Organizational Advocacy for Racial Justice: A Thematic Content Analysis of Corporate Twitter Statements

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Article Information	Abstract
	This study analyzes and classifies the content of organizational advocacy (OA) messages using a thematic content analysis. Data was collected by capturing the Twitter statements made by the top 100 American brands in response to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Findings revealed that the statements contained two main themes: framing and acting. Corporations framed their support of racial justice by naming the issue, expressing solidarity, and establishing the shot. Corporations indicated taking specific actions including self-facing (e.g., diversity training), other-facing (e.g., donations), and brand-promoting (e.g., incorporating brand values/slogans/logos). This study adds to OA research as a separate paradigm in public relations (PR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and as a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of OA statements.

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, public outrage concerning the killings of unarmed Black persons reached a boiling point in the United States with the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. These deaths along with the triggering event of the video of George Floyd's murder at the hands of police sparked a months-long nationwide protest for addressing racial inequality that saw over 26 million demonstrators (Buchanan et al., 2020). In the days following George Floyd's murder, thousands of organizations, both big and small, posted public statements on social media in support of racial justice and social change (Mull, 2020).

Corporations voicing opinions on sociopolitical issues is noteworthy as scholars have long debated the nature of business-society relationships, and Fyke et al. (2016) opined that "historically, businesses have been imagined as one of the great social institutions capable of the greatest social change" (p. 218). This imagining of the private sector has been tarnished by the seemingly singular pursuit of corporate self-interest over public interest (e.g., The Meltdown of 2001 and the Great Recession of 2008). However, recent discourse suggests that the public increasingly expects corporate leaders to speak out and act upon the public interest (APCO Worldwide LLC, 2018; Austin et al., 2019; Dodd, 2018; Edelman, 2020). Although companies have traditionally shied away from voicing their opinion on controversial sociopolitical issues (Antonette, 2019; Davis, 2016), more and more corporate leaders have embraced this new paradigm that businesses have a responsibility beyond mere profitability to help pave the path for social change (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018).

Several prominent examples of corporations advocating for social change include Salesforce CEO Mark Benioff leading a coalition against Indiana's Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 2015, and Nike making former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick the face of its Just Do It 30th Anniversary campaign in support of Kaepernick's stance on racial injustice. These examples jointly demonstrate how the role business plays in the public sphere is shifting from the predominant public relations (PR) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) model to a Public Interest Communications (PIC) model demonstrated through organizational advocacy (OA) (Dodd, 2018). PIC, as Christiano (2017) eloquently described it, is a "special form of communications whose unique role is taking on the world's demons and inequities. It transcends the interest of any single institution or individual" (p. 6). The transcendent nature of PIC in the corporate context of OA makes it markedly different from traditional CSR communications. Although CSR debatably serves the public interest (Dutta, 2019), its focus is still on the company's self-interests. OA, on the other hand, constitutes a company's engagement in a controversial sociopolitical issue knowing their stated position may negatively impact their business interests with some stakeholders (Browning et al., 2020).

A primary goal of PIC is to influence individuals' beliefs and attitudes and, perhaps more importantly, to persuade people to act on the public issue at hand (Christiano, 2017). However, corporate influence on social issues is fraught with challenges. The public often questions a company's true intentions (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Kim & Lee, 2009) and may view corporate attempts at social consciousness as woke-washing or bandwagoning (Parcha & Kingsley Westerman, 2020; Spry et al., 2018). Negative perceptions can result in diminished opinions toward both the company and the issue (Chatterji & Toffell, 2019).

Since persuasion is at the heart of PIC, and because ineffective messages can be detrimental to the company and cause, it is important to examine the content of corporate OA messages. What accounts for message quality is often overlooked in social influence studies of strong versus weak arguments (Areni, 2003). Seyranian (2017) argued that discerning the essence of persuasive communication will provide PIC researchers and practitioners with a prescriptive model of effective change communication. The purpose of this study is thus to identify and

characterize the content of OA messages to lay the foundations to research and test the necessary content for effective OA messaging. Specifically, this study uses a qualitative content analysis to identify emergent themes from corporate tweets in response to the racial justice protests stemming from the murder of George Floyd. This research aims to advance the field of PIC, further the conceptualization of OA, and inform PR research and practices engaging in activism campaigns.

