

2021

Information, Identification, or Both? A Rhetorical Analysis of How BLM Uses Their Official Website

Candice L. Edrington

University of South Carolina - Columbia, candicee@mailbox.sc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/jour_facpubs



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *The Pennsylvania Communication Annual*, Volume 77, Issue 2, 2021, pages 11-30.

© Pennsylvania Communication Association, 2021

Reposted from [Pennsylvania Communication Association](#) with permission.

This Article is brought to you by the Journalism & Mass Communications, School of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

**Information, Identification, Or Both? A Rhetorical Analysis
of How BLM Uses Their Official Website**

Candice L. Edrington, Ph.D.
University of South Carolina

Introduction

Containing many textual and visual elements, as well as hyperlinks, websites may be described as comprising a genre in that they share particular features and respond to particular exigences (Baab, 2008). More specifically, the websites of social movements contain a multitude of information housed in one place. This information usually includes but is not limited to the mission of the social movement, upcoming events, as well as contact information for media inquiries. The homepages (also known as landing pages) of these websites are the social movement's first opportunity to interact with a visitor. The homepages of these websites thus provide an overview as well as a level of specificity regarding the image, actions, and goals of the movements, in addition to presenting insights into their overall strategies. The visual structure and organization of the homepage can also serve as an indicator of how these social movements view or articulate their identities. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the rhetorical dimension of the Black Lives Matter's website homepage in an effort to uncover how identification is articulated in and through the website. This rhetorical analysis focuses on the larger issues of how social movements use digital tools to help advance their goals and achieve action.

Hahn and Gonchar (1971) proposed a methodology by which a rhetorical analysis of social movements should be examined. They suggested that "intertwining traditional categories of analysis facilitates insights into the complexity of social movement rhetoric" (p. 47). They maintained that social movements should be studied through the analysis of established classical rhetorical categories: ethos, logos, pathos, and style. According to Hahn and Gonchar (1971), the researcher should be able to discover the movement's ideal participant when analyzing its ethos, understand the premise that unites its members by analyzing logos, understand the emotional appeals of the movement when analyzing pathos, and uncover the attitude (tone) of the movement through its use of style.

Similar to organizations, social movements explicitly articulate

their identity through statements that project their mission, agenda, goals, or vision. Additionally, they “express their identity more indirectly through all their discourse, including visual discourse and links on websites” (Baab, 2008, p. 147). Websites offer social movements many opportunities to identify with current and future participants as they help “to move beyond passive forms of self-presentation” (Esrock and Leichty, 1998, p. 309). Many rhetorical scholars, including Warnick (2001), call for the analysis of organizational websites as they can help highlight how “electronic messages are designed, ordered, and organized to privilege certain ideas and to influence the thinking of their users and readers” (p. 63). Baab (2008) posited that websites help *social movements* make “arguments using verbal and visual texts working together” (p. 151). In a multimodal analysis of Amnesty International, Ochowicz (2018) demonstrated how “reports, visuals, and posts are represented to arouse emotions (pathos), engender authenticity and appropriateness of actions (logos) and boost credibility (ethos)” (p. 38) by analyzing the textual and visual mode of the organization’s website in addition to its color and composition. The framework for this rhetorical analysis utilizes these categories to examine and interpret the textual and visual components of the homepage in addition to the semiotic modes (color and composition).

Analysis

Overview

The Black Lives Matter official website (www.blacklivesmatter.com) was created on “July 17, 2013—just days after George Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin,” according to Freelon et al. (2016, p.14). While the conversation threads via hashtags on social media regarding the murder of Trayvon Martin made BLM a topic of discussion, the official website helped to articulate BLM as a movement. On this website, the visitor can find information referencing incidents of police brutality all over the nation, and charges for movement participators to demand accountability for the injustices witnessed by people of color. The analysis begins with a consideration of color and composition, an examination of the visual elements and concludes with interpreting these elements in relation to ethos, pathos, logos and style.

Color, Composition & Interactivity

Digital rhetorician Douglas Eyman (2015) writes,

Edrington

style takes on new importance for digital rhetoric, particularly in terms of visual style: for a digital rhetoric, style is equivalent to ‘design’; thus, digital rhetoric must be concerned with understanding all the available elements of digital document design, including color, font choice, and layout, as well as multimedia design possibilities such as motion, interactivity, and appropriate use of media (p. 70).

