

Celebrities, credibility, and complementary frames:

Raising the agenda of sustainable and other ‘inconvenient’ food issues in social media campaigning

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Abstract

In a rapidly changing and crowded media landscape, food sustainability advocates face new challenges in engaging the public. Participants in digital networks often reside in social media communities that support their own views. New media strategies are needed to connect these communities and engage a broader base with ‘inconvenient’ environmental messages. This action research study, which investigates international meat reduction social media campaigns through novel communications frameworks and methodologies, indicates that certain digital media advocacy strategies can assist in raising the agenda of issues surrounding environmental and other impacts of meat. Social media frameworks such as agenda melding and connective action facilitate connections in social media networks and offer the potential to build and broaden communities. These frameworks can also provide opportunities for new influencers who can challenge heritage news media’s hegemonic gatekeepers. Other strategies identified by this study to increase the reach and engagement of issues surrounding meat production and consumption include: featuring the environment as one of a suite of complementary frames that aim for similar outcomes in a social media campaign; and utilising high-profile experts, celebrities or authorities who promote or are associated with complementary frames, are seen to be credible and embrace bigger-than-self intrinsic values. The findings

have implications for media advocates working in other fields who wish to break through digital echo chambers.

Keywords

Celebrity, expert, frames, food sustainability, values, agenda melding, connective action

Introduction

Food sustainability issues surrounding meat production arguably share ‘inconvenient’ features with other concerns around food and the environment. Worldwide, livestock and meat production are major contributors to climate change (Springmann, Godfray, Rayner, & Scarborough, 2016; Steinfeld et al., 2006;), intensive water use (Hoekstra & Chapagain, 2008), high phosphorous use (Cordell, Jackson, & White 2013), land degradation and threats to food yields (McMichael, Powles, Butler, & Uauy, 2007; Stern, 2006), and loss of biodiversity (Dauvergne, 2008; Steinfeld et al, 2006). It is not surprising, then, that environmental advocates and campaigners seek to raise awareness of the adverse impacts of large-scale meat production and consumption. Advocacy initiatives are particularly pertinent with global meat consumption continuing to grow (Springmann et al., 2016).

Reflecting their ‘inconvenient’ nature (Bender, Burns, David, & Guggenheim, 2006), food sustainability issues are not natural media fodder. Studies show that heritage news media has failed in engaging with the issues around meat production, which makes finding effective social media strategies even more important. Both a US academic study (Neff, Chan, & Clegg Smith, 2009) and Australian research (Friedlander, Riedy, & Bonfiglioli, 2014) have found that the environmental impacts of meat production are subjects inadequately addressed in news media, and that the amount of media coverage is disproportionate to the salience and extent of scientific literature devoted to these areas. Both studies found that less than one per cent of all ‘climate change’ articles in leading newspapers mentioned meat or ruminant animals and their contributions.

However, both heritage news and contemporary social media pose challenges for food advocates who wish to engage the broader public with environmental

messaging and actions relating to consumption. Environmental topics face obstacles in both news and social media as a result of well-funded political and economic institutions who influence the news agenda (Friedlander, Riedy, & Bonfiglioli, 2014; Neff, Chan, & Clegg Smith, 2009; Williams, 2015), resistance to difficult and confronting messaging (Moser, 2007), a disrupted communications landscape with diminishing resources (Bacon, 2010) and the digital landscape's echo chamber effects (Aiello et al., 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

This action research set out to develop an effective meat reduction campaign by testing various communications strategies over a two-year period, and making ongoing refinements informed by successes and failures. The campaign explored social media strategies to raise the agenda of the impacts of meat production and consumption and to encourage the wider public to reduce meat consumption. These strategies included using multiple frames and involving high-profile advocates to increase reach and engagement. Iterations of the campaign were informed by contemporary media methodologies, frameworks and practices, including theories of agenda melding (Berger & Freeman, 2011; Ragas & Roberts, 2009; Shaw & Colistra, 2008), connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and the common cause values theory (Crompton, 2010).

