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JPIC Editorial Board

Special thanks to our reviewers

We would like to take this opportunity to extend a special thanks to the reviewers who contributed to the June 2022 issue. Your expertise and hard work make our journal's success possible.

Melissa Adams, Colleen Connolly-Ahern, Corey Hickerson, Myleea Hill, Dean Kruckeberg, Chris McCollough, Dean Mundy, Xiaochen Zhang

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JPIC Farewell Editor's Essay

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It has been a pleasure serving as Executive Editor of the *Journal of Public Interest Communications* since its inception in 2017. In these 5+ years, we have published 54 articles from authors from around the globe. These articles and authors have had an immense impact on building the field and creating the theoretical groundwork of public interest communications. Thank you to our authors for sharing your knowledge with *JPIC* and the world and for taking a chance on a new journal. I know taking such a leap is not easy, especially when on the tenure clock. However, without you sharing your work and knowledge, there would be very little theoretical basis to PIC.

Serving as Executive Editor has allowed me to witness this new area of communication emerge and become part of what we teach and research. It has been exciting to be a part of this development, and it has been an honor to work with talented and incredible editorial teams throughout these years. I have learned so much from the experience. I saw how a journal was built from the ground floor up; I became a better time manager; I understood the need for empathy in some situations as well as the need to make a tough decision; and I became a better editor of others' and my own writing. However, I did not do this work alone.

A huge thank you to former College of Journalism and Communications Dean Diane McFarland and current Dean Hub Brown and Executive Associate Dean Spiro Kiousis at the University of Florida for their continued support of and investment in *JPIC* and PIC. If you did not have the vision to see the importance of PIC, *JPIC* would not exist.

Thank yous are also owed to my Managing Editors—Lauren Griffin, Kelly Chernin, and Joseph Radice. Lauren, who served as *JPIC*'s first journal manager, helped me with establishing our guidelines and editorial board and did all the initial heavy lifting to create *JPIC*'s website via the Public Knowledge Project hosted by UF Libraries. Kelly Chernin helped bring *JPIC* to the next level by pursuing *JPIC*'s indexing within the Directory of Open Access Journals as well as working to establish DOI numbers for *JPIC*. These tasks might not seem like much, but they took hours upon hours of work and helped ensure the quality and reputation of the journal. Her

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additional work with practitioner interviews further broadened the scope of *JPIC*. Joseph Radice has served as Managing Editor the last three years and has brought a keen eye and excellent editing skills, and has supplied important advice. Joseph has been a constant and ever reliable partner in this endeavor. I never had a worry about anything—I always knew Joseph could handle any issue and would help with any task. And, did I mention, he's my go-to for all questions about APA Style? Without Joseph the day-to-day operations of *JPIC* would not have been as smooth. Each of my Managing Editors contributed in different ways, and I could not have asked for a better group to assist me. I appreciate all your help with responding to authors, allowing manuscripts to flow, keeping track of reviewers, and copy editing, formatting, and publishing each issue. I also thank Jasper Fessmann, who was the associate editor for the inaugural issue, and worked with Lauren to outline the mission of *JPIC* as well as create the journal's graphic identity and formatting style for manuscripts.

My heartfelt thanks must be given to my Journal Supervisor, Linda Hon, who is the consummate mentor. Without her guidance I never would have been able to bring *JPIC* to where it is. I wouldn't have known even where to start. Linda was there every step of the way and there was no task she refused—even helping to copy edit issues with close to 200 pages of content. Linda has been instrumental in establishing PIC as a distinct and important area of study not only through her work with the journal, but also with her teaching and her own research. Her theoretical contributions are unmatched, and I believe she should be thought of as a founding figure of PIC as we know it.

Finally, I want to thank our editorial board members and reviewers. Without you none of this work would be done. I appreciate your time and dedication to making *JPIC* a respected open-access outlet for peer-reviewed research. I know reviewing falls into those murky areas of unpaid labor that we all take on to keep academics going. A special thank you to those reviewers whom I leaned on when I needed a review completed because a scheduled review fell through—you know who you are.

Since 2017, *JPIC* has explored many issues such as diversity and various research approaches. Dialogue and its ability to build understanding to build ethical and moral communication was also examined. However, we did not shy away from issues that might be deemed more controversial either. For example, articles have investigated how to find stability and trust in times of chaos and change and others have asked, "What happens when we make private interests public ones?". In this last issue, authors delve into social media communication and PIC and demonstrate how Twitter in particular has become a site for contesting corporate communication power structures and how corporations use Twitter for organizational advocacy related to public interest issues.

During this time, *JPIC* had the opportunity to collaborate with the Public Relations Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. This partnership initiated by Richard Waters and Giselle Auger led to an amazing preconference session about PIC and a special issue of *JPIC* devoted to Advocacy and PIC. I again owe my sincere gratitude to Richard and Giselle for seeing this important alliance through. We also had an opportunity to

host a preconference at the International Communication Association—PIC in a Global Context. This preconference was also fertile ground for research and many of the contributors had their work published within *JPIC*, bringing unique ideas and perspectives to the journal.

I am proud of what we have accomplished in these five years, and I look forward to where *JPIC* will go next.