BLM’s homepage is inviting and easy to navigate. The website is screen-responsive, which means that it lends itself to being viewed on mobile devices, such as a phone or a tablet, in addition to on a laptop or desktop computer. A screen responsive homepage appears visually the same when viewed on an iPad as when viewed on a full computer screen. Viewing the homepage from a phone, however, is different since the information is condensed as it adapts to the viewer’s device, hiding some information behind a menu tab. Ochowicz (2018) notes that this visual condensation is “a rhetorical strategy of selectivity and minimalist design” (p. 41).

Upon landing on the movement’s homepage, website visitors are immediately introduced to the logo and identifying colors of the social movement. The meanings of colors differ depending on their cultural context; therefore, it is important to note that the analysis of these colors refers to meanings within the U.S. context. Black, white, and yellow are intertwined throughout the homepage via text, backgrounds, and social media widgets. These colors are consciously used throughout the website to remain consistent with the social movement. The logo is a declarative graphic which informs the visitor that “Black lives matter.” Positioned in the upper-left-hand corner of the homepage, these three words are written inside of a white square, in all caps, are bolded in black, and written vertically. Three yellow horizontal lines follow these words. Yellow is also used as a highlighting color. Black, yellow, and white are the primary colors fixated throughout the homepage, with the exception of a blue ‘donate’ button that appears twice and the traditional pink and blue colors associated with specific social media widgets.

The use of the color yellow attracts attention throughout the homepage. Swan (2008) posits that yellow is used as a color of both hope and urgency. Furthermore, she notes that combining yellow and black may imply a sense of danger, work, and energy.

Moreover, these three colors have been used together and individually elsewhere, particularly in other social movements. Sociologists Fine, Montemurro, Semora, Stalp, Claussen, and Sierra (1998) declared that social movements “use conventions of color to represent themselves and their ideologies to the public” (p. 449). They posited that black is a color that often symbolizes the people of the movement (Fine et al., 1998). In other civil rights movements, yellow has been used as a color for justice (the Yellow Vests Movement), and white has been used as a color of peace.

Sans-serif fonts are used throughout the homepage, creating a modern appeal to the website that is both youthful and accessible. These font choices allow the text to be readable on screen (Bernard, Chaparro, Mills, and Halcomb, 2002), appealing, and emphasized. The headings for each section on the homepage use a bolded Sans-serif font, while the text in the body uses a non-bolded Sans-serif font. The color of the text alternates between black, yellow, and white, depending on its location on the homepage, and the background that it is written on (white or yellow text on a black background; black text on a white background).

Visitors to the homepage can find videos, social media widgets, a Twitter timeline, and news stories regarding the movement throughout these columns. In addition to these elements, the homepage provides several outlets for the visitors to get involved with the social movement and to interact on the homepage. The website calls for a response from its visitors by providing links that allow the visitor to get help, find a local BLM chapter, donate, and help fight against disinformation. The homepage of the website is arranged in a table-like format, with columns and rows. The logo and the main tabs at the top of the homepage are presented in a horizontal banner, symbolizing a row. The rest of the information is presented vertically in a column under the banner. Three tabs (“What Matters 2020”, “Get Help”, and “Chapters”) are positioned in the horizontal banner at the top of the homepage. These tabs are bolded and in yellow. This signifies that these three tabs are currently the most important to the movement. Above these three prominent tabs, the visitors of the site will find additional tabs (“News”, “About”, “Programs”, “Global Actions”, “Watch + Listen”, and “Shop”) that invite the visitor to discover what the BLM organization is, what they believe, and how the visitor can help both the organization and cause. When selecting the “About” tab, visitors are presented

Edrington

with a dropdown menu where they can then choose to learn more about BLM (“About Black Lives Matter”), discover what the movement organizers and participants believe (“What We Believe”), see how the movement has evolved (“6 Years Strong”), understand how the movement originated (“Herstory), and meet the co-founders of the movement (“Our Co-Founders). The “Programs” tab provides additional tabs as well, “Arts+Culture” and “Black Futures Month”. “Activist Shorts” can be accessed by selecting “Watch+Listen”. The last tab that displays a dropdown menu when selected is the “Get Help” tab. Here, visitors to the website can gain access to the resources such as mental health guides and toolkits (“Resources”), view partners and organizations affiliated with the movement (“Partners”) and get in contact with organizers of the social movement (“Contact”).

