It’s Not How You Say It, It’s What You Say: Ambient Digital Racism and Racial Narratives on Twitter

Felipe I. Agudelo and Natalie Olbrych

Abstract
Social media has been used to disseminate hate speech and racism. Racist opinions can be disguised through a language that may appear to be harmless; however, it can be part of a racist rhetoric toward communities of color. This type of racist communication is called Ambient Digital Racism (ADR). Through a thematic analysis, this project sought to identify and analyze social media racist discourses on Twitter in the context of George Floyd’s death. This research examined original tweets posted during the time of the protests using three known counter Black Lives Matter (BLM) hashtags, namely, #WhiteLivesMatter, #BlueLivesMatter, and #AllLivesMatter. After the analysis, two themes emerged, namely, the discourse of oppressor’s reverse racism and the social criminalization of BLM. These themes described the narratives used by these groups to develop a racist digital discourse that goes unnoticed by social media regulations and policies and that leaves an open space to negotiate what constitutes acceptable race talk and what constitutes a racist discourse. It was found that both themes were grounded on White victimization, color-blind racism, and the dehumanization of BLM as a social and racial justice movement.

Keywords
Ambient Digital Racism, Twitter, Black Lives Matter, counter-narrative, counter-movement

Introduction
Social media platforms (SMPs) have become spaces for individuals and communities to express their feelings and beliefs either positive or negative toward topics they consider relevant (Chung & Zeng, 2015; Stroińska & Cecchetto, 2019). These platforms allow users to have an anonymous space where they can release frustrations, expose their affinities, and gather in groups with which they identify (De Saint Laurent et al., 2020). SMPs such as Twitter provide a space for racists discourses that become normalized and that may shape and affect the social perceptions other users may have about race (Ekman, 2019). In preparation for a discussion on racist discourse, we start by using the definition of race in which Omi and Winant (2016) argue that race, besides being a social construct, is also a concept that represents social conflicts and interests by distinguishing the different types of bodies. Therefore, whiteness can be understood as the embodiment of racial power based on the systemic privileges that those racialized as White receive (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Moreover, racism is defined as a power structure in which different norms are created for the inequitiable distribution of wealth, benefits, opportunities, and rights (Mills, 1997). Therefore, racist expression exists as a mechanism that keeps the structures of oppression and racial privilege in place. After these definitions, Ambient Digital Racism (ADR) exists as a concept that helps in understanding the discursive shifts in racist discourses (Siapera, 2019). It allows to differentiate between an explicit racist discourse and a type of racism that mutates and adapts making itself open for discussion, deniability, and manipulation for advantageous interpretation.

As of February 2019, there were around 3.5 billion social media users worldwide (Pitropakis et al., 2020). In the case of Twitter, there were 69 million U.S. citizens using this platform in the first quarter of 2017 (Oltmann et al., 2020). Although Twitter has been adopted as a source of information in which 74% of users report as their main news outlet...
(Oltmann et al., 2020), it initially started as a platform guided by the question, “What are you doing?” which was used to let friends know about your whereabouts and activities or to give them updates about your life. After 2019, this question changed to “What’s happening?” shifting to a more news, events, and politics-oriented platform which people use to stay informed (De Saint Laurent et al., 2020).

Social movements started to use SMPs to mobilize and advance social change by grouping individuals with similar views around issues like race, immigration, and political views (Wilkins et al., 2019). Examples of these groups are social movements like #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, or #bringbackourgirls which have been used to promote social change. In the case of Black Lives Matter (BLM), counter-movements have emerged to challenge, contradict, attack, or recontextualize the way in which their message of racial justice is presented. The concept of recontextualization is the process in which factual words, images, or data are taken out of context, extracted, or reorganized in a way in which a new narrative can be constructed to reinforce racial stereotypes or subtract the importance and relevance of the event being denounced (Ekman, 2019; Nortio et al., 2020). #WhiteLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter have emerged as an example of counter-movements that present a counter-narrative to the message intended by #BlackLivesMatter. During events of racial tension, there is generally a flux of racially loaded messages from these counter-movements in which individuals in the dominant discourses feel threatened or exposed triggering the expression of racist messages online (Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021). For example, after the 2016 Nice truck attack, there were 286 anti-Muslim tweets per hour, and between June and July of the same year 40% of the tweets about Brexit had anti-immigrant or xenophobic content (Siapera, 2019). Since none of these messages fell into the technicalities of what represents “hate speech,” they were allowed to stay online and public.