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Get Ratioed: Questioning the Fossil Fuel Industry's Social License to Operate on Twitter

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Abstract

Fossil fuel companies hold immense power to change the climate, impact public perceptions, and influence policy. Revoking their social license to operate is one strategy by which the public may resist harm done by the industry. Social license is built upon establishing legitimacy, credibility, and trust and is something that companies must earn from impacted communities to operate successfully. The current study uses a qualitative content analysis of tweets from fossil fuel organizations, as well as a selection of the replies to those posts, to examine how social media may be used to question these organizations' social license. Results show that replies consistently voice doubts about legitimacy and credibility. Implications for using this strategy in public interest campaigns are discussed.

Introduction

Climate change poses serious threats to many regions around the world (Abatzoglou et al., 2014b). The fossil fuel industry has contributed to climate change by producing products whose use results in greenhouse gas emissions (Griffin, 2017), spreading disinformation about the impacts of fossil fuels and the severity of climate change (Dunlap & McCright, 2011; Franta, 2021; Supran & Oreskes, 2017), and influencing policy to be more favorable to the fossil fuel industry (Karapin, 2020). Public interest issues include topics that have the potential to impact

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society's ability to benefit all its members (Fessmann, 2016). As a problem that has the potential to impact the wellbeing of communities across the globe, climate change may be considered a public interest issue (Seyranian, 2017) and public interest communications (PIC) has great potential to fight industry-driven disinformation about climate change (Fessmann, 2018). At the level of both organizational and individual communication, one option for fighting back against the fossil fuel industry's continued contributions to climate change is to revoke its social license (Frumhoff et al., 2015).

Companies need not only legal permission to successfully conduct business, but also the social license—society's acceptance and approval—to operate (Gunningham et al., 2004; Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Legitimacy, credibility, and trust are key components of social license that must be earned through ongoing relationships with communities impacted by a company's operations (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Projects may lose social license if communities perceive them as harmful (Hall et al., 2015) and, in the absence of social license, a project may not be able to continue (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018, Lyytimäki & Peltonen, 2016). Because communities have the power to grant or revoke social license, this concept gives the public a means to resist threats posed by powerful organizations (Gunster & Neubauer, 2019).

This exploratory study uses qualitative content analysis to examine how users question the fossil fuel industry's social license in response to issues management messages about environmental stewardship on Twitter. Six tweets (N = 6) from fossil fuel companies and a trade association, as well as a selection of replies (N = 444) to those posts, are examined through the lens of social license to pinpoint strategies for targeting legitimacy and credibility. Findings show that users frequently discuss these integral components of social license. Implications for this kind of social media communication as a potential tool for public interest campaigns are discussed.

Literature review

Impacts of the fossil fuel industry

Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which contributes to climate change (Abatzoglou et al., 2014a). Climate change, in turn, leads to rising temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events, negative effects on agricultural yields in some areas, more severe droughts for certain regions, and rising sea levels that will have negative impacts "for both human and natural systems" (Abatzoglou et al., 2014b, p. 92). The fossil fuel industry bears a great deal of responsibility for climate change. According to a 2017 report created in partnership with the Climate Accountability Institute, CDP (formerly the Carbon Disclosure Project) estimated that 71% of industrial greenhouse gas emissions could be linked to just 100 fossil fuel producing companies (Griffin, 2017).

Beyond simply producing these planet-warming fuels, however, the industry also has influenced policy and spread disinformation to encourage continued reliance on fossil fuels. In

1980, a publication from the American Petroleum Institute suggested that scientists at the time did not hold serious concern for climate change and believed, despite industry knowledge to the contrary, that burning fossil fuels would not be harmful (Franta, 2021). Companies such as Exxon have since sowed doubt among the public about the reality of climate change and the role that fossil fuels played in it by publishing advertisements styled as editorials in *The New York Times* (Supran & Oreskes, 2017). Meanwhile, research funded by Exxon and internal documents demonstrated that the company knew that climate change was occurring and was severe (Supran & Oreskes, 2017). Other companies also supported climate change denial through campaigns, front groups, and work with think tanks (Dunlap & McCright, 2011).

Furthermore, despite British Petroleum's CEO publicly acknowledging scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change in 1997, many fossil fuel companies spent the subsequent decades pushing against climate-friendly legislation and funding groups that worked to confuse the public about climate change (Frumhoff et al., 2015). Finally, a report from the Union of Concerned Scientists reviewed 85 documents from fossil fuel companies and trade associations that showed that the industry had funded research and strategized to work with scientists to call into question the role humans play in climate change and created organizations designed to look like grassroots efforts to oppose environmentally friendly policies (Mulvey et al., 2015).

Disinformation, the encouragement of uncertainty, and denial not only have the capacity to impact members of the public, but also policymakers (Dunlap & McCright, 2011; Franta, 2021; Supran & Oreskes, 2017). Additionally, the fossil fuel industry discouraged lawmakers in the United States from regulating carbon dioxide emissions, joining climate commitments, and making policies that support renewable energy (Karapin, 2020). These dishonest communications are in direct opposition to principles of ethical public relations, which include companies transparently sharing information and disclosing their role in campaigns (Plaisance, 2014) as well as ethical PIC, which demands endorsement only of scientifically sound solutions to public interest issues (Fessmann, 2017).

Considering that the fossil fuel industry sells products that contribute to climate change, spreads disinformation about the impacts of its activities and the reality of climate change, and influences policymakers to benefit the industry at the expense of climate action, it seems that fossil fuel companies have the power to do great harm to society. Frumhoff et al. (2015) suggest that revoking the social license of fossil fuel companies is one way to help prevent the damage they can do.