At the top of the BLM homepage in the righthand corner are social media widgets for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Additionally, a search icon signals to visitors that the website is searchable. Given the richness of text and content found on this homepage, it appears that the web designers chose this layout as a way not only to save space but to segment the attention of the visitor. The left-hand column is exclusively dedicated to information, asking the visitor to enlighten themselves on the recent happenings of the movement. The righthand column, on the other hand, demands involvement from the visitor by charging them with some form of action. A scrolling banner is positioned below the header in the left column. Here is where images of victims and pictures of events are displayed. By selecting these images, the visitor will be taken to another part of the website that shares related news stories. Additional news stories and social media feeds are found beneath the slideshow in the left column. Adjacent to the left column, visitors of the homepage can sign up for updates, donate, help the social movement in their fight against disinformation, gain access to quick links, follow the social media pages, and shop for paraphernalia. The logo of the movement is centered at the footer of the homepage. Beneath the logo are five tabs that once again invite users to further explore the website (“About BLM”, “Chapters”, “Contact”, “Donate”, “News”, “Resources”, “Shop”, and “What Matters 2020”). Beneath these tabs, visitors of the site can once again find social media widgets, linking to the social movement’s Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts.

Image

A combination of visual and textual components are displayed on the homepage. While only a few images are sprinkled throughout the homepage, the selection and placement of the images are strategic. These particular images align with the mission of the social movement and grab the attention of the visitors almost immediately upon entering the website. The background of the header is an image of protest. The image presents a combination of faces of some protestors and the hands of others holding signs. Serving as the main image for the website, this image is in grayscale. Although grayed out, the viewer of this image is able to identify the genders of the protestors and, through the visual cues, make assumptions about their race. Deliberate in its composition, this image serves to suggest that every visitor to the website is part of the fight for freedom, liberation, and justice.

The next visuals that are seen on the homepage are those found in the slideshow, situated in the left-hand column directly under the header. Two flyers and three images are arranged throughout the banner, each attached to a different movement-related news story that can be accessed by selecting the designated image. The first visual in the slideshow is a flyer asking visitors for their help in the fight against disinformation. Aligning with the theme colors of the movement, the text written on the flyer is in white with highlights of yellow throughout. The background of the flyer unveils a globe seemingly from a satellite view. The word “news” is wrapped around the globe and repeats. The image is also in grayscale and serves as the background for the text “help us fight disinformation.” As this is the first visual in the slideshow, it could be assumed that ensuring the dissemination of only accurate information surrounding the social movement is currently one of the main goals.

The second visual to appear in the slideshow is also a flyer. This flyer, however, displays four images in total: three of victims and an image of protest. Images of Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, and AJ Weber, all of whom were victims of police brutality and who sparked movement protests, are front and center on the flyer. An image of a protest serves as the background image to this flyer. Again, the main colors of the social movement are present (black, yellow, and white). This flyer invites its viewer to watch the September 19, 2019 oversight hearing on the country’s current policing practices and to demand accountability of police officers who unjustly exert excessive force on Black and Brown bodies.

Edrington

Hashtags that are commonly used on social media following the dialogue of BLM are included. These include: #blacklivesmatter, #whatmatters2020, #policeoversighthearing (January, 2020). The background image in this flyer does not show the faces of protesters. However, it displays people marching along the street with protest signs raised.

The third visual in this slideshow is an image of an adult male and four children (three boys and one girl). From the interactions shown in this image, the adult male can be assigned a paternal role with the children being assumed as *his* children. His face is not shown as he looks down at the little girl, but he is seen with one arm wrapped around the two older boys (approximately middle-school-aged) and one hand placed on the head of the younger boy. The younger boy is embracing the small girl as she so endearingly lays her head on his chest. Text does not appear in this image, and a graffiti wall is the backdrop for this image. While there is no textual commentary on this image, this image is attached to the news story of “what matters in 2020”. By opting not to show the face of the father in this image, this visual image projects the children to the center, alluding to them as being what matters in 2020. This particular image works in a way that culturally projects Black culture to dominant groups. The image of the father and children particularly work to make visible the realities of Black fatherhood. Given the stereotypes about Black fathers, this image humanizes Black men and pushes the narrative that Black men have children whose lives they are actively present in and that Black men are the protectors of the Black family.

The fourth visual of this slideshow is an image of protestors. This time, they are not grayed out, and their faces are clearly visible. While there are many of them, six women who *appear* to be Black hold a banner that reads “#BLACKLIVESMATTER. This too is attached to the “what matters in 2020” news story. Many other people are shown in this image, but it is the women holding the banner who take center stage. These women embody/visually reference the three women who co-founded the movement by proclaiming that Black lives are valuable, that they do, in fact, matter.

