

Twitter Users' Sense of Empowerment and Communicative Behavior: An Examination of the #Burkini Conversations on Twitter

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Communication scholars have invested considerable attention in examining the connection between social media and political participation. However, Twitter users' sense of empowerment and communicative behavior about collective discontent have received limited scholarly scrutiny. This study employed Habermas's theory of the public sphere and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. Content analysis of Twitter messages revealed that Twitter users predominately used personal commentary, criticism, and media surveillance to communicate about the Burkini ban. This study revealed that tweets predominately reflected Twitter users' sense of autonomy. Communicative behavior on Twitter about the #burkini highlights that global networked publics used Twitter for deliberation and contestation of public policy issues. Theoretical and practical implications of the research findings are discussed.

Introduction

Europe faced a soaring refugee crisis and the growing influence of populist political rhetoric that considers new asylum seekers to be a threat to security, culture, and stability. In 2015, more than 1.3 million refugees applied for asylum in European countries (Connor, 2016). The majority of refugees cross the Aegean Sea to reach Europe. More than 3,770 people died or were reported missing while attempting this crossing (UNHCR, 2015). The majority of the refugees come from war-torn countries like Syria (49%), Afghanistan (25%), and Iraq (15%) (UNHCR, 2016). With the rising tide of asylum seekers, the populist rhetoric that started to resurface in European public discourse portrayed the new refugees as violent and a threat to national sovereignty (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2016). Since the refugees come mainly from Muslim countries, the racialization of the refugee crisis has spawned a climate of Islamophobia in Europe.

Amid the growing political tensions spawned by the refugee crisis, more than 30 French cities have imposed bans on wearing the burkini—a garment worn in public by Muslim women that covers the entire body except for the face, hands, and feet (Bittermann, McKenzie, & Shoichet, 2016). On August 23, 2016, the *Guardian*, a British newspaper, reported that armed police confronted a Muslim woman resting on a beach and made her remove her burkini. They fined the woman on the grounds of not wearing “an outfit respecting good morals and secularism” (Quinn, 2016). A report of this sparked heated public discussion, both in France and across the globe about the burkini ban and the French idea of secularism (McKenzie, 2016). Human rights organizations criticized the French ban, arguing that such an act discriminated against people based on their faith and strengthened the climate of Islamophobia. Eventually, this public discussion created a social media buzz, with people sharing their opinions on the burkini ban. The hashtag #Burkini became a trending topic on Twitter after the *Guardian* broke the story. The burkini ban resurrected the French ban on the burqa and headscarves that Muslim women wear. Social media users as networked publics engaged their power to express collective discontent and resist the dominant discourse that marginalized the experiences of women in the name of national security and secular ideology.

Communication scholars have invested considerable attention in examining the connection between social media and political participation. Such studies mostly investigated online information-seeking behavior, political efficacy, second screening, news consumption, political persuasion, and political participation (Barnidge, Gil de Zúñiga, & Diehl, 2017; Gil de Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo, &

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McGregor, 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012). For example, Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012) used a survey to reveal the relation between political knowledge, efficacy, social capital, and political participation. Barnidge, Gil de Zúñiga, and Diehl (2017) investigated second screening and political persuasion on social media. These studies predominately used survey to examine user behavior. This line of inquiry contributed significantly to our understanding of social media and political expression. However, we have limited knowledge about social media users' sense of empowerment and their communicative behavior about collective discontent. Such understanding contributes to social media studies by highlighting how global networked publics use social media to combat discrimination to foster social change.

This present study fills this gap by examining users' behavior on social media by examining their Twitter messages. Employing a quantitative content analysis, this study analyzed 4,560 Twitter messages. The purpose was to investigate users' communication behavior about the burkini ban on Twitter. More importantly, this study examines users' sense of empowerment on Twitter about collective discontent.