Literature review

Public interest communications

PIC is a burgeoning discipline emerging from the strategic communication fields of PR and marketing and intersects with the social sciences of psychology, sociology, and political science. PIC is a strategic communication campaign with the goal of achieving positive behavioral change and action on a public issue that goes beyond the particular interest of any one entity (Fessmann, 2016).

The growth of PIC coincides with shifting public expectations and opinions about the roles of business, government, and non-profit organizations in advancing the human condition. The public trust in government and news media has cratered with the general public distrusting both the government and media, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2020). As globalization and pluralism weaken the legitimacy of nation-states (Dodd, 2018), the public increasingly expects and even pressures corporations to protect public rights and engage in solving sociopolitical problems (APCO Worldwide LLC, 2018; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Business institutions have begun to respond to this new business-society relationship by engaging in PIC on issues such as gun control, climate change, LGTBQ+ rights, and others. As Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff wrote in an opinion article in *The New York Times* (2019), "It's time for a new capitalism—a more fair, equal and sustainable capitalism that actually works for everyone and where businesses…don't just take from society but truly give back and have a positive impact" (para. 8).

Corporate action for the public good

Traditionally, companies have promoted the public good through the PR function of CSR. CSR initiatives are designed to enhance the legitimacy of the corporation through the management of reputation and stakeholder relationships, most often through philanthropy, volunteerism, and sustainability (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Gaither et al., 2018). These activities are meant to fulfill social responsibilities in a way that mitigates reputational and financial loss by generating positive perceptions of the company (Bhattacharya, 1999) and thus tend to be noncontroversial and supported by most stakeholders (Dodd, 2018; Smith & Alexander, 2013).

This definition and purpose of CSR does not coincide with the examples discussed previously of companies taking actions on socially and politically charged issues—nor do CSR actions fulfill the assumptions of PIC in two principal ways. First, although CSR initiatives do create public good, ultimately CSR is meant to serve the organization (L. A. Grunig et al., 1992). For actions to be considered PIC, the public's interests must be foremost, such that concerns about the company's interests are secondary, if considered at all (Fessmann, 2017). The second key difference is the view on relationships; PR focuses on the management of relationships, whereas relationships in PIC are secondary and even expendable if a relationship is hindering the achievement of positive change.

Corporate actions that move beyond the palatable corporate citizenship of CSR demand a new category—OA. OA occurs when a company signals their values to stakeholders by taking a stance on a controversial sociopolitical issue, knowing that their position will undoubtedly disenfranchise some stakeholders while ingratiating themselves to others (Browning et al, 2020). OA defies conventional PR advice to avoid or remain neutral on controversial issues to avoid alienating stakeholders (Korschun et al., 2019). OA actions are an attempt to influence public opinion and policy despite there being a lack of societal consensus on the issue. This issue may or may not be relevant to the company's core business operations, nor is the motive behind the advocacy judged.

Motive and relevancy are two characteristics noted by Browning and colleagues (2020) that differentiate OA from two other burgeoning concepts in PIC research: 1) corporate political advocacy (CPA) and 2) corporate social advocacy (CSA). Although the central conceit that companies publicly take a stance on controversial sociopolitical issues is the same among all three, a brief discussion of these differences is warranted to justify the use of OA over the other two concepts and to further the intellectual discussion on how and whether these concepts are convergent and discriminant.

First, both CPA and CSA assume a motive behind the organization's actions. In CPA, the motive is considered normative and is meant to serve the public interest regardless of private interest because it is the right thing to do (Baur & Wettstein, 2016). CSA, on the other hand, contends that due to the polarizing nature of the advocacy, financial outcomes must be emphasized, thus making the motive instrumental (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Identifying intentionality is problematic—one may locate intent within the sender, the receiver, or interactionally (Stamp & Knapp, 1990). For example, Nike may support Black Lives Matter because Nike feels it is the right thing to do, placing the intent within the sender; however, if the public believes Nike is supporting Black Lives Matter to pander to a particular target market, then the motive is located in the receiver. Interactionally, meaning is socially constructed based upon previous and current context and is redefined over time (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Nike's original support may be defined by receivers as instrumental to help the company, but if Nike continues advocacy for racial justice, then meaning may be redefined as normative. This becomes a problem identifying whether Nike's action should be classified as CPA or CSA. OA departs from CPA and CSA by emphasizing the controversial nature of the organization's public

stance rather than the motive behind the act (Browning et al., 2020). The motive may be normative, instrumental, or mixed.