As the slideshow continuously rolls, an image of two women appears. Neither woman is directly engaged with the viewer. They appear to be looking off at something or someone else. As a result of their positioning, they are best understood as having an offer gaze, rather than, say, a demand gaze. According to Kress

and van Leeuwen (2006), an image that takes the form of a demand gaze “demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her” (p. 118) while an offer gaze “offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case” (p. 119). These women offer information to the visitor of the homepage as they represent activists who participate in their local chapters of BLM. This image is linked to the “Activist Shorts” section of the website where members of the Black Lives Matter global network community share more about their activism and work within the movement. The logo of the movement is placed in the bottom right-hand corner of the image. The two women are dressed in a relaxed nature; one is wearing a t-shirt and cardigan while the other is wearing a white t-shirt with an image of rapper Eazy-E on the chest.

Scrolling down the homepage, viewers see images that are primarily placed in the left-hand column, the same column that presents the visitor with information about the movement’s efforts. Three news stories are positioned vertically with an image attached to each of these. The designer of the website once again uses the same images that were in the slideshow; the two flyers and the father and children. The flyer about disinformation is attached to the corresponding news story. The flyer urging the visitor of the site to watch, listen, and demand accountability is attached to the corresponding news story as well. However, the images used in the flyer are different this time. This time, the images are those of victims of police brutality Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Michelle Shirley, while the victims are different, they are all *still/also* victims of police brutality. It is also interesting to note that in each flyer regarding the police oversight hearing, only one woman is represented while there are two men. This is consistent with data on police violence, showing that while both Black men and women experience police brutality, Black men experience it at a higher rate (Edwards, Lee & Esposito, 2019). Upon reaching the last news story on the website, you see the little girl that was in the family image in the slideshow. This time, we only see her, as she is hugging her father, his back turned towards us. The child’s eyes gaze directly at the viewer, at us, and thus demand that we look at her as she is what matters in 2020. At the same time, the viewer is clear, based on the relationship of the image to the text indicated that it is not just her, specifically and singly that matters, but her as a representative of all children, particularly all Black children. Quite naturally, this image is attached to the news story about what matters in 2020. The

Edrington

last images that are seen in the left-hand column of the homepage are not those that were a part of the website design. These are images that were uploaded to the social media outlets of BLM, particularly Twitter, and are thus represented in the social media feed. Some of these images include photographs of the late author Toni Morrison, victims Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Emmitt Till, and rapper LL Cool J. While there are not any images located on the right-hand column of the homepage, visitors can find the designs of the t-shirts that are for sale near the bottom of the page.

Ethos

In Hahn and Gonchar's (1971) rhetorical methodology for studying social movements, they propose a closer examination of ethos, logos, and pathos. By analyzing these classic modes of persuasion, scholars can get a sense of the movement's ideal participant, the premise that unites the members, and its emotional appeal. Considering that this analysis only focuses on the homepage of BLM's website, the amount of text to analyze is limited. However, the text that is found on the homepage provides important insight into the movement's ideology. The use of persuasion is very prevalent in terms of ethos, logos, and pathos. Additionally, as scholarship in the area of visual rhetoric indicates, these modes of persuasion are also central to the impact of images and photographs such as those described on the website and analyzed below.

In identifying the ethos of a movement, Hahn and Gonchar (1971) posit that scholars discover who the movement considers to be an ideal participant. Given that ethos concerns both ethics and credibility, this can be done by researching speakers of the movement and/or the way that these speakers are introduced (p. 48). On the homepage, there is no explicit mention of the creators of the movement. In order to research these founders, one must select the "our co-founders" tab, which is located under the main "About" tab at the top of the page. Be that as it may, information regarding activists and their local work within the movement can be accessed from an image in the slideshow that scrolls at the top of the homepage. Other information that alludes to the social movement's ethical values and credibility can be found under the "About" tab as well. This includes the mission statement, philosophy, and values, and its founding. The movement positions itself as a leader in the fight to end injustices of Black people by providing resources such as healing toolkits. Showcasing the

global actions of the movement shines a light on how the movement cares for all people of color, and not just those in the United States. Lastly, they add credence to their status as a leader in the fight for equality by highlighting the partnerships with similar organizations.

In addition to researching the movement's speaker, Hahn and Gonchar (1971) suggest analyzing "the kinds of antagonists they choose to vilify, for many movements define themselves in terms of their opposition" (p. 48) as another way to identify the ideal participant of a movement. There are two key messages on the homepage that identify the ideals which BLM opposes. The first is disinformation regarding the movement. The phrase "help us fight disinformation" is seen repeatedly (three times) throughout the homepage. The first encounter that the visitor of the website has with this phrase is in the slideshow. The call to help fight disinformation is the first image in a series of other pictures. Upon scrolling down, the fight against disinformation is the very first news story found in the news section. The third time that this phrase appears is in the middle of the page, next to a "help us" button. The repetition of this phrase solidifies the movement's strong opposition to the false discourse that circulates around the movement. The second point of opposition for the movement is state-sanctioned violence (violence imparted and accepted by state, local, and federal governmental agencies and/or institutions) towards Black people. There are two instances on the homepage that directly mention the end to state-sanctioned violence. Both of these instances seek involvement from the visitor by petitioning them to act in some way. The first call to action for the visitor regarding state-sanctioned violence is to demand accountability by way of the police oversight hearing. This call is shared once in the slideshow and once again in the news story section of the website. The second call to action for the visitor regarding state-sanctioned violence appears in the "Donate Today" section of the website. In this section, donors are thanked for their support in the continued fight against state-sanctioned violence. This rhetoric makes it clear that BLM is opposed to disinformation and state-sanctioned violence, thus illuminating their ideal participant; someone dedicated to accurate information, non-violence, honesty, equality, and justice.

