime was increasing." A similar tweet was posted by @Cancon_ on April 8th: "@BLM_TO why is nobody concerned that black men are murdered at the hands of other black men?!" These tweets include sensitive language like "murder," "crime," and "dangerous," all of which add to the negative sentiment of these commentaries. These Twitter users express frustration with the BLMTO movement, as they perceive hypocrisy in the messages shared and omitted from the narrative. On the one hand, BLMTO seems concerned about carding, but some participants in the discussion feel that carding could help to lower crime. Others feel that BLMTO is making a considerable effort to hold officers accountable for their crimes against black people, but are not holding their own community members accountable for the same actions. My findings indicate that carding was mentioned on two occasions by BLMTO but in those tweets, BLMTO simply noted that carding still exist, and expressed their desire to see an end to that system. "Black on black crime" is completely absent from the discourse of organizers and followers.

To address these accusations, BLMTO could perhaps employ moral or logical appeals to explain their position more directly to both their supporters and critics; the tweets could include a discussion of what carding is, why it is wrong and the steps BLMTO is taking to address and dismantle it. "Black on black crime" is somewhat more difficult to integrate as this does not seem to be within the parameters of any Black Lives Matter initiative. The focus of BLM movements has been structural and institutional oppression rather than individual cases of violence. While these occurrences should be addressed, it is difficult to assess the appropriateness of their inclusion within BLMTO discourse.

Other critiques of Black Lives Matter Toronto have grown beyond replies and mentions within BLMTO hashtags and have led to the emergence of new hashtag communities. While some

of these hashtags are responding directly to Black Lives Matter, other opposing sentiments are collated within other hashtags (#allivesmatter and #bluelivesmatter). These conversations can also become very emotional as participants share sentiments of disgust, anger and frustration within the timeframe of my sample. Some of these posts have become abusive, as they directly target Yusra with sexist, homophobic and islamophobic comments. Others target black people in general, stereotyping them as lazy and angry, and addressing them with racial slurs. Others still choose to deny the realities of the situation, claiming that this is an American problem but not a Canadian one, that BLMTO is overreacting, and that carding and using violence are a normal and acceptable part of police duties. Lastly, some users suggest that BLMTO should be more polite in their inquiries to be heard and taken more seriously. Some tweets even condemned BLMTO's protesting based on environmental issues, noting that some of the tape on their signs was not removed from building walls. While these conversations introduce diversity of opinion, they arguably ignore the historical reality of institutional racism and its contemporary manifestations in Canadian society.

Conclusion

The Canadian Black Twitter experience is still a relatively new area of research that has not received adequate scholarly attention. There is much to be learned in this content about in-group and out-group behaviours, value and performative activities. As the Black Lives Matter campaign continues, it will be interesting to observe how this public sphere impacts public opinion and government policies in the long term, particularly in the domain of law enforcement. It will also be interesting to observe the sustainability of BLMTO as a public sphere. Can this group continue to maintain a space for public discourse when this issue is no longer a trending topic? How then will BLMTO continue to build collective identities and frame their messages on Twitter in the years to come?

BLMTO has created a digital public sphere to influence others, build community, share valuable insight and sentiments, while challenging dominant narratives offline and online. This group's Twitter activity was examined as a revisionist form of Habermas' public sphere model, conceptualizing the production and flow of information and the development of moral and emotional forms of communication about social issues alongside critical-rational discourse. BLMTO is a grassroots movement, whose digital sphere allows them to shape and control their narrative. Framing helps them to add value to their commentary and share and influence sentiments online. The emotional element within framing amplifies their message and enables greater identification with their cause, and between speakers and audience. Supporters and allies of the campaign share messages of solidarity and support, while detractors attempt to disprove and deny their message and circulate stereotypical depictions of those involved.

BLMTO is a movement that disrupts the common-sense narratives that encourage Canadians to ignore the plight of black people. They expose the veneer of a colour-blind, post-

racial society to advocate for their cause. These protests have reaped some results. In America, police now must wear body cameras during interactions with civilians. Some officers have even been fired or faced repercussions for their misconduct. In Canada, there have been some victories as well. As of April 13th, 2016, there was a motion to review the SIU; a coroner's inquest into Loku's death and a statement from the Premier promising a future meeting. While there are issues to address, BLMTO has the making of a strong public sphere.

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