Second, as conceptualized by Dodd and Supa (2014) and Baur and Wettstein (2016), respectively, both CSA and CPA assert that for the action to be considered advocacy, the supported issue should be divorced from any relevance to the organization's core business. Determining the relevancy of an issue to an organization's operations also can be problematic. To use Nike as an exemplar again, Nike's core business interests revolve around selling fashionable sports apparel. On the surface, Nike's support of Black Lives Matter may appear to have little relevance with their core business; however, Nike built its empire upon the celebrity of African American athletes, and, according to Simmons Research, African Americans are 56% more likely to buy Nike products than the national average (Chinni & Bronston, 2018). This key target market of African Americans thus complicates whether Nike's advocacy for Black Lives Matter is divorced from its core business interests. Browning et al. (2020) contend that "no predetermined congruence between company and cause defines whether an organization engages in advocacy" (p. 5). It is the signaling of company values to stakeholders by taking a public stance for particular ideals over others that defines advocacy.

Determining the relevance of an issue to the business advocating for it, or the business's motive behind the advocacy, is fraught with difficulty. What matters according to the tenets of PIC is whether the issue advances the public good and whether the company's interests do not supersede other's interests. The authors contend that OA conceptualizes this more effectively than CPA and CSA; however, given that all three are relatively similar, further debate is required in crystalizing these concepts.

Public response to corporate advocacy

While developing advocacy messaging, company leaders need to be aware of the potential effects of their advocacy as it can lead from public backlashes for perceived woke-washing (Spry et al., 2018) to positive offline public action advancing the cause (Cheong & Lee, 2010). Since OA was first conceived (Browning et al., 2020), and given the large conceptual overlap between CPA and CSA, the literature from all three research streams was used in exploring the effects that advocacy has on individuals and the firm.

A company's advocacy for an issue can influence both an individual's opinion on the issue and their purchase intentions toward the firm's products/services (Chatterji & Toffell, 2019). Supporters' opinions toward the issue and their purchase intentions toward the company's products tend to rise in response to advocacy, while detractors' opinions and purchase intentions tend to fall. However, negative effects tend to be stronger than positive effects, with a detractor's opinion and purchase intention falling more than the rise in a supporter's (Chatterji & Toffell, 2019; Dodd & Supa, 2014, 2015). Furthermore, the more controversial the issue, the greater the chance that advocacy has a negative effect on brand equity (Brenstad & Sølsnes, 2019) with boycotters being more actively engaged than buycotters (Rim et al., 2020). Finally, consumer

response depends on whether the company portrays itself as values-driven—consumers expect companies that espouse their values to speak out, and if that company stays silent, then consumers respond negatively due to the perceived hypocrisy (Korschun et al., 2019).

Advocacy message content

Given that the consequences of advocacy messages can span the spectrum from negative to positive as detailed in the previous section, it is vital to understand what is being communicated in advocacy messages. Seyranian (2017) argued that the content constituting message quality in social influence studies has often been overlooked, and that message content is clearly of importance as it influences an individual's responses. Research related to corporate PR messaging indicates that the use of concrete language increases individual's engagement on social media (e.g., share, like; Park & Jiang, 2020). Additionally, including action steps in the content increases feelings of trust, authenticity, and credibility of the company (Heffron, 2019), as do messages directly from the CEO (Brenstad & Sølsnes, 2019).

The research on corporate advocacy demonstrates its potential effects on the public's support of an issue and the public's behavioral intentions toward the advocating firm. Existing research also reveals that a statement's impact is affected by its incorporation of concrete language, action steps, and signatory. It is thus important to further identify and categorize the content of OA statements. To begin this inquiry, this study focuses on exploring what types of content were posted in social media messages by organizations during the height of the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020.