The visual images and text/placement of messages found on the homepage work together to reinforce the ethos of the social movement. The rhetoric found on this page highlight accuracy, non-violence, honesty, equality, and justice-seeking as values of

Edrington

the movement's ideal participant. The visuals found on this page also illustrate these same values. Beginning with the header image of the homepage, the value of equality is present. Seeing both men and women, old and young, and all of different races (assumed) assembled in protest to fight against the police brutality of people of color reflects equality; everyone should have the same rights. Not only does this image show a sense of equality, it also shows non-violence and unity, different people coming together for one common goal. The flyers that promote the police oversight hearing and urge viewers to demand accountability make visible justice. These flyers also serve to promote non-violence in the seeking of justice. When scrolling through the slideshow that is on the left-hand side of the homepage towards the top, there is an image of two activists. Their image connects with the value of accurate information as their image is situated with the "Activist Shorts" news story, a news story that highlights the work that these activists do in their community. By having them tell their own stories, there is little room for disinformation, something that the movement is fighting hard to eradicate. Lastly, the images of children reinforce the value of honesty. Children possess a sweet innocence. They are also known to be brutally honest. The image that fixates on the big, bright eyes of the little girl holding onto her father makes one think of pureness, innocence, and honesty. Her gaze, demand, visually takes on a form of address by directly acknowledging the viewer of the image and addressing them as 'you' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). In this way, she is demanding a relationship with the viewer, visually asking them to help her by participating in the movement because, as a child, she matters, and she cannot save herself.

Pathos

Pathos is the mode of persuasion that seeks to appeal to the emotions of others. Some examples of pathos include personal connections, testimonials, and/or figurative language that provoke an emotional response from the reader. Hahn and Gonchar (1971) assert that when analyzing pathos, a scholar of social movements will be able to "discover which emotions the movement appeals to, which it ignores, and the target audience of the emotional appeals" (p. 50). Furthermore, they note that the emotions that the movement seeks to appeal to could be determined by the belief systems of the movement (p. 50). There are several instances on the homepage of the Black Lives Matter website where pathos may be clearly identified.

Once the homepage of the website loads, the logo of the social movement catches your attention. This is not only because of the juxtaposition of the white and black backgrounds on the page, but because of the logo itself. The logo *is* the name of the movement, Black Lives Matter. These three words together can appeal to the emotions of its readers both positively and negatively. Chances are, viewers of the BLM website are supporters of the movement who seek information about the movement, wish to stay up to date with the latest news and events, want to donate or purchase paraphernalia, or are interested in joining their local chapter. For these viewers, the words Black Lives Matter could evoke a positive emotional appeal. Supporters of the movement may feel a sense of solidarity or pride in being Black. These same words could also evoke a negative appeal in the same group of viewers. Emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness could also arise. Supporters of the movement who view these words could be angry or sad that there is a need for this proclamation in the first place, and/or fearful of their Black lives.

While there is a high probability that the viewers of this website are supporters of the movement, there is also a chance that some are not. These viewers could be actively opposed to the movement. For these viewers, the words Black Lives Matter could result in a negative emotion. Emotions such as repugnance and exclusion may appear. Viewers of this website who are not supporters of the movement may feel intense disgust when reading these words because they may feel that these words are divisive. Additionally, viewers who are not supporters of the movement may not be supporters due to the fact that they feel excluded from the movement if they do not identify themselves as Black.

The phrases “help us”, “take action”, and “demand change” are the next instances of pathos that are displayed on the homepage in an effort to persuade viewers. Help us is seen in the first image on the slideshow that appears in the top left column of the homepage. Take action is the header of the first section in the right-hand column. Under this section, viewers can find other verbs such as donate, join, and help. Demand accountability is written on the second image seen in the slideshow. Help, take, demand, join, and donate are all verbs that may appeal positively to the viewers of this homepage. Viewers may feel needed, as if they personally are an integral part of helping this movement succeed, appreciated for their involvement with the movement, motivated and empowered to participate on multiple levels, and hopeful that their actions in addition to the actions of the movement

Edrington

will one day end the state-sanctioned violence that Black people are subjected to.