The international 2015 and 2016 Meat Free Week (MFW) campaigns were a vehicle for this research, focusing on Australia and the United Kingdom. The seven-day annual campaign aims to raise awareness of the impacts of meat production and consumption, reach new audiences and encourage a reduction in meat consumption. Meat Free Week is run across multiple media platforms with an emphasis on social media. The campaign's organisers involved various advocates including celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver, and Australian and UK activists who represented and

were interested in disseminating environmental, animal welfare and health messages to encourage a reduction in meat consumption. Developing contemporary strategies for raising the agenda of an inconvenient message requires understanding how the media landscape is changing, what its key features and frameworks are, and how to best apply strategies for effective interventions.

Conceptual frameworks

Before outlining the campaigns on which the research focused, we firstly need to establish the conceptual frameworks that guide this research. These frameworks combine multiple communications theories, including connective action, agenda melding and values theory, and examine the role of the celebrity or high-profile advocate in an expanding media environment. The contemporary media landscape requires a step back from the ‘infoglut’ (Andrejevic, 2013) swirling around us to apply and develop media constructs and methods of analysis that respond to an ever-expanding universe of information and content, evolving platforms and modes of delivery, and a breakdown in traditional roles of influence. The mobile phone version of news is vying for the dominant delivery system (Watkins et al., 2016) and encouraging condensed and symbolic representations. It is estimated that by 2020 there will be 50 times the amount of information that was available in 2011 (Gantz & Reinsel, 2011) and our ability to understand it remains relatively constant (Fry, 2004). New agenda creation theories and methods for facilitating and deconstructing the multitude of media messages are needed in a contemporary communications environment that provides ‘producers’ (Bruns, 2008) with greater autonomy and influence. Meraz (2009, 2011) has pointed to a dilution of traditional media’s singular agenda-setting influence as ‘citizen media’ re-distributes power and challenges the

traditional gatekeeper role. Traditional news media analysis, which is often used as a basis for media interventions, has conventionally been conducted through the lens of agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). Agenda setting theory proposes that the issue priorities of traditional or elite news become the issue priorities of the public, and that the higher an issue is on the news media agenda, the higher it will be on the public agenda. This framework has encouraged media campaigners to utilise messages or frames that have potential to feature prominently in news media. Since the landmark study of McCombs and Shaw (1972), more than 400 studies have demonstrated the agenda-setting influence of news media (Griffin, 2009). However, this framework is predicated on a traditional, top down approach where collective, and often-hegemonic, influences wrest greater control over the message. As a result, media campaigners have traditionally created strategies that respond to these pre-determined and prescribed messages.

The agenda melding theory (Berger & Freeman, 2011; Ragas & Roberts, 2009; Shaw & Colistra, 2008) offers a fresh and constructive prism to interpret the new digital modes of media. The agenda melding process shifts emphasis away from the role of news media in setting agendas and towards the role of individuals in identifying and pursuing their own agendas through group membership. In this respect, individuals who are seen to be experts or authorities, can play an influential role in a social media community or collection of communities. Agenda melding research also indicates a broader push/pull two-way process that results in individuals incorporating affiliates' interests into group agendas. The agenda melding framework offered useful strategies in the MFW campaigns through utilising experts and authorities who represented messages associated with meat production and consumption that have been resisted in traditional news media coverage. For example,

environmental and animal welfare messages have achieved limited coverage in news media coverage (Friedlander, Riedy, & Bonfiglioli, 2014), but were key frames promoted by MFW ambassadors. MFW also targeted individuals recognised for their associations with healthy eating, recipes or cookbooks, with the aim of broadening and deepening the reach of social media engagement.

The agenda melding process takes advantage of the connective action framework (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) operating in the digital media realm. The connective action framework has recently been cited in academic literature as a new model to facilitate effective campaigning in social media networks (Mercea & Funk, 2016). The framework is characterised by digital networks and open technologies that allow personalised messages to be generated. It contrasts with a collective action framework, prevalent in traditional news systems, where an authority with more control enacts goals and objectives, and which is associated with agenda setting. The connective action framework was the dominant model in the MFW campaigns through the use of digital media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, which facilitated influencers and social media communities in engaging with key messages.