Social license

Social license, also referred to as social license to operate, means "the demands on and expectations for a business enterprise that emerge from neighborhoods, environmental groups, community members, and other elements of the surrounding civil society" (Gunningham et al., 2004, p. 308). These demands often go above and beyond the law, pressuring companies to engage in actions that are not legally required to maintain a certain level of approval among the

public, such as sourcing materials responsibly or responding to consumer concerns about the health impacts of products (Gunningham et al., 2004). The term was initially used in the context of the mining industry and meant that earning community acceptance was often comparable in importance to gaining legal approval to ensure a project's success (Cooney, 2017). Since then, social license has become a broadly adopted concept in industries such as aquaculture (Baines & Edwards, 2018), hydroelectric power (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018), fossil fuels (Curran, 2017), hunting (Darimont et al., 2020), and tourism (Schweinsberg et al., 2020).

Legitimacy, credibility, and trust are key components of social license that build off one another (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Upon establishing legitimacy, a company, industry, or project gains basic acceptance; later, once credibility is earned, a project may earn community approval; finally, this is followed by trust (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). At an organizational level, gaining legitimacy means that the public views an organization's actions as "desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). To continue to operate, organizations must maintain legitimacy and do work in a way that meets society's standards of acceptability (Deegan, 2002). At a project level, legitimacy involves showing that a project is following laws, treating affected people fairly, providing benefits to society, and offering the opportunity for members of the public to be meaningfully involved in a transparent decision-making process (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018; Smits et al., 2017). Corporate credibility may be considered "the extent to which consumers feel that the firm has the knowledge or ability to fulfill its claims and whether the firm can be trusted to tell the truth" (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001, p. 235). Credibility is established when a company can communicate reliable, digestible information and acts accordingly (Baines & Edwards, 2018, Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018).

Finally, trust can be considered "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712). Within Thomson and Boutilier's (2011) conceptualization of social license, trust comes because of legitimacy and credibility when community members feel able to play the role of active partners in a project and can rely on a company to act in a way that consistently benefits them (Hall et al., 2015; Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018; Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Although there is some overlap of these concepts in the literature, for the purposes of this paper, legitimacy will refer to the idea that people accept that a project or industry is legal, beneficial, and offers basic consideration to affected communities; credibility will refer to the dependable communication of accurate information, consistent treatment of stakeholders, and cohesion between communication and action; and trust will be considered the ability of stakeholders to view themselves as partners in a company's work.

Social license is something that must be earned (Hall et al., 2015), which can only be achieved through an ongoing process of engagement (Eabrasu et al., 2021). While seeking to gain social license for a project, companies may hire staff whose job it is to interact with impacted community members (Smits et al., 2017), compensate anyone who might need to be relocated (Eabrasu et al., 2021; Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018), offer community members the

opportunity to serve on committees related to a project (Eabrasu et al., 2021), or provide clear information about project plans to anyone in the community who would like to learn more (Hall et al., 2015). Meanwhile, for an established project, ongoing communication, providing avenues for community members to make their issues related to the company known and responding to those problems in a meaningful way are all key strategies for maintaining social license (Baines & Edwards, 2018). Additionally, using social media to interact with stakeholders and provide helpful information can be important in supporting social license (Howard, 2020). Consistent in the literature is the idea that companies must be transparent, honest, and responsive in their communication and community engagement if they are to have any hope of gaining and keeping social license.

If a company's work seems to pose a risk to a community, social license may be lost quickly (Hall et al., 2015). Threats that might cause communities to question social license for a company or activity include dangers to a local economy or landscape (Lyytimäki & Peltonen, 2016), risks to a community's way of life (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018), a mismatch between an activity and community norms or values (Darimont et al., 2020), or industry contributions to global issues, such as climate change (Schweinsberg et al., 2020). As discussed in the previous section, the fossil fuel industry is responsible for producing materials that contribute to climate change. Furthermore, the industry has spent decades misleading the public about climate change and discouraging policymakers from passing strong climate policies. These actions certainly pose risks to society, and it would be reasonable for the public to question the industry's social license in response to this behavior.

From the company perspective, organizations may make the mistake of viewing social license as a box to be checked by engaging in the bare minimum, legally required level of community engagement before a project (Curran, 2017). However, from the community perspective, social license is a valuable resource and revoking it can be a powerful way to protect community interests (Gunster & Neubauer, 2019). A lack of social license can cause the legal license of a company's activities to come into question (Curran, 2017) or halt a project altogether (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018, Lyytimäki & Peltonen, 2016). Furthermore, stakeholder theory underscores the idea that business success depends on consideration of all groups (stakeholders) that may be impacted by the work of an organization or that could impact the work of an organization, including communities that could be harmed by byproducts of an industrial process (Freeman et al., 2012). Businesses should create value rather than harm their stakeholder groups so that these groups, in turn, may help a business thrive (Freeman et al., 2012).

Understanding social license not as something that can be gained through minimal corporate effort, but instead as a valuable resource that stakeholders can take away has "radical, counter-hegemonic potential" (Gunster & Neubauer, 2019, p. 708). To question social license, individuals may protest in person or through media (Hanna et al., 2016). Additionally, Durham and Kellner (2012) note that the Internet "can aid progressive political struggles and movements" (p. 21) as they resist hegemony.