Literature Review

Public Sphere, Networked Publics, and Collective Discontent

The idea of a public sphere refers to a discursive space for deliberation and rational exchange of ideas. Habermas (1991) posited that the bourgeois public sphere emerged in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Citizens gathered in coffee houses and salons to debate and express opinions connected to the common interests of society. Participation in a public sphere was egalitarian and aspired to generate discursive agreement on issues related to public concerns. Scholars argued that the public sphere fosters democratic engagement to formulate political will among citizens, which is crucial for democracy (Dahlgren, 2005; Maireder & Schlögl, 2014). Scholarly interest in social media rejuvenates discussion on democracy and networked publics.

Democratic plurality on social media is closely connected to the active citizenship model of networked publics. The idea of networked publics signals a seismic conceptual shift from mass media-centric publics to networked architecture and affordance-based publics (Benkler, 2006). Networked publics use the discursive space of social media to challenge dominant narratives. Boyd (2007, 2011) argued that digital communication technologies foster the formation of networked publics. In her latter study, she posited networked publics are "simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (p. 39). Such conceptualization of networked publics focuses on the technological affordances of social media and how citizens use such platforms for deliberation and contestation. Ito (2008) highlighted the intersections of social, cultural, and political structures that influence the performance of networked publics. In Ito's (2008) formulation, networked publics are engaged citizens who aspire to be "reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception" (p. 3). At the core of the idea of networked publics is the empowered practice of citizenship anchored in the networked affordances of digital media (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Becker & Copeland, 2016; Maireder & Schlögl, 2014). Empowered citizens often use social media to express their dissent to dominant narratives and voice their concerns about collective discontent.

Studies have illuminated how citizens and activists used social media for expressing collective discontent (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) argued that social media users employed the communicative affordances of digital communication platforms to protest against social injustice, networking with other users, and making inquiries (Men & Tsai, 2012, 2013; Smith, Men, & Al-Sinan, 2015). Previous studies (Bimber et al., 2012; Bimber, 2017; Castells, 2011; Copeland, Hasell, & Bimber, 2016; Smith, 2010) revealed that citizens use digital media to participate in contentious communication, express their opinions, and criticize dominant practices. Gerbaudo (2012) highlighted how activists exploited the interactivity and networked features of social media to mobilize people for collective action. However, Morozov (2011)

argued that digital communication technologies foster passivity and people are more inclined to engage in slacktivism rather than aspire to be involved directly in collective dissent. Keating and Melis (2017) revealed that a significant proportion of social media users never use such platforms to express an opinion about social injustice.

Nagle (2017) argued the techno-utopia that was anchored in the trust of the wisdom of crowds and user-generated content is being replaced by the implosion of racist, sexist, white supremacist, and violent ideology on social media that signal a bleak reality. The author articulated the way the alt-right, 4chan, and extremist ideology have used social media to openly express hostility toward mainstream cultural sensibilities toward feminism, racial equality, identity politics, and political correctness. Scholars posited that social and online media have become a breeding ground for right-wing populist discourse that invites racial, social, and political tensions to mold the society based on the white-conservative ideology (Haider, 2018; Lilla, 2018). Lilla (2018) stated that the Facebook model of political engagement puts a premium on the self-centric practices rather engage in creating a common history. Such sense of engagement prompted individual-centric and conservative leaning ideology to flourish and garner prominence.

The scholarly disagreement dictates further examination of the communicative behavior of networked publics about collective dissent. This study fills the research gap by examining Twitter users' communicative behavior about the burkini ban. For this study, user posts on Twitter were categorized as personal commentary, media surveillance, expressing criticism, networking, call for action, and inquiries. Such categorization is consistent with previous studies on social media and collective discontent (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Men & Tsai, 2012, 2013; Smith et al., 2015). This study addresses the following research question:

RQ 1: How do global networked publics use Twitter to communicate about the burkini ban in France?