Social media, and Twitter in particular, have become a popular communication medium for corporations to share information about their CSR activities (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013), with approximately a quarter of all corporate tweets dedicated to CSR efforts (Etter, 2014). Specific attributes of Twitter make it especially appealing for corporate communication with publics. Twitter affords direct access to followers, message dissemination to a broader audience, multi-way communication between and among followers, and control of self-image. Since Twitter has become a primary source for corporations to communicate with the public regarding their advocacy of social issues, it is important to examine the content of their advocacy tweets. As such, the following research question is posed to guide this study:

RQ: What messages were present in corporate OA statements posted to Twitter immediately following the George Floyd triggering event?

Method

Data collection

Given the large volume of both citizen and organizational communication regarding the police killing of George Floyd, it was necessary to identify a sample frame to acquire OA messages. We decided to use Kantar's (2020) *BrandZ™ Top 100 Most Valuable US Brands* report. Kantar is the world's leading marketing data, insight, and consultancy firm and is part of the WPP conglomerate of media, PR, and advertising companies. This report provided us with an empirical list of prominent companies representing a cross-section of industry sectors (e.g., consumer goods, finance, technology, energy) whose communication has a mass public reach given their standing as top U.S. brands.

Next, we reviewed the Twitter accounts of each company in the *BrandZ™ Top 100 Most Valuable US Brands* to discover whether the companies tweeted about the incident. We chose to focus specifically on Twitter due to its popularity with U.S. consumers and its recognized value as a communicative tool for PR as detailed above. In terms of consumer popularity, Twitter has 192 million active daily users, 37 million of whom are U.S.-based and a 27% year over year growth rate (Twitter, 2021). We restricted the timeframe of our Twitter search from May 25, 2020 to June 7, 2020. May 25, 2020 was the date of the George Floyd tragedy. Collective public action protesting racism and police brutality resulted in an organized day on June 2 to express support toward the African American community on social media aptly called Blackout Tuesday. On this day, social media users were encouraged to post a black square. Due to the intense media coverage of George Floyd's death, subsequent protests, as well as the highly publicized Blackout Tuesday event, we felt that companies that had not made a public statement by the end of that week on June 7 had made the choice to stay silent. We captured screenshots of the initial post for each organization that tweeted in response to the ongoing events, resulting in 80 tweets representing 80% of the companies on the Kantar list.

Coding & analysis

As no a priori codes existed in the literature regarding content of OA messaging, we took an inductive approach to identify initial themes and categories frequently occurring in the dataset (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). We individually coded half of the Twitter statements and then engaged in a data conference to share our codes with one another. We compared representative statements and codes to gain synergy and alignment with our codebooks. We then combined all of our open codes and uploaded the data into Atlas.ti to assist with further coding refinement and retrieval. This process resulted in the initial articulation of approximately 35 open codes.

We then held another data conference to begin the process of axial coding. We discussed the 35 open codes and looked for patterns, consistencies, and overlap for the purposes of building

code families. Guided by our research question, which explores OA and messaging, we created seven code families that represented our 35 initial open codes.

Once code families were in place, we processed the data by looking for semantic relationships among the codes (Spradley, 1979). We examined each code family by looking for patterns, connections, and contradictions, which enabled us to collapse similar codes and eliminate redundancies. As we processed the data, we went back on numerous occasions to revisit the Twitter statements in a more holistic manner. Through this iterative process, we identified two themes and six categories.

To establish the veracity of our content analysis, two pairs of raters were trained in the coding of the data. All raters were undergraduate students who volunteered. Each rater coded 100% of the posts ($N = 80$). The first set of coders was used as a pretest to help validate and refine the conceptualizations of the categories. After subsequent changes were made to the codebook, a second pair of raters coded the posts. Cohen's Kappa was used to evaluate the extent to which there was agreement between the raters. The interrater reliability (IRR) Kappa values for the coded categories ranged from 0.628 to 0.965 (see Table 1). The commonly agreed upon interpretation of Kappa is that values between 0.61 and 0.80 are substantial, and values greater than 0.81 are considered almost perfect (Cohen, 1960). Given this rule, all the coding categories should be considered reliable.

Results

We found that OA messages aligned under two specific themes: framing and acting. Framing focuses on how an organization centers itself publicly in the conversation on the issue. Acting involves the organization's next steps regarding the issue. See Table 1 for coding categories, and their respective definitions, examples, IRR, and frequencies.