Online activism

The Internet has provided a plethora of possibilities for activism and, although some may deride online activism as slacktivism (Hanna et al., 2016), critical comments on social media can play a significant role in undermining the social license of a project, company, or industry if community members view it as undesirable (Darimont et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017). Hanna et al. (2016) compiled an impressive glossary of activism strategies that includes several activities applicable to online and social media settings, such as sharing satirical memes, "naming and shaming" (p. 229) guilty companies or individuals, communicating insults through political satire, tweeting about an issue, creating fake websites, sharing protest event information online, and hacking an organization's website. For some organizations involved in grassroots activism, online actions may be the most common kind of activity that their stakeholders engage in (Han et al., 2017), while for others the Internet can be a useful tool for mobilizing action on an issue (Şen & Şen, 2016).

Individuals and organizations have relied on social media to protest and raise awareness about topics, such as mistreatment of animals (Wonneberger et al., 2020), fracking (Larri & Whitehouse, 2019), climate change (Boulianne et al., 2020), and toxic waste (Kaur, 2014). Hanna et al. (2016) contend that social media protests have the potential to influence mass media and public opinion and that protests can shape broader social media conversation. Protests publicized through social media, such as Greta Thunberg's School Strike 4 Climate, can spark a global movement because social media are an excellent way to spread awareness and connect distant local events under the umbrella of a common cause (Boulianne et al., 2020). Beyond promoting formal protest, social media democratize the opportunity for the public to demand accountability in the face of unethical behavior (Neu et al., 2019).

Simply posting critical responses to an organization's online content or campaign can spark a serious conversation and potentially encourage change. Large numbers of comments expressing concern over ingredients in Kraft's macaroni and cheese, encouraged by an activist, garnered media attention and may have contributed to the company removing specific dyes from its product (Veil et al., 2015). Meanwhile, negative comments can gain attention of other users, causing both the original content and critical discourse to spread (Amezcua & Quintanilla, 2016) or lead to petitions and an overflow of conversation to multiple social media platforms (Kirkwood et al., 2019).

Whether it is used as the sole venue for activism or as a steppingstone toward in-person action, social media can play an important role in facilitating critical conversation, protest, and activism, which in turn function as important methods for calling social license into question. While some studies of social license consider individual projects (Curran, 2017; Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018; Lyytimäki & Peltonen, 2016), other scholars have investigated social license at the industry level (Baines & Edwards, 2018; Schweinsberg et al., 2020).

The current research specifically considers tweets to investigate how members of the public can use social media to question the fossil fuel industry's social license. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of tweets from fossil fuel organizations that provoke negative responses from Twitter users?

RQ2: How do Twitter users react to tweets from fossil fuel organizations that they find to be upsetting, inappropriate, disingenuous, or offensive?

RQ3: How do these reactions target the organization's social license, specifically their legitimacy, credibility, and trustworthiness?

Method

To narrow the range of tweets to be examined, only tweets that had been ratioed were considered. Getting ratioed may mean that: a) a tweet received more replies than retweets (O'Connor & Shumate, 2018); b) a post garnered many negative comments (Chapman, 2019); or c) a post received more dislikes than likes (Larabee, 2020). For the purposes of this paper, a tweet was considered to have been ratioed if it had more replies than likes. Generally, a ratioed tweet is a sign that an account has posted something offensive or insensitive, as people use comments and replies to express their dissatisfaction in greater numbers than those who show approval via likes.

Because the focus of this research is on negative reactions to fossil fuel organizations, it was appropriate to seek out tweets that drew large numbers of likely negative comments. Tweets posted between April 2020 and April 2021 from Shell, Chevron, BP, Exxon, Conoco Phillips, and the American Petroleum Institute (API) were considered, as these are all large organizations with an active Twitter presence that frequently receive engagement from users. Other prominent organizations from the fossil fuel industry were considered but either did not have a Twitter account, did not post frequently, or did not frequently receive more than a small number of likes or replies. One tweet from each organization was selected to ensure that a single organization did not have a disproportionate influence on the results. A total of six tweets (N = 6) and up to the first 100 replies directly to those tweets (N = 444) were collected during April 2021. Please see Table 1 for a description of all the main tweets along with the number of likes, retweets, quote tweets, and replies they received.

Table 1

Original tweets

Account	Date Posted	Tweet Text	Likes	Replies	Retweets	Quote Tweets
APIenergy	3-23-21	"Reining in climate change requires many solutions. Declaring who cannot be part of those, such as natural gas companies, only raises resistance to progress." Via @sciam [link to an article titled "Can Natural Gas Be Part of a Low-Carbon Future?"]	12	110	2	35
bp_plc	3-17-21	This great @NYtimes piece explains the barriers to the mass roll-out of EV's. By joining forces with businesses like @VWGroup we hope to accelerate the introduction of ultra-fast EV charging across Europe & the rest of the world [earth emoji] [plug emoji] [link to article titled: Electric Cars Are Coming. How Long Until They Rule the Road?]	15	29	7	6
Chevron	3-9-21	We all have a role to play in creating a cleaner future. At Chevron, we're lowering the carbon emissions intensity of our operations, investing in lower-carbon technologies and exploring renewable fuels of the future. Learn more: http://chevron.com/lowercarbon #HumanEnergy [black and white video about how Chevron is reducing their carbon emissions]	81	708	25	216
conocophillips	1-6-21	An iconic live oak tree in the town of Kenedy, Texas home of the company's Eagle Ford headquarters. The liquids-rich Eagle Ford tight oil trend represents the company's most prolific unconventional resource development. Learn more: https://bit.ly/38bnfkY [picture of a live oak tree at sunset]	8	15	1	2
exxonmobil	12-3-20	We're all in this together! Glad to be a part of the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative – working collaboratively toward solutions to mitigate the risks of climate change. @OGCInews [quote tweet from OCGInews that reads "We've launched our 2020 Progress Report [earth emoji] Using the collective power of OGCI's member companies, we've driven change across four key areas: [graphic which reads "Delivering on a low carbon future"]]	245	2,344	43	1,741
Shell	11-2-20	[Bar chart emoji] What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions? #EnergyDebate [poll options: Offset emissions (23.1%), Stop flying (6.5%), Buy electric vehicle (25.6%), renewable energy (44.7%) 199 votes total]	1,036	7,051	210	7,861