The celebrity or expert takes on a more prominent role in the contemporary media landscape. This is attributable to the elevated positions of individuals in agenda melding and connective action frameworks combined with social media's use of symbolic messages and frames in the age of the 'infoglut' (Andrejevic, 2013), which encourages a contraction of content and packages of meaning. The celebrity or expert can offer a convenient shorthand metaphor for more complex ideas. Research into the volume of coverage of celebrities reveals how these media stars are dominant colonisers of today's media. One study of UK newspapers comparing the amount of domestic news space dedicated to the death of Elvis Presley in 1977 and the death of

Michael Jackson in 2009 found an increase of between 10- and 15-fold for coverage of a pop star's death (O'Neill, 2012). There is also evidence of an increasing 'celebritisation' of environmental and political advocacy in the media. Boykoff, Goodman and Littler (2010) found evidence of a 'growing imbrication' between celebrity and climate change in media reporting between 1996 and 2009 across the US, UK, Canada and Australia. In examining four representative newspapers in each country, they reported an increase of between 20 articles in each country to between 400 and 900 articles in each country over the time period (1996 to 2009).

However, the reporting of celebrities' climate change advocacy does not, in general, translate to an increased news agenda for environmental issues. Thrall et al. (2008) argue that 'the standard view of celebrity and advocacy significantly overstates the news-making abilities of celebrities in the political arena' with findings indicating that 'rarely do even the most famous celebrities get sustained attention from mass media news organizations for advocacy-related activity' (2008, pp. 362–364). It is important to distinguish between the ability of celebrities and the operating media framework they reside in as to how effective they can be in engaging the public with an environmental agenda. While celebrities can offer superficial associations, the traditional reporting of their associated causes is restricted through the well-funded political and economic institutions who influence and dominate news media. Lester (2006) argues that the impact of celebrity involvement in Tasmanian environmental protests in the final decades of the last century was diminished through the influence and interventions of elite sources and a news media that 'continue to act in such a way that they regain and retain control over the news agenda' (2006, p. 917). Social media frameworks, in contrast, can facilitate multiple messaging so that a campaign such as Meat Free Week can combine both political and personal frames

that celebrities and experts convey or embody. Contemporary frameworks can also help offset the personal conflict and discomfort which can be associated with environmental stories (Moser, 2007) through combining confronting facts with softer messaging. The greater flexibility and access offered by social media means that there is more potential for celebrities and experts to mobilise and motivate media publics through their environmental and political advocacy. Several scholars note this potential. Thrall et al. (2008) discuss the application of ‘narrowcasting’ and ‘the emergence of the Internet... allowing groups to control the message more tightly’ (p. 378). Anderson (2013) refers to new opportunities for celebrities and ‘a greater range of authorized definers of climate change to make their voices heard’ through the growing penetration of digital media and more interactive webs of communication (p. 340). Brockington (2009) argues that celebrities can challenge the status quo, ‘for with their legitimacy to speak out comes an ability to connect with, and represent, the ideas of all the rest of us’ (p. 108).

Critiques surrounding the legitimacy of certain celebrities and the often superficial nature of fame point to the importance of values in successful celebrity engagement with environmental advocacy. Previous research indicates that key intrinsic or ‘bigger-than-self’ values may lead to deeper and more protracted engagement with campaigns (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015). The common cause values theory (Crompton, 2010) argues that values and behaviours are connected and that there are two broad classes of value: intrinsic or self-transcendent values; and extrinsic or self-enhancing values. As stated in the ‘Common Cause’ Report: ‘Intrinsic values include the value placed on a sense of community, affiliation to friends and family, and self-development. Extrinsic values... are contingent upon the perceptions of others – they relate to envy of “higher” social strata, admiration of