This article followed the case of George Floyd’s death from the perspective of WhiteLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter and the racial discourses created within them as counter-narratives of #BlackLivesMatter. Its purpose was to identify and analyze social media racist discourses on Twitter by approaching this SMP as a communication space that is used by individuals and communities to express their racist beliefs in a socially accepted and apparently harmless language through the use of these three hashtags.

**Ambient Digital Racism**

ADR can be defined as a digital discursive form of discrimination that is presented as subtler, polished, and without obvious racist language on SMPs (Rubio-Carbonero, 2020). ADR refers to a narrative that allows racist discourses to be posted online, tolerated, and sometimes confused with an open debate about race (Siapera, 2019). For the purpose of this article, we focus on SMPs more specifically on Twitter as a communication space where ADR is expressed within the use of three specific hashtags, namely, WhiteLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter.

When talking about ADR, a couple of issues are important to mention. One of them is its availability represented through the amount of information users can access on platforms such as Twitter. From June 2012 to April 2013, through the project “Geography of Hate” 150,000 tweets that used racist, homophobic, or anti-disabled slurs were identified (Keum & Miller, 2017). A second aspect that characterizes ADR is its Internet omnipresence, the staggering amount of racist messaging that can be easily found or inadvertently accessed by users of any social identity (Keum & Miller, 2017; Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021). Although this information can be accessed by chance or by purposely looking for it, it provides an idea of how unsafe the internet can be since it may influence how people make sense of racist discourses (Daniels, 2009).

**SMPs and Race**

It is important to highlight that a racialized technology covered by an apparent color-blindness has been present since the beginning of digital media (Siapera, 2019; Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021). Moreover, these technologies have been linked not only to racialized structures but also to racist discourses (Siapera, 2019).

SMPs represent a space in which people connect, navigate other participants profiles, and comment on issues of interest. SMPs like Twitter have turned into a space of discourses that mediate societal construction through the public messages and their users (Jackson et al., 2020). By 2018, there were 336 million Twitter users worldwide (Alkiviadou, 2019). According to Oltmann et al. (2020), one of the reasons Twitter users initially create an account stems from the sense of solidarity they find in these SMPs using their accounts as platforms for political participation, protesting or expressing support or dislike for social or political events. Being able to share things quickly and easily by gathering through hashtags makes the dissemination of information reachable to a bigger audience than with other platforms and also makes it easier for users to find information based on their interests (Oltmann et al., 2020). Finally, Twitter is set up in such a way that facilitates a perceived anonymity which allows individuals or groups to share their ideas about issues that are less likely to be expressed through other means of communication or data gathering (Nguyen et al., 2021; Strońska & Cecchetto, 2019). Therefore, it creates an apparent safe space in which users can say things without feeling restraint by any social norm (Keum & Miller, 2017).

Twitter has become a space that is open for different racial groups to express their identities and beliefs. One example is the case of Black Twitter. This space (hashtag) allows users...
who identify as Black to develop Black discourses and to connect through affinities in meaning (Brock, 2020). As expressed by Jackson et al (2020), these hashtags represent a shortcut to connect people and ideas. Another example is BLM. This community provides a political and social importance to the discourses of blackness. Therefore, the presence of a group like BLM allows to take out of the anonymity stories about racial injustice that would have been silenced or ignored by other traditional media (Brock, 2020; Jackson et al., 2020). These two communities represent a response to a system that includes social media, web browsers, platforms, and algorithms that reproduce negative stereotypes and racial identities that have been historically constructed offline (Daniels, 2009; Noble, 2018). At the same time, counter-movements through the use of hashtags are created with the purpose of disseminating their beliefs and to mis-characterize the previous two examples. A sample of these counter-movements includes communities like Blue Lives Matter, White Lives Matter, and All Lives Matter.