All the tweets selected for analysis in this study happened to be issue management messages, which means they were intended to illustrate an organizational stance on a topic in a way that aligns with stakeholder expectations (Heath, 2013). In the case of these tweets, they all seem to strive to show that these companies are involved in sustainability or environmental stewardship. Considering this specific pool of tweets and their narrow topical focus, the current study may be considered exploratory in nature, shedding light on reactions specifically to issues management messages and the possible implications for organizations' social license in response to those particular kinds of tweets.

Only the first 100 replies to each tweet were collected, and responses to those replies were not collected. Limiting the number of replies analyzed per tweet prevents one tweet that received many replies from having too large of an impact on the research conclusions (Declercq et al., 2019). In cases where a tweet received less than 100 replies, all replies were collected. For each tweet, the text of the tweet was pasted into an Excel sheet and the date, author, url, a description of any media associated with the tweet, and the number of likes, retweets, quote tweets, and replies were added to the Excel document as well. Twitter did not display an exact number of replies once the replies surpassed a certain number (e.g., Exxon's tweet showed as having 2.3k replies). To determine the exact number of replies that tweets got, tweet data were collected from the Twitter API using a program called Postman. Meanwhile, for the replies, the text of each reply was pasted into the same Excel document and the date, author, url, a description of any media associated with the reply, and the number of likes, retweets, and replies also were recorded.

Tweets and replies were qualitatively analyzed using multiple rounds of coding to identify common themes and relate them to components of social license following an iterative phronetic approach (Tracy, 2020). To begin, a round of initial coding was done to identify distinct kinds of negative replies from Twitter users, such as accusing a company of lying or causing harm, along with any additional notes on tone or argument strategy, such as use of humor or linking to an article for support. After this initial round of coding, different kinds of replies and strategies were organized under the umbrellas of legitimacy and credibility in a chart. Strategies were duplicated where needed to fit under multiple categories. Strategies were considered to target legitimacy if they related to the idea that company actions did not benefit the public, the organization actively harmed certain stakeholders, or that the company had failed to gain a baseline level of acceptance from the public. Meanwhile, strategies were deemed relevant to credibility if they demonstrated that users perceived a lack of reliable or transparent communication or an absence of care for stakeholder opinions. Next, larger themes relevant to the ideas of legitimacy and credibility were identified that related to the kinds of replies users wrote. These included a general lack of acceptance, perceived disregard for stakeholder's opinions, accusations of harm done to the public by the organization, calling out concealment of information or the spread of disinformation, perceptions that the organization's tweet was disingenuous, and accusations of lying. Once these themes were identified, a final round of coding was done to fit negative replies under one of those six categories.

Results

All the tweets identified for this study had been ratioed, meaning they received more replies than likes. A common thread among most of these tweets was the suggestion that these organizations valued the environment. Conoco Phillips expressed appreciation for a live oak tree, API asserted that natural gas companies could help address climate change, Exxon showcased a larger industry initiative to combat climate change, BP highlighted its connection to more environmentally friendly electric vehicles, and Chevron wrote about its contribution toward a cleaner future. Additionally, Shell, Chevron, and Exxon all used inclusive plural pronouns that suggested consumers bear responsibility for climate change alongside companies by using phrases, such as "We're all in this together!" and "We all have a role to play" and asking the members of the general public what actions they could take to care for the environment. The ire these tweets provoked suggests that people viewed these sentiments as insulting, upsetting, and hypocritical as organizations whose primary activities harm the environment tried to reassure the public that they cared about environmental stewardship and wanted to encourage the public to help clean up the industry's mess. Replies to these tweets undermined the organization's legitimacy and credibility to the extent that it seems that real trust may never have been gained at all among some stakeholder groups. A lack of established legitimacy and credibility was apparent in replies calling out harmful industry actions, criticizing disingenuous statements, highlighting a history of deceptive communication, pointing out ways the organizations disregard public opinion, and questioning organizations' honesty and integrity.

Before delving into a closer examination of these themes, it is worth noting that many replies received more likes or retweets than the organizations' original tweets. Moreover, most replies collected for this research were negative or hostile toward the original poster (e.g., "On behalf of future generations, Bite me."). The high levels of attention received by such critical replies demonstrates that some critiques of the organizations garnered more public support than the organizations' original messages and that some criticisms also were spread more widely than the original tweets. If critique is more widespread than agreement for these messages, it seems that attacks on organizations' social license via social media could have the potential to negatively impact the organizations' brand image and public support.

Questioning legitimacy

Harm done to the public

A key aspect of legitimacy is demonstrating that a project or industry is beneficial (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018). The main strategy that users adopted to question fossil fuel organizations' legitimacy was to highlight public harm that the corporations and trade association had done. By calling out harm done by these organizations, social media users clearly showed that they did not believe these groups were beneficial, but rather dangerous to at least some stakeholders.