Social Cognitive Theory, Empowerment, and Self-Efficacy

Social cognitive theory is anchored in the idea of human agency that highlights our capacity to reformulate social environment, adapt with social changes, and reflect on our experiences to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1986; 2001; 2002; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Smith et al., 2015; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Bandura (2001) argued that we intentionally make choices about our actions, set goals to achieve desired outcomes, and adapt or regulate our actions based on the changes in our lived experiences. As social agents, we do not just respond to external stimuli; instead, we intentionally and proactively engage with social circumstances and formulate our course of action (Bandura, 2001; 2002). Scholars posited that our sense of mastery and assertiveness are shaped by our direct and observational experiences (Bandura, 2001; 2002; Chung & Park, 2019; Stefanone, Yue, & Toh, 2019). Such a sense of self-mastery and assertiveness is anchored in our sense of empowerment.

Empowerment refers to the increased sense of mastery, control, self-determination, and assertiveness in individuals' lived experiences to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Smith et al., 2015; Wood & Bandura, 1989). In the context of social media, empowerment is reflected in the networked publics' capacity to contribute online and seek influence in social change initiatives (Smith & Taylor, 2017; Voorveld, Niejens, & Smit, 2010). Networked publics can exert influence on social media by taking part in conversations, contributing to social change initiatives, sharing information about personal beliefs, and networking with like-minded individuals.

Users' sense of empowerment is closely linked to Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy. The idea of self-efficacy refers to the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). Chiles and Zorn (1995) argued that self-efficacy is connected to an individual's sense of self-belief that he or she can perform required tasks with desirable outcomes. Scholars identified three crucial components of self-efficacy: enactive attainment or mastery experience, vicarious experience, and sense of autonomy (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Enactive efficacy refers to individuals' personal experiences of using generative skills to tackle real-life challenges. Scholars argued that enactive attainment is linked to our experience of successfully performing tasks or actions with desired outcomes. Such a sense of proficiency is crucial for future self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Recine, Werner, & Recine, 2009; Resnick, 2003, Smith et al., 2015). Bandura (1997) posited that enactive efficacy is connected to our "knowledge of the rules and strategies for constructing effective courses of behavior" and such perceived mastery "provides people with the tools to manage the demands of their everyday life" (p. 80). Chiles and Zorn (1995) defined enactive attainment as "the experience of mastery of a task that creates a feeling of confidence" (p. 4). Scholars (Smith et al., 2015; Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012) revealed that our knowledge of self-mastery is anchored in our earlier experience of success which motivates us to exert influence through actions. In the context of social media, networked publics' sense of enactive attainment or self-knowledge is a crucial factor in psychological empowerment (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). Use of social media is conducive to enactive attainment as it demonstrates our "perception of connectedness, mastery and control, and ability to effect change" (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012, p. 2). Enactive attainment fosters user participation on social media through their expressions like commenting on social injustice and expressing criticism (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Scholars argued that self-mastery or confidence is not the only source of empowerment (Bandura, 1977; Recine et al., 2009; Resnick, 2003; Smith et al., 2015). We are inspired or feel empowered to see success in others who have capabilities similar to ours. Such sense of self-efficacy is known as vicarious experience (Smith et al., 2015). Bandura (1977) argued that when we see others performing successful actions that generate an expectation of future success, we intensify our efforts to reach desired outcomes. Bandura posited "seeing or visualizing people similar to oneself perform successfully typically raises efficacy beliefs in observers" (p. 87). In the context of social media, the networked public can model the experiences of others who have successfully used social media to exert their influence in social change (Smith et al., 2015).

Networked publics often exercise their sense of self-autonomy to manage their online persona that are directly linked to their political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Papacharissi, 2011, 2012). Publics employ their agency on social media to create, curate, and circulate messages to project their personalities. Furthermore, people often use digital platforms to connect and maintain relationships with myriad audiences in multiple social realms. Such actions require maintaining different aspects of social media users' personalities. Strategic self-representation in online platforms demands users' sense of self-autonomy (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Papacharissi, 2011, 2012). Therefore, scholars linked users' sense of self-autonomy to their online expression (Smith et al., 2015; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). For example, Stavrositu and Sundar (2012) investigated the connection between blogging and empowerment and found that users' sense of agency or autonomy is directly connected to empowerment. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2015) posited that social media affordances like interactivity and user-generated content nurture a sense of autonomy that exhibits communication power of networked publics.