Hate Speech and Terms of Service on Social Media

One of the challenges regarding the First Amendment in relation to hate speech is that freedom of speech is not specifically defined and thus courts and lawmakers are left to interpret (Fisch, 2002; Matsuda, 1989). The selected interpretation of the protection of hate speech has, over the years, fabricated a solidity that dramatically affects the outcome of all hate speech trials brought before the Supreme Court (Fisch, 2002). Thus, those disseminating content containing hate speech are able to utilize this interpretation and protection to cause physical, emotional, social, and economic harm with no legal consequence (Becker et al., 2000). As Matsuda (1989) has suggested, the failure of US law to supply resources to people and groups whose lives and livelihoods are jeopardized by hate speech is basically another way to hurt them.

Hate speech in social media according to Siapera and Viejo-Otero (2021) creates a dilemma between freedom of speech and the control of hate speech. This raises the following questions: When hate speech becomes permissible? What language has to be used to be considered hate speech or racist? Are there “bad” expressions of racism and therefore also “good” ones? And how far is racism and racist discourses allowed to go to be considered offensive? Although these are not necessarily the questions we intended to answer during this study, they provide guidance on how racist discourses or hate speech can be disguised with the purpose of disseminating racial discourses.

Different SMPs have developed and implemented their own regulations or terms of service for their users, controlling their posts, messages, and the language used by them (Siapera, 2019); nevertheless, this only addresses what can be identified in general terms as explicit hate speech. Therefore, it can be said that SMPs work as information gatekeepers. They create the filters and the parameters of what can be said and how (West, 2017). This allows them to become the regulators of what can be considered constitutes a racist discourse and what does not. This allows users in the case of Twitter to express racist discourses without sounding racist despite the rules and language policies created to prevent hate speech or the harassment of individuals or groups.

Moreover, policies related to the term of service of SMPs can be characterized into two groups: a “free speech”-oriented organization in which the focus of their policies is to protect the ability of their users to express freely and a “community”-oriented organization in which their policies focus on preventing discourses and content that will generate the stereotyping and harassment of different communities (West, 2017).

Counter-Movements and BLM

SMPs like Twitter have become a space for individuals to express political opinions and other viewpoints about current issues like immigration, and social and race (Nortio et al., 2020). These expressions promote different virtual spaces where users can get together based on the sense of belonging, or “digital togetherness” (Nortio et al., 2020). According to Marino (2015), the concept of “digital togetherness” refers to a sense of belonging and sharing an identity due to personal experiences, facilitating a space to communally propagate their values. This allows the development of perceived intimate relationships with other members through shared fears, stereotypes, or personal experiences that can be used to communicate their beliefs, or apparent knowledge toward those considered a threat to their identity (Ekman, 2019; Stamatelatos et al., 2020). Therefore, individuals or groups who identify with what can be considered counter-movements of BLM like Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, or Whites Lives Matter share a digital togetherness based on a shared meaning affinity.

Moreover, social movements like BLM are expected to create social change and collective actions (Wilkins et al., 2019). Their purpose is basically to challenge the structures and to represent the interest of a collective that is being oppressed (Lippard et al., 2020). In contrast, counter-movements seek the opposite and their members advocate for keeping the status quo and to prevent social changes, especially those that will affect their interests or privileged position within society (Lippard et al., 2020). However, they only exist if the social movement they oppose is politically significant (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Therefore, these movements become reactionary adversaries, the efforts and confrontations of which are placed on the public sphere, including SMPs and courts (Lippard et al., 2020).