The first way that users demonstrated harm was by referencing corporate crises, such as oil spills. For example, one user told Shell to "Clean up your mess in the Niger Delta and North Sea" and another declared, in response to Chevron, "You won't have my attention until you act responsibly & ethically to clean up disasters, such as oil pollution in the Ecuadorian Amazon (& elsewhere)." Meanwhile, in reply to BP's tweet, one user said, "I pledge not to spill 4.9 million barrels of oil in the gulf of mexico and refuse to clean it up because there is no current law or regulation that would force me to clean it up." These clear reminders of specific instances of environmental harm by oil companies served as examples of how these organizations have caused great harm to the public and natural environments in the past.

Beyond examples of particular harmful corporate crises, other users chose to remind organizations that they were causing damage at a broader scale by contributing to climate change and environmental degradation, such as, "You make absurd claims about co2 emissions reduction while emitting absolutely massive and underrated amounts of methane directly into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change," a cartoon that showed people huddled around a campfire with a caption that read, "Yes, the planet got destroyed. But for a beautiful moment in time we created a lot of value for shareholders," or one reply targeted at Conoco Phillips that stated, "Y'all like trees? Stop drilling and start planting those. Y'all know how many live oaks we lose when you lay your pipelines?" Replies such as these emphasize how organizations' day-to-day operations harm the environment that people depend on for a healthy future.

In addition to harm done through environmental damage, many users were also quick to point out harm done to individuals opposed to fossil fuel projects. At times, this harm took the form of violence, such as one user's accusation that Shell was involved in the "murder [of] activists in the Global South" and another reply that suggested Shell was responsible for the murder of "the Ogoni 9" and provided a link to a Wikipedia page about the group in case other users wanted to "read about Shell's involvement in killing them." Another situation that many users referenced by quoting relevant tweets in replies to Chevron was the house arrest of Steven Donziger, a lawyer involved in a case against Chevron on behalf of indigenous people and farmers in South America (North, 2020). These replies drew attention to how organizations have hurt some of the people who attempt to oppose their activities.

Finally, the last main type of reply in this category suggested harm not by citing specific examples of organizational actions or connecting operations to larger environmental problems, but instead by comparing the fossil fuel industry to other kinds of dangerous industries or individuals. A common comparison was made between these organizations and tobacco companies, illustrated by replies such as, "Hey Chevron Comms people! Fossil fuels are the new tobacco." Other users compared these organizations to pedophiles and arsonists. Through such comparisons, users depicted these organizations as harmful and dangerous.

General lack of acceptance

Achieving acceptance is an initial threshold for gaining social license (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Users expressed a general lack of acceptance for organizations through insults and

mockery, threats of violence, and suggestions that companies cease their operations. Multiple users replied to Exxon with an image of SpongeBob dressed as a police officer looking around suspiciously near a wanted poster with a drawing of him on it, implying that the company could not recognize that they had done something wrong. A similar humorous image, depicting a man dressed as a hot dog with text that read, "We're all trying to find the guy who did this," was used in reply to API, Exxon, Chevron, and Shell. Other insults were also present in the form of a variety of text, images, and gifs.

Another way users expressed that they did not accept these organizations was through threats of violence, with gifs of guillotines posted in response to Shell and Exxon. Additionally, one user told Exxon to "chew glass and drink saltwater." Although these replies are somewhat disturbing, they do demonstrate a great deal of hostility toward these organizations.

Finally, many users expressed their lack of acceptance by suggesting that they would like companies to cease current operations or existence. Multiple users told Conoco Phillips to stop drilling, one suggested that Chevron "immediately halt investments in fossil fuels, and direct all funds to green solutions," and another said it would be "neat and fun" if Exxon stopped "harvesting fossil fuels entirely and immediately." In addition to users suggesting that these organizations dramatically alter what they do, some suggested that these organizations should not exist at all. One user suggested that "nationalizing and dismantling shell" would be desirable, while another felt that they would like Chevron to consider "shutting down and giving all your money to the renewables industry." These sentiments illustrate users' failure to accept both some organizations' existence as well as the work they do.

Undermining credibility

Disinformation

Credibility relies upon open, reliable communication (Jijelava & Vanclay, 2018). Many replies undermined organizations' credibility by suggesting that the fossil fuel industry has been actively involved in spreading disinformation. Some replies featured accusations such as, "How dare you further confuse and mislead?" and demanded that these organizations "Educate the public about the fossil fuel industry's decades-long effort to spread doubt about the deadly climate consequences of its products to preserve profits." Additionally, quite a few replies included links to or screenshots of articles with titles such as, "Exxon Knew about Climate Change almost 40 years ago" and "Oil firms knew decades ago fossil fuels posed grave health risks, files reveal." Using these accusations and examples, users made it clear that they did not believe these organizations could be relied upon to share accurate information or be transparent.

Disingenuous sentiments

In addition to accusations of disinformation campaigns, users also left replies that suggested they simply did not find the organizations' statements to be genuine or believable. The first method

for questioning the believability of organizations' statements involved users writing their own versions of the main tweets, such as one revision of Chevron's tweet that read, "We, as in Chevron, have an immense role to play in a clean future because we created this mess. At Chevron, we're responsible for delaying climate action. No apology we can give is necessary, but we're done green washing and are ready for truth and reconciliation." One user's interpretation of API's tweet read, "Reining in climate change requires many solutions, including solutions that don't reign in climate change, and in fact make it worse," while another stated, "Reining in rabid 500lb gorillas requires many solutions. Declaring who cannot be part of those, such as companies that release rabid 500lb gorillas, only raises resistance to progress." These rewordings occasionally overlapped with comparisons to harmful individuals or industries, a strategy for insinuating harm defined in the previous section. If rewrites of tweets compared the fossil fuel company to a harmful actor, such as the tobacco industry, those replies were not included in this category.