For this study, users' sense of empowerment is categorized as enactive attainment, vicarious experience, and sense of autonomy. This study examines tweets to investigate users' sense of empowerment about the burkini ban and poses the following question:

RQ2: How do global networked publics express their sense of empowerment through their Twitter messages about the burkini ban in France?

Methodology

Quantitative Content Analysis

This study employed content analysis to examine the Twitter discussion on the burkini ban. Data were collected after the *Guardian* reported the burkini ban incident on August 23, 2016. For this study, 98,811 tweets on the burkini ban were collected, using NodeXL, a social network analysis and data visualization software for social media data. Data were collected from August 23, 2016, to August 31,

2016. The rationale for selecting August 23, 2016, as a starting point of data collection is that #Burkini emerged as a trending topic on Twitter after the *Guardian* broke the story on August 23, 2016. The endpoint of data collection was August 31, 2016, because the worldwide online discussion on burkini bans significantly diminished after August 31, 2016 (Google Trends, 2016).

The researchers removed any non-English tweets and then used random sampling to select 4,560 Twitter messages. This procedure is similar to those used in earlier studies on social media (Saxton, Niyirora, & Guo & Waters, 2015; Smith et al., 2015). For this research, we employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches to develop codes. We explored scholarly literature to determine the existing constructs for empowerment, communicative behavior, and gender; and employed qualitative grounded theoretical approach to identify new codes. The purpose of using a mix of deductive and inductive approaches is to identify existing constructs that were validated by scholarly research and to explore unique practices that had not mentioned by the literature (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Mazid, 2019). This process is grounded in the scholastic practices of social science research (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Krippendorff, 2019; Neuendorf, 2017). We developed a total of ten codes through the process that reflect the constructs of empowerment, communicative behavior, and gender. The majority of the codes (eight codes) were similar to Smith et al., (2015) and Men and Tsai (2012, 2013). The researchers developed two new codes that were included in the codebook.

The study coded tweets for ten items to examine users' communicative behavior, empowerment, and gender. The items for users' communicative behavior are: personal commentary, expressing social criticisms, media surveillance, social networking, call for action, and making inquiries. For this study, personal commentary is operationalized as Twitter user comment about the burkini ban through his or her tweet. Twitter provides a unique opportunity to comment on sociopolitical issues. Twitter users employ the technological affordances of the platform to express personal standpoint or perspective about social discontent. For example, networked publics used Twitter to express personal comments about collective discontent during the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movements that highlighted their opinion about contentious social issues (Gerbaudo, 2012; Goodwin & Jasper, 2015; Howard & Hussain, 2013). Personal commentary on Twitter helps users to connect with a broader community of networked publics and could mobilize people for connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Tweets that reflect users' criticisms about government, police, and social practice of controlling women's bodies are operationalized as expressing social criticism. Media surveillance is identified when tweets refer to any media sources. This study operationalized social networking as tweets engaging in communicating directly with other Twitter users. The call for action is reflected in tweets when Twitter users encourage people to take action or ask for an immediate response about the burkini ban. This study defined making inquiries as when users asked for information about events, occurrences, and clarification about social practices related to the burkini ban.

For the sense of empowerment, we coded three items: vicarious experience, the feeling of autonomy and control, and enactive attainment. For this study, vicarious experience is operationalized as tweet reflecting others' experience, behavior, and expression of discontent. Tweet that reflect users' sense of control and determination is identified as sense of autonomy. This study defined enactive attainment as tweets that demonstrate users' sense of mastery and personal experience. We also coded one item for the gender of social media users which was identified by examining their Twitter profiles.

The unit of analysis for this study was a unique tweet. Each item was coded dichotomously as *yes* for presence and *no* for absence. This study randomly selected 4,560 unique tweets and then data were coded by two trained researchers who first participated in a training session. Second, for the first round of coding, we each coded 450 tweets. Third, we resolved any inconsistencies and updated coding definitions. Fourth, after two rounds of coding, we reached good intercoder reliability agreement. The Cohen's Kappa for intercoder reliability were .92 (personal commentary), .90 (expressing social criticisms), 1.0 (media surveillance), 1.0 (social networking), .88 (call for action), .96 (making inquiries), .94 (enactive attainment), .90 (vicarious experience), .96 (sense of autonomy) and 1.0 (gender). Such agreement in coding reflects good reliability among coders (Stemler, 2001).