material wealth, or power’ (Crompton, 2010, p. 10). It is argued that invoking intrinsic values to achieve beneficial action for the common good can be assisted by selecting appropriate frames. Another key common cause argument is that activating extrinsic values can create ‘collateral damage’ because those values are ultimately inconsistent, ‘undermining the basis for systemic concern about bigger-than-self problems’ (Crompton, 2010, p. 10). The ‘Common Cause Toolkit’ (Crompton & Weinstein, 2015) cites the examples of case studies that invoke certain values and frames, and which achieved a significant level of public engagement. In one case, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) supporters who had been sent more intrinsic content expressed greater care about issues relating to both conservation and families living with disabled children than WWF supporters who had been sent less intrinsic content. Exponents of the common cause framework have cautioned against using celebrities in environmental campaigning, stating: ‘The celebrity can act to diminish the impact of causes and actually be counter-productive in campaigns promoting sustainability’ (Public Interest Research Centre, 2015). Anderson (2013) echoes these concerns cautioning that celebrity interventions can be a ‘double-edged sword’ and that issues can be trivialised and core legitimacy questioned (Anderson, 2013, p. 349).

The MFW campaign would serve to be a testing ground for the roles of participating celebrities and experts, and their associated values and messages. One such celebrity, Jamie Oliver, had been found, in a previous study, to be perceived as legitimate and embracing intrinsic values. The UK-based survey (Barnes 2014) explored the ‘celebritisation’ of society and engagements with celebrity chefs. When asked to directly name a celebrity chef, over 88% named Oliver as one of the most recognisable chefs in the UK. Oliver is associated with a range of food issues including those relating to health, school meals, sustainability and food equity. Oliver

was also named most frequently in the survey as the most trusted chef, using his celebrity status ‘to do good’.

Oliver has achieved widespread media coverage with many successful television shows and cookbooks. He has also established a very high engagement in social media with representations including Jamie Oliver (@jamieoliver), Jamie’s Kitchen Garden (@JamiesKGP), Food Revolution (@FoodRev) and Jamie Magazine (@JamieMagazine). The most popular at the time of writing was @JamieOliver with 6.9 million followers and 17.4K likes. As a ‘talking label’ or ‘boundary object’, Barnes (2017) argues that celebrity chefs such as Oliver can ‘easily cross the boundaries between science, health, governance, entertainment and consumption to relay complex food and nutrition information in readily understandable and demotic ways’ (pp. 171–172). Oliver’s high recognition value speaks to the role of media platforms outside traditional heritage news in encouraging successful engagement in advocacy. His messages find traction outside news agendas, and a hybrid of the personal and political do not impede on his perceived legitimacy. While environmental and political advocacy can hit roadblocks in news media, the Internet and television can offer windows for engagement with agendas influenced by celebrities and experts networking with interested communities.

In examining the roles of celebrities and experts in the MFW campaigns, this research explores how the social media frameworks of agenda melding and connective action facilitated their connections and influence, and how these high-profile influencers were perceived by ‘followers’ in the network in order to gain insights into the impact of intrinsic values and particular messages for engagement with meat reduction messages. The following section outlines the methodological processes undertaken in the social media analysis of the Meat Free Week campaigns.

Methods

Action research (AR) (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002; Bradbury, 2015) served as an overarching framework for this research and drew upon Friedlander's dual roles as both participant and researcher with the MFW campaign. As a researcher, Friedlander reviewed and synthesised relevant academic literature to contribute suggestions for advocacy. Friedlander also had a hands-on role through assisting with the development of campaign frames, involving suitable experts, and refining campaign strategies. Action research is described by scholars as 'a very broad movement' (Altrichter et al., 2002) and a concept where 'no single formulation can be correct' (Bradbury, 2015). However, the key features of action research involve cycles of research, action and reflection. Bradbury (2015) explains that action research 'brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern. Action research is a pragmatic co-creation of knowing *with*, not *on*, people' (p. 1). Attwater (2014) calls action research a 'meta-methodology', which allows underlying methods and 'underpinnings' to be used under its guiding principles. Friedlander's research and analysis also incorporated the methodologies of text analysis, trace interviews and word cloud/hash tag analysis.

Research was undertaken on two consecutive international MFW campaigns in 2015 and 2016, which targeted Australian and United Kingdom media publics. The primary aims were to examine the different roles of umbrella and complementary frames, high-profile celebrities and experts, social media networking processes and opportunities, and intrinsic or extrinsic values in assisting messages surrounding environmental and other impacts of meat production and consumption achieve greater

traction and media engagement. The campaigns were mainly facilitated through the social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Key messaging and branding was disseminated through the organisers with the 2015 campaign co-ordinated by stakeholders focusing on environmental, health and animal welfare frames and the 2016 campaign co-ordinated by Bowel Cancer Australia, which prioritised health messaging but also included alternative frames.