Other users chose not to write their own version of the entire tweet but instead singled out specific phrases or aspects of the media associated with the tweets that they found problematic. One user pointed out that Chevron has made "billions upon billions from that pollution without paying anything for the cost of it" and wondered, "What 'role' should we 'all' play compared to you?" Meanwhile, another reply informed Exxon that "we will be 'in this together' when y'all stop unearthing carbon, destroying the future, and redistribute your billions to folks who actually know how to solve the mess you've made." Finally, a user told Shell that it had "left 'Completely revamp our infrastructure and society so we can put the oil industry behind us' out of the poll." Both strategies, rewriting tweets and pointing out problems with specific words and media, undermined credibility by casting doubt on whether these organizations' communication can be taken as genuine. By focusing on particular issues with tweets' wording and media choices, these replies demonstrate that many users found the organizations' sentiments disingenuous.

Accusations of lying

Similar to pointing out disingenuous statements, but distinct due to a lack of specificity, were general accusations that an organization was lying. Although these replies did not call out specific words or phrases, they did charge organizations with dishonesty. One user felt that Shell "put the gas in gaslighting." Meanwhile, multiple users accused Chevron and BP of greenwashing either through written replies or through media, such as a gif of a man painting the inside of his car green. Others expressed a belief that API, Chevron, and Exxon were lying either by outright saying it, such as one gif that read, "The lie detector determined that was a lie," or through stating that the organizations' claims were "bullshit." These claims did not question specific wording as did the accusations of disingenuous statements, nor did they make detailed assertions about the company hiding information as did the accusations of disinformation. However, these replies clearly showed that many users did not find the original tweets believable or credible.

Disregard for some stakeholders

For stakeholders to see an organization as credible, they must feel that stakeholders are treated consistently (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). Some of the organizations considered in this study demonstrated very clearly that they did not care for some of their stakeholders' thoughts by hiding replies. Many users noticed Shell hiding specific replies and posted screenshots of them with captions such as, "Why are you hiding this reply? Is that an inconvenient truth?" Other users noted the overall phenomenon of hidden replies, saying that they "love the hidden replies feature. should be renamed 'good tweets section'," again accompanying these sentiments with screenshots of hidden replies or showing where other users could click to view them. Meanwhile, a user noted that Chevron was "hiding every reply that has a swear in it like cursing is the issue here." Not all organizations engaged in hiding replies, but those that did were certainly noticed by users.

Discussion

Many of the Twitter replies considered in this study actively questioned and undermined organizations' legitimacy and credibility in response to issues management messaging. In the absence of these components of social license, trust cannot be established (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011), suggesting that these organizations failed to gain many people's trust. Although it may be tempting to dismiss the opinions of Twitter users because they have little direct influence on companies' operations, Beckman et al. (2016) point out that even low-power stakeholders might be negatively impacted by an organization's damage to the environment and therefore should be considered salient to maintain a good reputation and social license. Moreover, Thomson and Boutilier (2011) assert that anyone who is impacted by or who can impact a project should be considered a stakeholder. In the case of the fossil fuel industry, companies and trade associations shape national policies as well as the global climate, therefore affecting billions of people and broadening the definition of stakeholder to include these users on Twitter.

Social media can help facilitate global protest movements (Boulianne et al., 2020), raise awareness about problematic corporate practices (Larri & Whitehouse, 2019; Wonneberger et al., 2020), provide a platform to demand change from organizations (Veil et al., 2015), and spread calls to boycott organizations that have acted unethically (Makarem & Jae, 2016). In the sample examined here, negative replies greatly outnumbered positive replies and were, at times, retweeted or liked more than organizations' original tweets. Therefore, it seems that users had the ability to steer the conversation attached to a post away from the organization's intended focus, thus impacting how others think about these companies and their work. This redirection of focus fits the concept of social media hijacking, or using comments on social media to take over a post and emphasize user concerns (Veil et al., 2015). Considering the negative effects that the fossil fuel industry could have on many stakeholders, the serious ramifications of negative online comments, and the relative ease with which social media hijacking could be used as an activist

strategy, it is worth considering the implications of this kind of discourse for the fossil fuel industry, individuals seeking activism opportunities, and organizers of public interest campaigns.

In the wake of concern and criticism on social media, companies have changed ingredients in their products (Veil et al., 2015), groups have proposed policy changes that would alter industries (Mummery & Rodan, 2019), politicians have requested that major projects be relocated (Valenzuela et al., 2012), stock prices have fallen for certain companies (Gomez-Carrasco & Michelon, 2017), and thousands have expressed interest in supporting boycotts of brands (Kang, 2012). Some of these examples (Mummery & Rodan, 2019; Valenzuela et al., 2012) involved offline action in conjunction with online protest, but research has linked online political activity to participation in offline actions, such as protest (Vissers & Stolle, 2014), suggesting that even if change did not come about due solely to online actions, engagement in online protest can spark future engagement among users. If user responses on social media can contribute to serious impacts on manufacturing processes, policy proposals, project locations, stock values, and interest in boycotts, it is possible that mobilizing social media users to publicly voice their concerns about the fossil fuel industry's impact on people and the environment could lead to important changes in these organizations.