Results

Research question 1 wanted to examine Twitter communication of global networked publics about the burkini ban in France. Table 1 and 2 depict the descriptive results of Twitter communication of global networked publics and gender related to the burkini ban discussion. This study reports that global networked publics use Twitter predominately for personal commentary ($f=2808$, 61.57%) and engaging in social criticism ($f=2076$, 45.52%). Global networked publics also use Twitter for media surveillance ($f=936$, 20.52%), networking ($f=576$, 12.63%), call for action ($f=60$, 1.31%), and making inquiries ($f=30$, .65%).

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of Twitter communication of global networked publics		
	Coding Items	Frequency (%)
Twitter communication of networked publics	Personal commentary	2808 (61.57%)
	Media surveillance	936 (20.52%)
	Expressing criticism	2076 (45.52%)
	Criticism of government	378 (8.28%)
	Criticism of controlling women's bodies	1440 (31.57%)
	Criticism of law and policy	258 (5.65%)
	Networking	576 (12.63%)
	Call for action	60 (1.31%)
	Inquiries	30 (.65%)

The results further reveal that predominately female ($f=2196$, 48.15%) Twitter users engaged in social conversations on the burkini ban. Social media scholarship reported mixed findings about gender and social media participation (Khan, 2017; Lin & Lu, 2011; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). For example, Khan (2017) found that males engaged in more participatory behavior on social media than did women. However, the results of this study illuminate that women are more active on Twitter about socio-political issues that resonate with their lived experiences.

Women are at the forefront of using social media to challenge patriarchy and misogynist social practices. They also use social media to mobilize people to dismantle unequal power relations in society. For example, after President Trump was inaugurated as President of the United States, women took the street to protest and express their outrage toward the president and the future political environment that may threaten women's progress (Gantt-Shafer, Wallis, & Miles, 2019; Kitch, 2018; Weber, Dejmancee, & Rhode, 2018). Women used social media to organize the most massive single-day demonstration in U.S. history (Weber, Dejmancee, & Rhode, 2018). The protest is known as the Women's March on Washington. The sister marches mobilized more than 5 million people worldwide. The Women's Marches were organized in more than 80 countries around the globe and 400 cities in the U.S. (Weber, Dejmancee, & Rhode, 2018). The Women's March was not only a U.S. protest rather it was mobilized throughout the globe. Therefore, it is evident that women proactively use social media to combat misogynist practices.

Table 2: Gender and tweeting about the burkini ban		
	Coding Items	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	1542 (33.81%)

	Female	2196 (48.15%)
	Unable to determine	822 (18.02%)

Research question 2 wanted to investigate Twitter users' sense of empowerment demonstrated in their tweets. Table 3 reports the descriptive analysis of Twitter users' sense of empowerment. This study reports that global networked publics expressed different types of empowerment on Twitter: sense of autonomy (f=1404, 30.78%), enactive attainment (f=408, 8.94%), and vicarious experience (f=198, 4.34%). Smith et al. (2015) examined the users' sense of empowerment in the context of the public protest in Turkey. They reported the use of sense of autonomy at 12.2%, enactive attainment at 5.1%, and vicarious experience at 44.2%. Such differences in findings reflect the choice of communicative event. Smith et al. (2015) examined the users' sense of empowerment in a social protest where citizens were involved in both online and offline protests. This study examined the exercise of users' sense of empowerment related to a contentious social issue and such discussion occurred mostly in an online setting.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of Twitter users' sense of empowerment		
	Coding Items	Frequency (%)
Twitter users' sense of empowerment	Vicarious experience	198 (4.34%)
	Sense of autonomy	1404 (30.78%)
	Enactive attainment	408 (8.94%)