Table 1

Categories within organizational advocacy messages identified via content analysis

Category	Definition	Example	Cohen's κ	Frequency
Framing				
Naming the Issue	Explicitly names the issue that prompted the message	We refuse to accept racism, intolerance, and inequality in our workplaces and community.	.945	86%
Establishing the Shot	Provides details about the event which incited the statement	The senseless killing of George Floyd calls upon us all to speak and act against racism.	.965	34%
Expressing Solidarity	Support for the aggrieved group is stated through words, and/or visuals	We stand with the Black community 🖐 🖐	.741	76%
Acting				
Self-Facing	Provides concrete details about actions being taken internally to primarily affect the organization itself	We are creating a task force to examine inequality in our workplace.	.875	15%
Other-Facing	Provides concrete details about actions being taken toward parties external to the organization	We're donating over $1.3 million to NAACP LDF and the EJI.	.875	28%
Brand Promotion	Using words, phrases, and/or imagery that reference the organization	A world where black people are accepted everywhere. That's where we want to be. *	.628	73%

Note. Number of organizations in sample = 80.

* Visa incorporating its tagline "Everywhere you want to be" into the message

Framing

Framing explores how the organization demonstrates its position toward the issue. Specifically, we found three choices that organizations were making in the context of racial justice messages: Naming the Issue, Establishing the Shot, and Expressing Solidarity.

Naming the issue

This category focuses on whether the organization explicitly makes salient the sociopolitical issue or else avoids articulating the issue that prompted the message. Posts were coded as (0) not

stating the issue or (1) stating the issue. In this case, organizations must have addressed racial justice in some capacity. Most frequently, messages that named the issue used language such as racism, racial discrimination, and racial inequality. An example of a tweet that did not name the issue read, "We stand with our colleagues in the Black community." Although that tweet expressed solidarity (see category below), the tweet does not inform the reader about what the organization is standing for. Of the 80 Twitter posts in the sample, 86% named the issue and 14% avoided naming the issue. The IRR was almost perfect between the two coders with $\kappa =$ .945 (95% CI, .803 to 1.000), $p < .001$.

Establishing the shot

The term *establishing shot* is borrowed from filmmaking. The purpose of an establishing shot is to set up the context of the scene for the audience (Petrie & Boggs, 2017). It often denotes the time and place of the scene as well as the relationship of the characters to the scene. Leveraging this concept for this study, the use of establishing the shot evokes a very specific time and place in the mind of the audience by centering the advocacy in its historical context. To be coded in this category, messages had to include specific information about the triggering event, defined as the event which prompted the organization to post a statement. In this case, messages had to reference specific details or instances of racial injustice and/or police brutality. Several tweets cited George Floyd and other victims of police brutality by name (e.g., Breonna Taylor, David McAtee, Michael Brown) and located the time and place of these tragedies (e.g., Minneapolis, May 25). The following example captures the meaning of this category well: "We are deeply disturbed by what unfolded in Minneapolis last week and saddened to see the pain, frustration and anguish boil over in our communities following the death of George Floyd." Of the 80 tweets, 27 (34%; $\kappa = .965$) provided contextual details establishing the shot for their OA.

Expressing solidarity

Organizations further framed their message by choosing whether to express support for the party primarily affected by the issue. It was found that organizations expressed their solidarity in three main ways: (1) words only, (2) visuals only, and (3) both words and visuals. Visual symbols included the use of images, colors, and emojis. Tweets commonly used the phrases "stand with the African-American community" ($n = 34$) and "Black Lives Matter" ($n = 17$) to verbally express support and predominately used a Black colored background ($n = 45$) to visually demonstrate solidarity. The clenched Black fist emoji (✊🏿) was also a noteworthy use of visual support. Overall, 61 tweets (76%) expressed explicit support for African Americans. Of those 61 tweets, 26% used only words to express solidarity, 25% used only visuals, and 49% used both words and visuals. This category had substantial IRR with $\kappa = .741$ (95% CI, .500 to .913), $p <$ .001.

To summarize the first theme, framing focuses on how organizations choose to center themselves in OA conversations. This framing is accomplished using three methods: 1) naming

the issue, 2) establishing the shot, and 3) expressing solidarity. With naming the issue, organizations clearly state the issue they are advocating. Establishing the shot provides context and background for taking the stance. Finally, expressing solidarity highlights the group the organization is supporting.