A structural principle of counter-movements like #WhiteLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter is the argument that there is not a need for the development
of a racial hierarchy based on the argument that there is no differentiation between the value of other lives in comparison with Black lives (Agozino, 2018). This logic hides and minimizes the fact that there are racial groups whose lives have been oppressed and forced to be considered to be of lesser value than White lives, and who are considered disposable and can be taken without consequences (Agozino, 2018). Kil (2020) argued these three movements are framed in a context of whiteness. For All Lives Matter, “all” means “White” through a color-blindness language that does not address race directly (Atkins, 2019; Kil, 2020; Lippard et al., 2020). For Blue Lives Matter, whiteness is represented through the history of police in the United States and its role in keeping and protecting White privilege (Bock & Figueroa, 2018; Kil, 2020). And finally, in the case of White Lives Matter, it poses White lives in the context of an appearing existing discrimination against White people based on their race (Kalunta-Crump, 2017).

Although some of these counter-movements have been “infiltrated” or “sabotaged” by racial and social justice supporters to change the narratives provided in these digital groups, the focus of these counter-movements continues to be the delegitimization of BLM as a movement (Banks, 2018).

Therefore, it is important to become explicit about the lives of those who identify as part of these racial groups. Although these hashtags may not typically use explicit language that could be perceived as racist, it uses colloquial and seemingly neutral language part of a rhetoric that promotes a racist discourse. This subtle, vulnerable to interpretation, and difficult to identify type of discrimination becomes part of what is considered ADR (Rubio-Carbonero, 2020).

**Method**

This project is framed into a qualitative research method. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the body of the original tweets of three BLM counter-movement, namely, #WhiteLives Matter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter. This method allowed to identify themes based on the importance of the data they capture in relation to the research question.

This research examined only original tweets posted using these hashtags within 1 month of George Floyd’s death (25 May 2020–25 June 2020) that manifest any expression of dislike or unfavored opinion about his death or about BLM as a social movement. Replies and retweets were not included as part of the analysis for this study since the purpose was to identify how the conversation and counter-narratives started through the content of the original tweets.

For the data analysis, we used an inductive coding process supported by the use of NVivo 12 to identify, organize, and group data by codes, categories, and themes. Inductive coding is a method in which themes emerge from the tweets collected (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This process was developed first through the inductive creation of codes, in which 27 codes were generated. Second, the process of analysis focused on identifying and grouping the previous codes into three categories. These three categories included White victimization, racism denial, and BLM as a thread to American society. Subsequently, the process focused on looking for broader themes that grouped these categories based on similar patterns. Two themes emerged from this step. These themes included Oppressor’s Reverse Racism and the social criminalization of BLM.

During this study, saturation was achieved after reading and analyzing 200 tweets. For the purpose of this research, that means that no new codes emerged from the data after reaching this number of tweets. According to Glaser and Strauss cited by Saunders et al. (2018), saturation is the decision factor used by the researcher to stop collecting data since no new codes are found.

Grammar and spelling for the tweets cited in this article were kept based on how original tweets were posted.

**Findings and Analysis**

During the analysis of all tweets included in this project, two main themes emerged. These themes represented two different types of racist discourses that fall into the category of ADR based on its definition. These themes included a type of colloquial language that did not at first appear to have a racist meaning or purpose; however, after analyzing both the content and the context in which these tweets were posted a racial subtext was found. The language used was given to interpretations which could allow users who posted the messages deny the racist connotation of their messages and could be seen as acceptable and harmless (Siapera, 2019). One of the two types of racist discourses identified was based on a discourse of the oppressor’s reverse racism and the second one was based on a counter-narrative that fosters the social criminalization of race through the criminalization of BLM.