Discussion

This study makes several remarkable contributions to the existing literature on social media and online advocacy and empowerment. First, in the context of online collective discontent, global networked publics use Twitter predominately for personal commentary (61.57%), criticism (45.52%), and media surveillance (20.52%). Such a scenario reflects the centrality of social media users' communication power in public discussion on contentious social practices. Social media users often shape political discourse by sharing their voices in digital platforms that eventually replace the dominance of political elites and their influence in framing public discourse. Twitter communicative behavior about the burkini ban highlights that global networked publics use Twitter for deliberation and contestation of public policy issues. Such practices strive to reformulate, reimagine, and recreate social and cultural ideologies and practices. The burkini ban discussion on Twitter supports the claim that networked publics actively harness the communicative affordances of social media to seek social change (Bimber et al., 2012; Bimber, 2017; Castells, 2011; Copeland et al., 2016; Gerbaudo, 2012; Smith, 2010; Tufekci, 2017).

The discussion of the burkini ban incident revealed the irony of religious and secular practices. Western societies often identified headscarves, burqa, and Muslim attires as signs of religious domination over women's bodies. In 1990s, Muslim headscarves became the frontier of cultural conflicts in French society. The secular societies often failed to acknowledge the way people can re-frame cultural symbols to signify identity, freedom, and choice. In many instances, Muslim women embraced religious attire as personal choice and infused the essence of liberty to make such decision. Women often contested the cultural meaning of wearing religious attire and re-signified the headscarves and burkini as resistance to cultural otherness.

Second, the findings of this study weaken the validity of the slacktivism thesis of social media use. Aligned with earlier studies (Bimber et al., 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017), this study argues that Twitter users actively participate in contentious policy issues to seek social change. Global citizens use Twitter to challenge discrimination based on Islamophobia and misogyny and reformulate

exclusionary social practices. For example, our results show that Twitter users expressed criticism about the ban of burkini (45.52%). Such communicative behavior requires significant initiative and a considerable knowledge base about the historicity of social discrimination. Therefore, the idea that social media users are slacktivists needs scholarly reformulation.

The scholarly tendency of dismissing online participation as trivial requires a new understanding of online civic engagement. Zuckerman (2014) provided the much-needed conceptualization of online participation. He categorized online participation as thick and thin level of engagement. Networked publics engage in thin participation to raise their voice, sign petition, change profile picture, and other relevant actions to promote change. The thick participation is geared toward the active solution of social problems. We need to consider thick and thin participation as a continuum; rather than a binary construct. The networked publics expressed grievances about the ban and challenged discrimination. Later, France's highest administrative court overturned the burkini ban. The backlash of the burkini ban continues in France today as the right-wing populist faced defiance from Muslim women and their alliance.

The results of this study highlight that women formed the majority of Twitter users who discussed the burkini ban. Eslen-Ziya (2013) found that social media have been crucial to circulate information, to unite women's activists, and to gain national and international attention about social injustice and gender discriminatory practices. This is also aligned with the new wave of online activism for speaking-out and empowering women around the globe. A good example of this is the #MeToo movement, which went viral in the wake of sexual harassment accusations and revelations. Similar hashtags were used in Italy and France. In Italy, women used the #QuellaVoltaChe that means "That time when," and French women confronted their harassers by telling them #BalanceTonPorc that means "snitch out your pig" (LaMotte, 2017). Although social media provides an accessible platform for women to tackle gender discriminatory practices, the sustainability of these movements is yet to be determined. Future studies are needed to explore the strategies to help sustain the movement on social media.

Third, this study reveals that users' sense of empowerment that is predominately demonstrated in their tweets is the sense of autonomy. Social media users mainly used their sense of autonomy or agency to engage in the burkini discussion. Smith et al. (2015) reported the predominant mode of empowerment on the online protest was vicarious experience (44.2%). This study argues that the difference in findings reflects the communicative events of research. This study examined the burkini discussion whereas Smith et al. (2015) investigated collective protest in which thousands of citizens participated, that encompassed both online and offline actions and confrontations. Furthermore, the burkini discussion was centered on one incident in Nice City in France, where police fined a Muslim woman for wearing a burkini on a beach. Therefore, global networked publics had limited exposure to others' experience regarding marginalization through enforcing a dress code. However, the picture posted in the *Guardian* report recalled cultural imagery that the slain ghost of patriarchy is still implementing a dress code to control women's bodies even in the 21st century. Such a haunting scenario invoked human agency to subdue discriminatory practices in the name of national security and secular ideology.