Although there were a handful of positive or neutral replies in many of the Twitter conversations examined in this study, the vast majority were negative and directly questioned organizations' legitimacy and credibility, key components of social license. Gunster and Neubauer (2019) argued that foundational to the concept of social license is the idea that governments have failed to protect their citizens from powerful corporations and that people can wield social license as a counterhegemonic tool to protect individual and community interests. It seems that people may be using social media to do just that. The replies examined in this research suggest that users did not view social license as "little more than a public relations tactic" (Gunster & Neubauer, 2019, p. 722). Rather, they seemed to view social license as something necessary that, when not earned, evoked public expressions of anger and accusations of harm. Replies called out industry wrongdoings and demanded changes and transparency, even expressing desires for radical solutions, such as doing away with some of these companies altogether.

The strong disapproval of companies, the sentiment in some replies that these companies perhaps ought to cease operations, and the accusations of lying and harm at organizational scales suggest that the fossil fuel industry faces a lack of social license at an industry-wide scale among some stakeholders. While social license initially has often been considered a prerequisite for a particular project to take place (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011), the idea also can apply to an entire industry (Hall et al., 2015). At this point, it may not be sufficient for fossil fuel companies to earn social license on a project-by-project basis; social license for their entire operation may be in jeopardy.

Further research on the kinds of negative online responses to fossil fuel organizations that are covered in this paper could be of interest to scholars doing work related to the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS), which seeks to shed light on which factors lead people to

take communicative action in response to a problem (Kim & J. E. Grunig, 2011). Although some research has applied this model to social media activism (Chon & Park, 2020), there is still an opportunity for more research surrounding the motivations for engaging in social media activism around environmental topics. Additionally, many of the replies examined in the current study expressed frustration or anger, so it could be worthwhile to examine social media activism related to the fossil fuel industry through the lens of the Anger Activism Model (AAM), which suggests that individuals' varying degrees of anger and efficacy beliefs can result in different activism outcomes (Turner, 2007).

Practically, using social media as a tool to question social license could be considered as a means for both individuals and organizations to engage in activism. Public interest campaigns, which take a society-wide view of an issue and aim to promote behavioral change (Fessmann, 2017), could benefit from incorporating this tactic into campaigns as a facet of their strategy or an end goal for behavior change. Encouraging people to publicly question the social license of organizations that contribute to climate change could offer a feasible first step into activism for some users while also drawing attention to campaigns. Should public interest campaigns choose to go this route, it could be beneficial to pair this strategy with other forms of communication that do not focus solely on social media comments. For example, while exploring backlash to the idea of clean coal on Twitter, Demetrious (2019) found that although many replies were clever and critical, replies offered only a shallow discussion of a complex issue, ignoring the negative impacts that the decline of the coal industry could have on people working in the industry. The current study also found an abundance of strong critiques deploying humor and unnuanced arguments; although these comments offer a potentially useful strategy for attracting attention to the topic and engaging users in activism, this sort of dialogue likely should not be where the conversation ends for an organized PIC campaign.

This study had a limited focus on a selection of ratioed tweets to understand strong reactions to content posted by fossil fuel companies and trade associations. These conversations were very negative, with very few positive or neutral replies out of hundreds. Although the replies examined here provide valuable insight into how users express disapproval of the fossil fuel industry, they cannot be considered representative of typical interactions with the fossil fuel industry on Twitter. Furthermore, the original organization tweets included in this study may be considered issues management communication, messages intended to express an organization's position on an issue while meeting stakeholder expectations and strengthening relationships with stakeholders (Heath, 2013). Organizations engage in issues management to maintain legitimacy or to bridge legitimacy gaps—that is, differences between stakeholder expectations and perceptions of organizations' actions (Heath & Palenchar, 2009).

To understand whether the sentiments found in this study are consistent across other Twitter conversations, a more extensive content analysis would need to be conducted that included tweets outside the realm of issues management. Additionally, aside from considering likes and retweets of replies, this study was not able to assess the impacts that these negative replies had. Future research could be conducted to understand how replies that call into question a company

or industry's social license might impact things, such as consumer trust, brand image, policy support, or individual purchasing behavior or purchase intentions. Furthermore, future research could take an experimental approach to examine whether seeing negative responses to companies online impact social media users' perceptions of social license and posting behavior or intention.

Replies to fossil fuel organizations' tweets demonstrated clear threats to legitimacy and credibility through accusations of harm, charges of disinformation and dishonesty, and lack of acceptance. Some of these replies garnered just as much attention, if not more, than the original tweets and presented avenues for individuals to express displeasure with a powerful industry. These replies suggest that, beyond specific projects, the entire industry may be at risk of losing social license among some stakeholders. Such a threat to social license would ideally not be met by shiny ad campaigns or rebranding schemes. Instead, this broad threat to social license should be seen as a wake-up call to the industry that many stakeholders are unwilling to accept disinformation and environmental harm and that something must radically change so that vulnerable communities and ecosystems can be protected now and in decades to come. Public interest campaigns can encourage continued user engagement in questioning social license on social media to strengthen this demand for change. Replies to tweets alone certainly will not revolutionize the fossil fuel industry, but these replies offer an accessible, public platform for people to express their concerns. This sort of online activism is a method that both individuals and organizations may promote to chip away at a harmful industry's social license and spark broader conversations and action.

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

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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).

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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 κ = .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%; κ = .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 κ = .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 (κ = .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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