The MFW campaigns enlisted individuals who both represented or promoted multiple or singular frames including environmental, health, animal welfare and food messaging. Over 40 supporters or influencers, including food celebrity Jamie Oliver, were asked to help disseminate meat reduction messages and were encouraged to incorporate their own interpretations of messaging. These influencers included ‘chefs, lifestyle experts and foodies/instagrammers’ (L. Bracher, 2017, personal communication, 20 October, 2017). Influential individuals who were enlisted included politician Dr Mehreen Faruqi (Greens NSW Australia MP), Australian Broadcasting Corporation medical reporter Sophie Scott, and well-known Australian television chef Simon Bryant. Several key influencers, such as well-known food blogger Jen Curcio of DecisiveCravings.com.au, also emerged organically and proactively.

Novel forms of social media methodology were applied to analyse the MFW Twitter campaigns and explore the broad networking reach and impacts of the most successful ‘posters’ or influencers. The Twitter platform was selected for this research due to its greatest impact in the campaigns in terms of engagement and the fact that it is also recognised as a news dissemination medium (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). Twitter was responsible for approximately 60% of the total engagement of the MFW campaigns compared to 40% for Facebook and 25% for Instagram. There were

approximately 2,000 tweets in 2015 and 1,000 tweets in 2016. Accompanying the tweet text analysis, the methodology featured firstly, a two-stage variation of trace interviews, an innovative tracking and qualitative social media methodology developed in 2015 by the Oxford Internet Institute (Dubois & Ford, 2015), and secondly, word cloud frame analysis. Dubois and Ford (2015) describe trace interviews as an effective means of combining the benefits of trace data with those of the qualitative interview. Trace data is defined as digital records that humans consciously or unconsciously leave behind as they navigate the digital world (Wesler, Smith, Fisher, & Gleave, 2008). In-person or face-to-face trace interviews with four Australian first-level (or most popular) MFW Twitter influencers (Mehreen Faruqi, Sophie Scott, Simon Bryant and Jen Curcio) utilised visual and textual prompts to remind the individuals of the content of their successful posts and to seek comments and insights. Trace interviews offer positive ethical attributes as social media subjects consent to being involved in the analysis and contribute their own commentaries and insights. Enlisting a purely text-based analysis of a tweet is limiting in comparison, as it provides no context or personal interpretations. Initial identification and analysis of the Twitter platform was achieved through the Tweetcatcher, NodeXL and Gephi programs.

The four first-level Australian influencers were selected for trace interviews due to their interests covering political, health, food and environmental domains, their levels of influence determined by the number of Twitter followers at the time of the 2015 and 2016 campaigns, and their availability, with some influencers in the top 10 unable or unwilling to participate. Similar to the Dubois and Ford (2015) study, '[a]ny account that had been mentioned at least twice in the sample was considered "influential"' (p. 2075). Given that some of the influencers engaged in one year of the

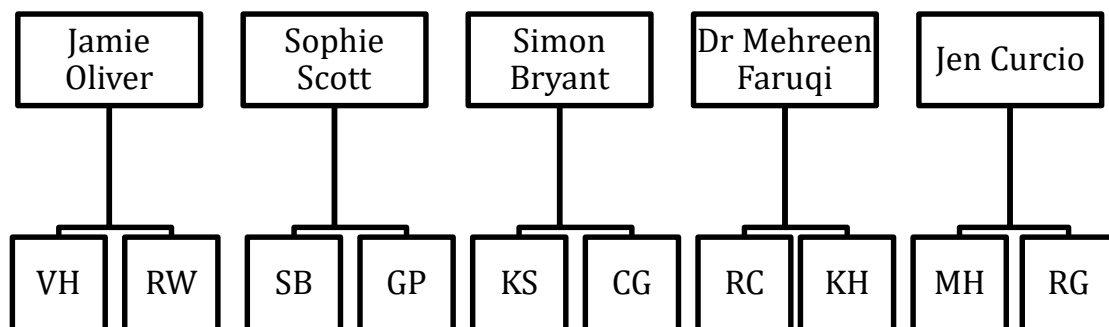
campaign and others in two, the numbers may not necessarily indicate their relative influence. Regardless, they were all considered influential connectors in the MFW campaigns. Text analysis was conducted on their most influential posts and face-to-face questions sought insights into the primary and secondary meat reduction messages considered important, their perceived objectives of the MFW campaign, who they wished to reach through social media networking and what prompted involvement in the campaign.