Acting

The second theme focuses on the actions that the organization is taking, or will be taking, with regard to the issue. We found three specific actions that organizations may engage in: (a) self-facing actions, (b) other-facing actions, and (c) brand promotion.

Self-facing

Self-facing actions are interna, and primarily affect the organization itself (e.g., forming a diversity committee, seeking employee input). These actions center on what organizations can do internally to advocate for the cause and can influence organizational policy and culture. For example, one company stated that it was actively "hosting open and necessary conversations with our partners (employees) about racism." Another corporation announced that it was "accelerating our efforts in all areas of Diversity & Inclusion, including hiring, advancement and anti-bias and anti-racism training." Organizations reported self-facing actions in 15% ($n =12$) of the posts, and the category had an IRR of $\kappa = .875$ (95% CI, .761 to .968), $p < .001$.

Other-facing

Other-facing actions are external and primarily affect parties outside of the organization (e.g., donations, grants). These actions center on what organizations can do externally to advocate for the cause and affect institutions beyond the organization's direct involvement. Details of these other-facing actions predominately involved monetary pledges to organizations such as the Urban Defense League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the United Negro College Fund. For example, one corporation tweeted, "We're pledging $1M to help fight racial injustice w/ grants to two organizations: the National Urban League and the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund." Organizations detailed other-facing actions in 28% ($n = 22$) of the posts, and the category had an IRR of $\kappa = .875$ (95% CI, .761 to .968), $p < .001$.

Overall, 46% ($n = 37$) of the companies in the sample stated that they were taking action. However, 10 of those organizations did not provide details on the extent of those actions. Since those posts could not be categorized into either self- or other-facing actions, they were not included in the frequency calculation. Additionally, self- and other-facing actions are not mutually exclusive. Seven organizations provided details for both in their statements.

Brand promotion

The use of words, phrases, and/or images referencing the company's name, slogan, logo, and/or values is designated as brand promotion. These company identifiers must have been included in the actual message itself. As such, the Twitter handle and profile picture were not considered brand promotion. Incorporating the company name, logo, etc. into the message is a rhetorical device of relation meant to merge the organization's brand identity with the specific cause. The inclusion of brand identifiers is meant to remind the audience of the author of the message, and, given the sharing nature of social media, ensures that the author is known regardless of where the message is seen. Brand promotion was very prevalent in the sample with 73% ($n = 58$) of the posts containing some reference to the company ($\kappa = .628$ (95% CI, .422 to .806), $p < .001$). Most frequently, brand promotion consisted of using the company name or logo as a signatory, but several companies attempted to work their slogan into the message. Visa's attempt at combining its slogan, "Everywhere you want to be," with advocacy was readily apparent in its tweet, "A world where Black people are accepted everywhere. That's where we want to be."

In summary, the second theme, acting, focuses on three specific actions companies were taking in response to the cause of racial justice. The first two, self- and other-facing action, identify what the organization is pledging to do in regard to the cause. Self-facing actions are internal and designed to address the issue within the organization itself; whereas other-facing actions are external and aid institutions outside of the organization's control. Brand promotion highlights the ways that organizations act to link their brand identity to the cause.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to extend our understanding of OA as a unique area of inquiry related to yet separate from CSR and CSA/CPA. CSR research focuses on consumers' cognitive reactions toward the company, brand, or particular CSR activities (Peloza & Shang, 2011; Xie et al, 2019) and how those reactions relate to the organization's financial bottom line (Bowman & Haire, 1975; Brower & Mahajan, 2012; Margolis et al, 2009; Roman et al., 1999). PIC such as OA differs from CSR in that the public good supersedes any business self-interest (Fessmann, 2016). In CSR, companies tend to partake in philanthropic actions toward noncontroversial issues that most stakeholders generally agree are good, thus allowing companies to manage reputation and legitimacy with stakeholders. OA goes beyond noncontroversial CSR issues to cover what happens when an organization takes a public stance on a controversial sociopolitical issue. Organizations communicate these messages because decision makers believe that the stance is the morally just action to advance the public interest. Companies recognize that taking such a stance will alienate some of their stakeholders and be championed by others. This willingness to acknowledge that such actions may upset stakeholders distinguishes OA from CSR.