Similar to ethos, the visual images work with the text/placement of messages to reinforce and strengthen the emotional appeals found on the homepage of this website. The images of the victims whose faces appear on the flyer promoting the viewing of the police oversight hearing and demanding accountability for their actions could elicit emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness. Anger could be felt by two different groups of people. The first group of people who could experience the feeling of anger could be supporters of the movement. These supporters would include, but are not limited to, families of the victims, participants and allies of the movement, and people of color. This feeling of anger could arise from the actual killings of the victims shown, or from the lack of justice served to these victims. The second group of people who could experience anger from viewing this flyer could be opposers of the movement, those people who identify with the counter-movement Blue Lives Matter (Condevillamar, 2020). This group of people could become angry from viewing this flyer due to the demand of punishing the police officers who contributed to the killings of the victims shown. People of color who visit this homepage and see these images could experience fear, fear that they too could be victims of state-sanctioned violence. If not a fear for themselves, they could experience fear for their loved ones or other people of color. This same fear and sadness could be experienced when viewing the image of the children with their father, *Black* children with their *Black* father. Lastly, sadness could be experienced from viewers of this flyer as they remember not only the victims shown on the flyer, but many others who have succumbed to the same fate. When viewing the image of women standing on the front lines of the march during a protest, some viewers may experience a feeling of pride, pride in the sense that they were all Black women taking a stance. Similarly, the header image that shows a variety of people engaged in protest may help in creating a sense of joy in viewers of the homepage. This joy could possibly come from witnessing different genders, age groups, and races working together to fight injustice.

Logos

As the third mode of persuasion, logos seeks to appeal to the cognition of the readers by using logic, rationale, and critical reasoning to persuade. Some examples of logos include the use of facts,

statistics, logical reasons, explanations, and appeals to the reader's mind. Hahn and Gonchar (1971) suggest exploring all arguments that the movement employs. Thus, they note that "the underlying premises of any social movement provide the worldview which unites the members" (p. 49). Throughout the homepage, there are several occurrences that seek to appeal to the reader's cognition. Again, the logo and name of the movement itself, Black Lives Matter, is the main premise that unites its members. Although the mission statement of the social movement is not explicitly found on the homepage (it can be found by accessing the "What We Believe" tab under the main "About" tab), language such as "join the fight for freedom, liberation, and justice", and "end white supremacy forever" provide insight into the views of the movement. Other language found on the homepage, such as "central target" provides rationale for why the movement is requesting the help of its members in the fight against disinformation. Lastly, words such as "demand accountability" regarding police brutality highlight the reasoning behind the movement's creation. Facts and statistics are not found on the homepage of this website. However, they may appear throughout the website.

There is one prominent image on the homepage that reinforces the logical appeal of the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition to the text/placement of messages, this visual image helps to explore the arguments that the movement employs. The main image that reinforces the logic behind this movement is the flyer referencing the police oversight hearing. This image is important in that it shows photographs of multiple victims of state-sanctioned violence. Although this flyer appears twice on the homepage, each occurrence of this flyer features images of different victims. By displaying multiple people who have actually been killed by members of law enforcement, the designers of this website are providing justification as to why the movement was first created.

Evaluation and Interpretation

Given this analysis of BLM's homepage, it is evident that their identification is articulated in and through their website. The usage of the social movement's primary colors create a brand identity that is clear and easily translated across their communication channels. This is shown through the social media feeds that are displayed at the bottom of the homepage. Displaying images of protests as well as victims of police brutality serve to address the exigence of the social movement by implicitly declaring its mis-

Edrington

sion. The text that corresponds with these images use ethos, pathos, and logos to explicitly state the mission and values of the movement, and to draw participants in. Additionally, the homepage of this website does a great job in vilifying those that in some fashion created the exigence – police brutality – that in turn led to the creation of this social movement. In doing so, the homepage of the website almost immediately presents an us vs. them, for or against, ideology. This ideology helps to build identification with the visitors of the website.

Both the images and text that seek financial support, demand change, and solicit help fighting disinformation serve as calls to action for the visitors of the site. In addition to charging visitors with the tasks of getting involved with the movement via several capacities, the social movement gives back to its visitors by offering up resources. These resources work to connect visitors of the website to the social movement. Furthermore, these resources suggest that the social movement *understands* what the visitor is experiencing as if they too are (or have) experienced similar situations and circumstances. Consequently, these resources require a level of interactivity from the visitor; actually navigating beyond the homepage and downloading the sought after material. The images of victims and text calling for the accountability of their murders provide an unspoken connection between the visitors of the website and the social movement, seemingly suggesting that an injustice to one is an injustice to all.