In a variation of Dubois and Ford's (2015) trace interview methodology, Friedlander conducted interviews with individuals who had engaged with first-level influencers. Email or telephone interviews were conducted with 10 second-level individuals or associates engaging with the key first-level influencers (consisting of the four Australian influencers and Jamie Oliver). These second-level individuals, who are referred to as 'associates' for the rest of this article, were among the followers of the most popular MFW first-level influencers on the Twitter platform (see Figure 1). These associates were also selected because of their availability and levels of influence. The interviews sought further insights into the broader social media network and asked how influencers were perceived in terms of important issues and values, which of the campaign's messages were influential and why, their knowledge of meat production and consumption's impacts, and how the campaign changed their knowledge and views on these topics. Eight of these individuals were associates of the Australian connectors and two were associates of Jamie Oliver. Oliver achieved the greatest engagement with Twitter through his various representations including @JamieOliverCom and @FoodRev. One Jamie Oliver associate was international and one Australian.

Figure 1. Meat Free Week (2015 & 2016) Twitter influencers and associates

**First-level
influencers**

**Second-level
associates**



Word cloud and hash tag analysis identified the dominant terms used by first- and second-level influencers or associates, which provided insights into the range of subjects their networks would observe and engage with. The word cloud and hash tag analysis was based on ‘mentions’ from Twitter. In the case of each influencer or associate, 200 tweets featuring their @handle were examined over the same six-month period from 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2016 to gain insights into the most

common frames or terms appearing in their media networks. The more prominent the word is in the cloud, the more times it is mentioned in the overall tweets. Word cloud analysis was conducted for all influencers and associates selected for this study with the exception of Jamie Oliver where analysis of most used hash tags in the same period was conducted for @JamieOliverCom and @FoodRev. Synthesio software analytic and Twitonomy tools were used. This analysis stage provided insights into communities at the second and third levels of the social media network.

Results

In general terms, the Meat Free Week campaign achieved success in engaging with a wide range of individuals and communities through social media. The ability of social media to heighten and broaden awareness of meat's impacts is important given news media's failure to engage with these issues. Sustained behaviour change is not possible without accompanying knowledge and positive attitudes towards an issue. As seen in comments from influencers and associates provided below (in 'Sustainability finds traction'), messages around sustainability and meat reduction were successfully disseminated through their incorporation within a wider meta-frame or collection of frames.

In the MFW campaign, agenda raising or melding was achieved through celebrities or experts, contrasting with the role that news traditionally performs in setting the agenda. In this way, messages around meat's impacts achieved greater reach through the connective action process of social media, which counters the gatekeeper forces of news media. Comments from influencers and associates provided below (in 'Agenda melding through social networking') illustrate how the campaign motivated individuals to spread the meat reduction message to a broader network and

attempt to raise the agenda. The social media research conducted on the Twitter platform of the MFW campaigns indicates that high-profile advocates who either promote or represent different frames such as the environment, health, animal welfare, economising, and appealing food, as well as being associated with intrinsic values, can have a vital role in raising the agenda of the impacts of meat production and consumption. These individuals can also broaden the range of social media participants engaging with a meat reduction campaign. Both key influencers, such as Jamie Oliver, who themselves represent a range of frames (or a meta-frame) and a collection of influencers who represent singular frames engaged the social media public in broadening the reach and impacts of the social media campaigns. Analysis of the campaigns' Twitter networks revealed that dissemination of the meat reduction message spread in both linear and radiating directions. Comments from associates in the sections below ('Centres of attention' and 'Intrinsic values') illustrate the importance of authentic advocates to a social media campaign that promotes sustainability, animal welfare and health messages.