**Oppressor’s Reverse Racism**

A recurrent topic found in the tweets analyzed for this study was the argument that the primary victim of racism has been inverted, repositioning the oppressor as the victim of oppression and vice versa. For the purpose of this research, when we talk about the oppressor we refer to White supremacy as a system of oppression that marginalizes and dehumanizes communities of color by setting whiteness as the standard; therefore, other groups are considered a deviation of that norm (Ellerhoff, 2021).

According to the concept of reverse racism members of a privileged group are the apparent victims of discrimination supposedly perpetuated by a group that has been historically marginalized because of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Cepollaro, 2021). Therefore, this concept is framed in color-blind racism and it is centered in the argument that White people are
discriminated based on their race; therefore, they can claim a victimhood and a valid resentment toward communities of color (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2017; Sengul, 2021). This discourse emerged combining expressions of victimization, denial, White pride, and a potential loss of privilege. These tweets expressed arguments from a defensive perspective to communicate an apparent victimization:

“‘White people have never been oppressed.’ Is Holocaust denial.”

“Just curious, would anyone protest if George Floyd were white?”

“Race relations weren’t perfect before George Floyd’s death, but they weren’t dire. What’s happening now has nothing to do with race”

As mentioned previously, these tweets exhibit expressions of self-victimization to support the argument of a counter-narrative in which the subjects of the social mobilization are actually the oppressors of the member of the counter-movement. In order to develop a more credible narrative, some of the tweets in this theme provided data or facts to support either the denial or an opposite argument of what the purpose of the social movement is:

“#AllLivesMatter, but in modern society it is white lives that are more at risk. Whites are disproportionately the victims of interracial violence, primarily at the hands of black offenders. It will only be true that #AllLivesMatter once it is true that #WhiteLivesMatter.”

“How many unarmed blacks were killed by cops last year? 9. How many unarmed whites were killed by cops last year? 19. More officers are killed every year than are unarmed blacks. When do the #BlueLivesMatter protests begin?”

These tweets in some cases advocate for a pride of whiteness, a characteristic that is threatened by the purpose of social movements like BLM. These types of tweets reflect an apparent pride toward whiteness and the symbols that may represent it.

“Love my freckles”

“Chance of me apologizing for being white . . . 0.00%”

Furthermore, some of the tweets analyzed during this study create a counter-narrative based on the manipulation of a discourse founded on the criminalization of those being historically marginalized because of their race creating a context of victim deservingness:

“I will NOT be taking a knee NEITHER for #BlackLivesMatter protesters who display such hatred towards white people NOR George Floyd, a criminal who once robbed a woman in her house at gunpoint RT if you agree with my stance”

Moreover, by claiming this victimhood and to overturn the narrative in which actions happen the authors of these tweets seek to mobilize readers to retake a system that provides White supremacy with the privileges given by the current reality they constructed and continuously serves them:

“White people need to stand up for themselves and take back the country or we’re doomed”

“IF this officer is convicted of murder—Civil War II will begin!”

A Counter-Narrative Based on the Social Criminalization of BLM

Authors of the tweets analyzed for this study expressed a narrative that reflects a social criminalization and mischaracterization of the BLM discourse. They propose a counter-narrative that equals this racial justice movement with what is perceived as a threat to democracy and society. The use of language that includes terms like terrorists, radical left, and thugs, among others, is used to provide a description and a social identity and a political affiliation to BLM. BLM becomes the focus of some of these narratives during the events surrounding George Floyd’s death due to its role and recognition as a racial and social justice advocate:

“I do not support BLM. I do not support Antifa. I do not support TERRORISTS, nor do I negotiate with them!”