Official organization websites are typically used for the purposes of disseminating important organizational information to stakeholders. Moreover, social movement websites serve an additional purpose, the purpose of recruiting participants. The BLM website does a great job in both disseminating important information as well as using identification to recruit participants. In particular, the homepage of this website articulates the mission, participants, and origin of the movement. This is productive in that it aids in the advancement of the movement and its efforts by making visible those doing the work, and articulating why the work is being done. However, there are additional elements that are currently not featured on the homepage of this website. Adding these elements to the homepage could potentially make it even more productive.

Specifically, the *who* or *who else* is doing the work is a key component missing from the homepage. While BLM is a movement fighting for freedom, justice, and liberation for all Black people,

Black people are not the only ones in this fight. The image that serves as the header image for the homepage does appear to show different races. However, these races are ambiguous due to the composition of the image. It is grayed out and obscure in nature. At first glance, visitors of the website may not recognize the faces that appear in the image. It is not until you look for the faces that you actually see them. Partnerships of the movement could be found by selecting other tabs on the main menu; however, this information is not presented on the homepage. Information regarding allies, sponsors, or how to become a partner of the movement are all missing. Although all are welcomed to join this fight, the strategic choice to only feature Black people on the homepage could turn others away. This has the potential to create cultural polarization as it inadvertently excludes others from being a part of the movement on the homepage. Nevertheless, people of other races could be featured throughout the website.

Secondly, the work that is being done takes a backseat to why said work is actually needed. Fighting disinformation appears to be at the top of the agenda for BLM as it is mentioned several times throughout the homepage. The developers of the website include the visitors in this effort by asking them to help share their knowledge about the disinformation that is circulating surrounding the movement. This text is the only actionable one displayed on the homepage. Images that show protest do show activists in action; however, these images are not connected to text that confirms current actions taken on behalf of the movement. Besides the images of previous protests and the fight for disinformation, the homepage of this website does not provide any indication of current actions that the movement is taking in the fight for justice, freedom, and liberation for all Black people.

The *how* the work is being done is the third element missing from the homepage and should very well be present. The homepage does a great job of asking visitors to support the movement by taking action and donating to the cause. The homepage fails, however, to show how these actions will actually help the movement. Sharing with visitors of the website as well as supporters how their funds and efforts are being used to advance the movement has the potential to increase donorship. In addition to transparency of donations, the homepage does not explicitly share its plans on how to end state-sanctioned violence and White supremacy forever. The movement's claim to end state-sanctioned violence is politically charged. While this is a widely known goal of the movement, the homepage does not direct the visitor to any

Edrington

grassroots efforts such as signing petitions nor does it share any information about partnerships with state or local government agencies. Although the homepage does mention demanding accountability, it does not explicitly outline what this would look like for a movement participant.

The last element missing from the homepage of the website that could potentially advance the movement is updates. The most recent updates made on the BLM homepage dates back to three months. This includes the updates made to the news stories and the social media feeds. In doing a quick search, all of the social media accounts have more recent information than what is displayed on the homepage of the website. This could deter future participants or supporters of the movement from joining if they view it as inactive.

Conclusion

The rhetorical analysis of the homepage for BLM alludes to how the movement used digital platforms, such as websites, to help promote their goals and actions. It becomes clear that BLM's homepage effectively articulates the identity of the movement either through text, visual elements, or both. The textual and visual elements featured define the movement's mission, whether implicitly or explicitly. This is both strategic and effective as it helps build identification (either through known or unknown similarities and/or a common enemy) with visitors of the website. The logo and colors associated with the movement are prominently placed throughout the homepage, which works to promote the identity of the movement. Similarly, points of action, such as donate now, join now, and contact us, are featured. These are also effective in that they provide a pathway to interactivity for the visitors of the sites, calling them to action on behalf of the respective cause. Additionally, the homepage is easy to navigate and can be accessed via other mobile devices such as mobile phones or tablets. The name of the movement is declarative in that it articulates the rhetorical situation, the exigence, audience, and constraints of the movements (Bitzer, 1968). Information (related to the movement and about the victims) was a prominent theme that emerged from this analysis.