The differences among OA, CPA, and CSA are more nuanced than with CSR and demand further debate. All three describe public interest actions taken by the private corporate sectors,

but they differ in their stance on motive and relevance. Corporate motive for undertaking the actions and the relevance of the actions to the core business are determinates of whether an action can be classified as CSA or CPA. OA disregards those problematic determinates by emphasizing the controversial nature of the taken stance and the willingness to fracture relationships with certain stakeholders.

As corporations are becoming more active in advocacy for sociopolitical issues, especially controversial issues, categorizing elements in public statements is a key initial step in understanding the impact OA may have. In response, we conducted a thematic analysis of tweets posted by the top U.S. brands in the wake of the murder of George Floyd. Our findings indicate that these OA statements contained two central themes of (1) framing and (2) acting with each theme containing three categories: (1a) naming the issue, (1b) establishing the shot, and (1c) expressing solidarity under the framing theme and (2a) self-facing, (2b) other-facing, and (2c) brand promotion within the acting theme.

The first theme, framing, denotes how an organization chooses to center itself within the controversy. Results reveal that organizations indicate their position on a cause through 1) the explicit pronouncement of the controversial issue, 2) the inclusion of details establishing the context surrounding the issue, and 3) the expression of support toward a group aggrieved by the issue. Each of these three categories received strong reliability between the raters, and, in the case of (1) naming the issue and (3) establishing solidarity, a high frequency of use by organizations.

The second theme, acting, builds upon the framing by posing the question "what is the organization doing in regard to the issue?" Acting centers around three types of actions: (a) self-facing, (b) other-facing, and (c) brand promotion. Self-facing refers to internal accountability while other-facing actions are directed outside of the context of the organization. Brand promotion encapsulates the ways corporations promote themselves along with their advocacy. All three categories had a high level of reliability; however, only brand promotion had a high frequency of use and was quite prevalent with approximately three-quarters of the companies incorporating their brand identity into their messaging.

Two key implications emerged from our study. First, although all six categories were used in various Twitter statements, naming the issue and expressing solidarity reported a high frequency of usage. Given the popularity of social media coupled with Twitter's impact on media reporting, it has perhaps become standard operating procedure to directly acknowledge the issue and express empathy with those affected. Organizations may no longer enjoy the privilege of choosing to remain silent. Being abstract could be costly, however, as the concreteness of language in advocacy statements is directly correlated to consumer behavior (Park & Jiang, 2020). At least on Twitter, these types of OA messages may become a standard component of PR practices.

In examining expressing solidarity, one interesting finding was the use of emojis as image-based support. As a visual shorthand for a variety of things including objects, emotions, and concepts, emojis can affect how an individual interprets the meaning of the message. Kelly

(2015) indicates that emojis are primarily used to convey emotions, while Kaye et al. (2016) found that the use of emojis augments the communicative intent through the enhanced expression of emotion. Emojis can reduce the ambiguity of the message and increase the positive perception of the message (Riordan, 2017) if the receiver interprets the emoji similarly as the sender intended (Miller et al, 2016). Expressing solidarity, especially through visuals and emojis, may enhance the audience's feelings of social identity. Future research should apply social identity framing theory (Seyranian, 2014) to examine how expressing solidarity in OA statements may build support and mobilization for social change.

Second, brand promotion also had a high frequency of use reinforcing the relationship between OA and PR. This type of OA message directly connects the issue back to the brand itself. Having a brand identifier (e.g., logo, signatory, values statement) in the message assures that the audience will know who wrote the message regardless of whether the message has been shared, copied, etc. from the original source. As individuals often encounter social media message divorced from the original author, this technique could be useful to make sure that the brand remains attached to the advocated issue. Since a content analysis cannot determine the efficacy of using brand promotion, further research should explore how individuals perceive its varied use. Research indicates that consumer response toward a company espousing its values depends on whether the company has portrayed itself as profits-driven or values-driven (Korschun et al., 2019). For companies that are profits-driven, speaking out can lead to negative reactions, but for values-driven companies, not speaking out leads to negative responses.