Fourth, this study provides a crucial vantage point for policymakers. The results highlight how collective discontent is expressed on social media which could be a valuable source for mining public opinion (Smith et., 2015). Policymakers need to embrace social media to analyze public sentiment and determine key players. Such a practice could lead to a sustainable government-public relationship. Moss, Kennedy, Moshonas, and Birchall (2015) revealed that mining social media data can help the government in myriad ways (Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, social data can help the government to ameliorate political polarization and bridge gaps between contentious publics by creating a common ground for the collective good. Scholars need to investigate the role of social media algorithms in accelerating or combating political polarization where populism is resurfacing as a mode of political participation.

Fifth, the findings of this study make a valuable contribution to strategic communication scholarship. Earlier, scholars revealed how empowered employees are considered a crucial asset to organizations (Spreitzer, 1995). Now, empowered users' can be considered a vital component of organizational success because such users can help organizations build online communities and secure sustainable relationships between organizations and the publics (Smith et., 2015). Such a relationship will

help organizations build a reputation and enhance their share of voice in the online discussion about their brands. Furthermore, brands can measure their share of voice across different audience segments by investigating the connection between empowered users and electronic word-of-mouth.

This study has a few limitations. The major limitation of the study is that we did not analyze French-language tweets. The inclusion of such tweets could reveal cultural and social dynamics regarding the burkini ban in French society. The researchers were not proficient in French and resource constraints posed a challenge to recruit multilingual coders. However, the burkini ban discussion on Twitter was not just a local phenomenon; rather global networked publics participated in the discussion. The photo of the burkini ban incident was first published in a British newspaper and created contentious responses around the globe. The local is often tied to global, and the burkini ban incident highlighted the way a local incident can create a ripple effect around the globe. The proliferation of social media has created a global network of activists and people who challenge the misogynist practices. For example, the Women's March on Washington mobilized people around the globe, and women took street in 80 countries. In the context of #MeToo, the networked publics from 85 countries created 1.7 million tweets that included the hashtag #MeToo on their tweets (Park, 2017). Therefore, the tweets that reflect the expression of global networked publics demand scholarly scrutiny.

Another limitation of the study is that data were analyzed to examine users' sense of empowerment and communicative behavior. However, the connection between user networking potentials like user profile status on Twitter (the total number of tweets posted by the user), user friends (number of friends), user followers (number of followers) and empowerment remain unexplored in this study. Future research needs to tap into the networking potentials of Twitter users to examine the link between networking potentials and communicative behavior. Also, this study has not explored the relationship between gender and empowerment. Scholars could examine how gender and sexual orientation are connected to online communicative behavior and empowerment.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, political participation on social media have received considerable attention from scholars. They mostly investigated democratization, political efficacy, information seeking, and other online behavior. This approach of research predominately used survey to examine online behavior. However, the networked publics' sense of empowerment and communication behavior about contentious social issues received limited scholarly attention. This study provided a much-needed discussion on users' sense of empowerment and online communicative behavior by analyzing tweets. This study contributed to the ongoing dialogue on the networked public sphere, empowerment, and communication and social change. The study revealed that global networked publics could influence political discourse by sharing their voices online and reframing public policy issues.

Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that Twitter has become the much-needed platform to exercise users' sense of autonomy about social issues. The findings of this study weaken the slacktivism thesis by revealing how actively Twitter users resist discriminatory practices. As Twitter is becoming a crucial vehicle for public communication, policymakers and communication professionals need to leverage the potentials of empowered users to build relationships and mining public opinion. Policymakers need to understand the value of online public opinion to resolve conflict, negotiate polarized issues, and build government-public partnership. This study hopes to generate new scholarly interest in empowerment and social media.

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