The theme of information is evident as the homepage is comprised of information about and relating to the movement. This information includes but is not limited to the victims of police brutality, goals of the movement, and reasons for the movement's

existence. Images of victims are continuously displayed throughout the homepage. By displaying images of the victims in multiple locations, BLM portrays/illuminates the victim as the center of the movement. Almost as if it is a designated digital place of memorialization, the homepage serves to portray the victims more so than depicting the target (state-sanctioned violence). By making the victims visible, this renders the target of the movement somewhat *invisible*, although still implied. This type of memorialization brings forth the concept of memory work in contemporary digital activism by allowing for affective commemorative engagement, contextualizing the victims as part of continued systematic injustice, using the past to legitimize the current actions of the movement, and creating recognizable markers as symbols for future references (Smit, Heinrich, & Broersma, 2018). In the beginning stages of BLM, making the target visible had consequences, specifically the creation of the counter-movement Blue Lives Matter. Choosing to make the target explicitly invisible on the homepage of the official website could be a strategic choice.

The textual and visual components of the homepage use identification in a way that calls the viewer to visualize themselves as future victims. Consequently, this creates a community of witness which presents agency in two ways. By choosing to portray victims throughout the homepage more than the target (opponent) of the movement, the visual and textual elements depict how agency has been taken away from Black people. In other words, the effects of state-sanctioned violence and White supremacy have taken away the power Black people have to shape their experiences and life trajectories (Cole, 2020). The second way that agency is shown throughout the homepage is by calling visitors to act, inviting them to be participants of the movement. In this way, movement participants can regain their agency by helping to end state-sanctioned violence and White supremacy.

The various elements of the homepage, in addition to the words “Black lives matter,” identify the rhetorical situation of the movement: the exigence, audience, and constraints. Working in conjunction with the textual elements found on the homepage, the visuals displayed help visitors understand police brutality as the main reason behind the creation of the movement. Subsequently, these textual and visual elements highlight Black people – potential future victims – as the audience of the movement. Consequently, this illumination doubles as a constraint to the movement as it works to polarize people who are not Black, as

Edrington

mentioned previously. In reiterating the dual power of the movement's identity, BLM as a movement and mantra work to create identification within future participants of the Black population but particularly for those that are not members of this same community. The findings from the rhetorical analysis suggest that the homepage effectively articulates the identity of the movement either through text, visual elements, or both. In articulating their identity, the social movement is building identification with the visitors of the website either through known or unknown similarities and a common enemy.

References

- Baab, L. (2008). Portraits of the future church: A rhetorical analysis of congregational websites. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 31, 143-181.
- Bernard, M. L., Chaparro, B.S., Mills, M. M., & Halcomb, C. G. (2002). Examining children's reading performance and preference for different computer-displayed text. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 21(2), 87-96.
- Bitzer, L. (1968). The rhetorical situation. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1, 1-14.
- Black Lives Matter. (n.d.). *Black Lives Matter*. <https://blacklivesmatter.com>
- Cole, N. L. (2020, February 11). How sociologists define human agency. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/agency-definition-3026036>
- Condevillamar, J. (2020, July 2). *Black Lives Matter counter-movements and criticisms*. The_ Thunderbolt. <https://millsthunderbolt.com/black-lives-matter-counter-movement-and-criticisms/>
- Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race—ethnicity, and sex. *Proceeding of the Academy of Sciences of the United States*, 116(34), 16793-16798.
- Esrock, S. & Leichty, G. (1998). Social responsibility and corporate web pages: Self-presentation or agenda-setting? *Public Relations Review*, 24(3), 305-319.
- Eyman, Douglas. *Digital rhetoric: Theory, method, practice*. University of Michigan Press, 2015.
- Fine, G. A., Montemurro, B., Semora, B., Stalp, M. C., Claussen, D. S., & Sierra, Z. (1998). Social order through a prism: Color as collective representation. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68(4), 443-457.
- Freelon, D., McIlwain, C. D., & Clark, M. (2016). Beyond the

- hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice. *Center for Media and Social Impact*. Retrieved from https://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/beyond_the_hashtags_2016.pdf
- Hahn, D. & Gonchar, R. (1971). Studying social movements: A rhetorical methodology. *The Speech Teacher*, 44-52.
- Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Ochowicz, A. (2018). Rhetoric of social movements. *Res Rhetorica*, 5(3), 38-56.
- Smit, R., Heinrich, A., & Broersma, M. (2018). Activating the past in the Ferguson protests: Memory work, digital activism and the politics of platforms. *New Media & Society*, 20(9), 3119-3139.
- Swan, C. (2008). *The Amnesty International Global Identity*. Accessed January 1, 2020. <https://designresearchgroup.wordpress.com/2008/08/31/the-amnesty-international-global-identity/>