“In summary, George Floyd’s death will be remembered by these 3 kinds of groups •Protesters •looters •extremist/agitators”

“Black Lives Matter co-founder tweets about killing men and white folks”

In addition, these tweets portray aspects in which the different counter-movements correlate racial justice advocacy with a political affiliation that threatens the history and identity of the country:

“#WhiteLivesMatter I’m at a complete loss to understand why Government and the police are allowing the BLM to preach racial hatred on our streets. If they don’t like our history no one is keeping them here! See how they fare in the country of their ORIGIN”

“The #purge2020 continues & goes far beyond #ConfederateMonuments. Washington, Grant, Lincoln & many others are being targeted. This is an effort to #SociallyEngineer society & right from the #Communism 101 playbook”
Finally, the authors of some of these tweets expressed a counter-narrative that provides message founded in the promotion of order and peace in a society that has been disrupted by individuals who are seeking to achieve racial and social justice. This is evidenced through messages that provide a division between political parties:

“Dems are Anti-America. 104 shootings in a weekend in Chicago. 14 shot were children. I was a 3 year old child. Are you going to keep letting this happen? I won’t”

“Conservatives We need to make a stand Would you intervene Time to Stand Up”

**Discussion**

The results of this study reflect how hashtags like #WhiteLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, or #BlueLivesMatter are intended to deny the validity of the #BlackLivesMatter movement through a racial discourse that questions the integrity, intentionality, and character of this social movement and the search of racial justice. These narratives are framed into a discourse that reflects White victimization, as an expression in which White individuals perceive the apparent increasing power of a racially oppressed group as a threat to their privileges. Hence, they need to adapt and justify different behaviors and discourses of control to keep their power and privileges (Isom et al., 2022). These behaviors and discourses of control in some cases are exercised through a reverse racism argument or by a counter-narrative that criminalizes races and the search for racial justice. This criminalization is understood as the process by which the government, media, and individuals or communities who feel threatened define and characterize different social identities and behaviors as criminal creating a criminal perception about them (Schneider & Schneider, 2008). Consequently, this criminalization process is reflected on the content of these tweets through narratives that create a misrepresentation of the actions, character, and purpose of a movement like BLM. These discourses depend on highlighting the negative stereotypes given to race through its social construction to perpetuate their existence as part of a truthful knowledge which society has to believe (Jablonski, 2012).

Authors of these tweets relied on the concept of White victimization during the death of George Floyd as a route to describe the defensiveness that White people express when their ideas, and knowledge about race, racism, and racial justice, are confronted and challenged (DiAngelo & Dyson, 2018). This concept allows them to frame a discourse of reverse racism to explain a perceived vulnerability and self-victimization with the purpose of justifying and achieving a counter-narrative that is presented from an approach that allows the oppressor to turn the tables and hide their acts of oppression by becoming the victim of a racial group that threatens the stability of a system that provides material and psychological privileges for them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Furthermore, this type of discourse allows to develop a protective narrative of the interest of White people and develops a shield against racial stress in the midst of tense racial situations (Resane, 2021). One of the characteristics of this type of protective discourses is the minimization of racism by creating a color-blindness narrative in which the impact of racism on communities of color is either denied or minimized (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This type of narrative within the tweets analyzed for this research was evidenced through tweets that either try to remove the racial component from the death of George Floyd or that simply provided him with a criminal status, therefore legitimizing the police actions.

Moreover, the results of this study suggest the social criminalization of BLM through a counter-narrative that dehumanizes and provides negative social attributes to its followers. The dehumanization of people of color may be understood as a process that facilitates the devaluation of their lives by not perceiving them as humans but as objects or less than humans (Nelson & Williams, 2019; Oh, 2019). Furthermore, once a group has been dehumanized, offenses committed against them will not be considered a violation of the normative order that regulates society (Owusu-Bempah, 2017). This dehumanization and criminalization is evidenced in these Tweets through the use of expressions like “thugs,” “looters,” “rioters,” “terrorists,” and everything perceived as damaging for society. As a result, this discourse represents a racial narrative that expresses emotions such as anger, fear, disgust, and hate in which people of color are allowed to be treated as a group that lacks the moral values and the social principles of White communities, whose values and humanity are considered an example and role for the rest of society (Nelson & Williams, 2019; Oh, 2019). Moreover, dehumanization through a color-blindness discourse tries to explain a racial and moral superiority by the process of rationalizing racial inequities through a racist narrative and rhetorical strategies that seem not to be racial (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). This approach provides a space that allows and creates a raceless explanation to what in reality constitutes a racial phenomenon by redesigning and rewriting old types of racism into new expressions of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