Applications

This study presents additional opportunities for future research and application for organizations seeking to communicate OA messages. First, inter- and multi-disciplinary scholarship is highly encouraged. Though this study's focus was on OA as it relates to corporate communication and PR, this strand of research also can branch to political science and political communication as lines of inquiry. As civically mindful practices in PR, CSR, and OA continue to gain scholarly focus, a collaborative lens would allow for a broader consideration of how company brands and OA messages can impact the sociopolitical landscape. The questions posed in those disciplines would expand the conversation beyond the brand-consumer conversation by placing it in a larger context subject to more critical lines of inquiry.

To expand this study specifically, we encourage a follow-up project that explores the relationship between OA statements and consumer attitudes and behaviors. Studies indicate that advocacy statements can influence individual's opinions toward the issue and purchase intentions toward the company (e.g., Chatterji & Toffell, 2019). A future study can examine whether any of the identified categories from this study are mediators of that change. Future studies also can examine how these categories may affect consumer perceptions of trust and authenticity with the organization-public relationship.

In terms of disseminating OA statements through social media, organizations need to think strategically and think about unintended consequences. For example, the New York Police Department's pose and post with the police social media campaign was co-opted to feature depictions of police brutality (Fern-Banks, 2017). As such, the results of this study can be used as recommendations for an organizational messaging strategy to help campaigns proactively account for unintended consequences (e.g., backlash, cancelling, co-opting of the message). Specifically, we offer the following recommendations for organizations seeking to engage in OA messaging through social media. First name the issue. Almost all the statements analyzed named racial justice in some capacity as the current issue at hand. From there, we encourage organizations to express solidarity. It is important that thoughtful, transparent, and critical conversations occur regarding language choices and message deployment. Such conversations should not be rushed and should be a collaborative group decision and vetting process. For example, in this study, we would not recommend that a homogenous group of White individuals be the only participants in these conversations. Additionally, when bringing in voices of nondominant group members, do it authentically.

Acting also should be considered when crafting OA statements. As several of the analyzed statements noted, "Talk is cheap," and it is not enough to frame the issue. Instead, an organization should be ready to commit to action. The organization can choose to commit to internal actions, external actions, or a combination of both. Surprisingly, detailing action steps was not prevalent among our sample—only 15% of the companies in our sample detailed internal actions and 28% external actions. The exclusion of acting in the OA message may be a lost opportunity as research has demonstrated that including action steps in advocacy statements increases feelings of trust, authenticity, and credibility (Heffron, 2019). While thinking through what the action should be, we recommend highlighting and amplifying the voices and activists who have been in the fight. For example, we would recommend that the corporations that we analyzed for this study provide actions that uplift Black voices, activists, and organizations. These organizations have long been calling for and working for Black Lives Matter; external actions should draw the public's attention to these organizations. Finally, organizations should be cautious about self or brand promotion. If the company is perceived as profits-driven as opposed to values-driven, then its actions could be viewed as exploitative, similar to pinkwashing and greenwashing.

Limitations

The findings and conclusions of the current study are representative of the content organizations may include in advocacy statements, but there are a few limitations. First, the content analysis only focused on the top 100 U.S. brands. Given the size and scope of these national brands, their decision to advocate or not, and what they include in a tweet may differ from regional and/or local businesses. The inclusion of international brands to the sample may also be appropriate in examining OA messages in domestic sociopolitical issues. Global brands such as Toyota and

Samsung were not included as they are not U.S. based; however, they have considerable brand recognition and consumer market share in the United States. Their foreign status may impact their decision to advocate and/or the nature of their advocacy. A cross-sectional comparison would allow researchers to identify if these and other factors influence the content of OA messages. Finally, this is a study of a reaction to a single incident. The findings should be further validated by additional studies on OA responses to other controversial sociopolitical issues. Such validation would help determine the generalization of categories and themes across events and potentially add to the exhaustive category list.

In conclusion, 80 of the Kantar's Top 100 U.S. Brands posted what we considered to be OA statements on racial justice. A thematic content analysis identified two main themes of framing and acting, with each theme containing three categories, all of which obtained high levels of IRR. This study may serve as a base for further research and exploration of OA as a burgeoning way of thinking about CSR and PIC and to provide practical knowledge in the field of PR to assist practitioners in the creation and dissemination of respectful and inclusive messages.

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