The themes found during this study reflect a sentiment within the tweets posted in the three counter BLM hashtags that suggested that the narratives of the racial contract have changed. According to Mills (1997), the foundation of the social contract is racial and it happens between those racialized as Whites (subjects of the contract) over those racialized as people of color (objects of the contract). Consequently, it creates a system of power involving those who represent the dominant group (White supremacy) and those who have been robbed of their humanity or simply dehumanized (groups historically marginalized because of race). However, the discursive foundation of these tweets is a narrative that
suggests that the order of this contract has shifted by turning White people into the victims of racism (reverse racism), allowing them to express counter-narratives that allow them to label and stereotype communities of color through a discourse suitable and tolerable for SMPs (Siapera, 2019).

ADR becomes, then, an expression of the convenient and repressive discourse that perpetuates privilege for certain racial groups. It represents a narrative where individuals can express racism without being believed to be a racist. ADR exposes how different expressions of racism and racist discourses, even though more sophisticated and subtle than those of the Jim Crow era, can be equally damaging and effective in keeping the racial contract and its resulting inequities in place (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Conclusion

The tweets analyzed for this study have revealed a racially loaded content even within the structures and regulations developed by Twitter.

The BLM movement and the highly public attention created by Floyd’s death exposed a reality that makes participants in the counter-movement groups (#WhiteLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, #BlueLivesMatter) uncomfortable, and as a result, different discourses are originated with the purpose of creating frames that cannot be considered intangible ideas but concrete narratives that mobilize counter-movements and their followers through the manipulation of their knowledge and emotions (Wahlström et al., 2021).

Although SMPs like Twitter have implemented different user policies to control racial hate speech on their sites, it still leaves the doors open to negotiations of what constitutes acceptable race talk and what constitutes racist discourse. Racist expressions on social media are not always easy to identify and they can be less than obvious. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the importance of media literacy to recognize the intentionality behind a message. It is evident how more sophisticated expressions of racism are permeating social media policies and filters. Therefore, ADR coexists and is mutually reinforced with other more explicit racist expressions. This, according to Siapera & Viejo-Otero (2021), has led to a flexible racism that is allowed through online policies that are not historically or socially contextualized to identify and understand what constitutes a racist discourse. This raises the question of what constitutes hate speech and who are the actors involved in the dissemination of such discourse.

Social media racist discourses come in different shapes and scenarios that can be produced by anybody who identifies with a set of affinities that can be expressed on a digital platform. In the case of Twitter, users may post racially loaded tweets using any of these hashtags by only using up to 280 characters. These messages are expressed in a digital platform that reaches millions of people; therefore, it allows the perpetuation and legitimization of racist discourses that shape the knowledge and perceptions about race for different generations that retrieve their information from platforms like Twitter.

SMPs like Twitter create a perfect faceless space, which allows to minimize the impact and repercussions that expressing personal beliefs has in non-virtual society. It allows users to perceive a lesser sense of accountability for their actions (Keum & Miller, 2017).

Finally, subtle but damaging digital racial discourses bring up an interaction between how to exercise the right to free speech and the need to disassemble racist discourses. Throughout the development of this project and the examination of all included tweets, we found different ways by which freedom of speech, and the protections therein, could be used as a tool of oppression to maintain the racial contract.

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ORCID iD

Felipe I. Agudelo https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2586-2304

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**Author Biographies**

Felipe I. Agudelo PhD, MPH, is an assistant professor in the Department of Public Health at Simmons University. His research interests include social media and racism, restorative justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Natalie Olbrych, BSW, was a research assistant at Simmons University during the development of this article.