The individual with the greatest engagement over the two years of the MFW Twitter campaign was Jamie Oliver. Jamie Oliver's tweets on Meat Free Week were circulated from six representations: JamieOliver.com, Food Revolution, Jamie's Food Tube, Jamie Oliver, Jamie Magazine, and Jamie's Kitchen Garden. The combined re-tweets of all Jamie Oliver representations in the 2015 and 2016 MFW campaigns consisted of 797 overall re-tweets and 1,856 overall likes. All of Oliver's tweets incorporated the Meat Free Week name and most tweets consisted of links to recipes from his various organisations.

The social media analysis pointed to findings for effective food sustainability campaigning in three key areas: firstly, the importance of including messages around

sustainability in the campaign's branding, or in posts through a collection of frames or a meta-frame; secondly, collaborating with a range of high-profile experts or celebrities who represent or espouse a range of complementary messaging and are seen to be influential; and thirdly, selecting advocates who are perceived as embracing intrinsic values. The analysis also demonstrated the potential that new social media frameworks have for facilitating broader connections.

Sustainability finds traction through integration with campaign branding or frames

Integrating the food sustainability message within a suite of complementary frames, either within initial branding of the campaign or within subsequent posts, facilitated engagement with the meat reduction message on social media. Key influencer and food blogger Jen Curcio, with 1,394 followers, posted links to MFW and recipes, and stated that environmental factors were the primary reason for engaging with MFW:

‘It was more from an environmental perspective – let’s say primarily.
Secondly, health. [My aim] was that a much broader audience would
hopefully see the tweets.’

While the text of her tweets featured links to plant-based recipes (‘Today’s #meatless meal idea: Potato Gnocchi with tomato sugo!’), they also contained links to the MFW website that included environmental messages and research on meat’s impacts. One associate of Curcio, MH, stated:

‘After increasing my knowledge of meat production and consumption, I
became shocked at the lack of interest it receives by environment agencies.’

Interviews with connectors and associates revealed that they sometimes saw the environmental frame as an issue that was either difficult to engage with or experienced a lack of public awareness and were therefore motivated to include it as part of a group of messages to facilitate engagement.

Australian celebrity chef Simon Bryant (3,203 followers at the time of the trace interview) posted multiple tweets mainly focused on plant-based recipes and said that animal welfare was the paramount reason for engaging with the MFW campaign. However, he also stated that environmental factors were important to him:

‘MFW is about promoting responsible consumption of meat, and stewardship of land and animals... To me, you should agitate in the most respectful and polite way.’

KS, an associate of Bryant, stated that environmental and health factors were her reasons for re-tweeting the MFW post and being engaged in the campaign:

‘I have a reasonably good knowledge of the impact on our environment of consuming meat [and I] have a wide range of followers. The campaign did not really change my attitude or behaviour... but I hoped it might change others.’

Hashtag word cloud analysis of KS’s tweets indicates the dominant issues she engages with relate to mental health and include: #dementia and #diagnosis which indicates that the MFW message was finding a novel audience. While sustainability messages may not have featured overtly in Meat Free Week, they were an important

sub-text that motivated key influencers and their followers to engage with the campaign. It can be argued that even if the primary aim of campaigners is to engage media publics with sustainability issues, it is opportune to integrate environmental messages with other frames into campaign initiatives.

Centres of attention: Celebrity embodiment of frames

Extending the discussion on the benefits of a suite of complementary messages for sustainability advocacy, in this section we point to the power of the celebrity or expert in embodying singular or multiple frames through their social media posts, reputations or perceived experiences. In this way, the implicit or explicit associations of a cultural intermediary with a range of issues relating to meat reduction were found to provide impetus for disseminating advocacy messages in multiple directions.

Interviews with associates revealed that they were motivated to re-tweet a MFW post from a first-level connector because of both the inherent benefits of the campaign and their knowledge of the individual and their championing of certain messages. For example, an interview with CG, an associate of Simon Bryant, revealed that she regarded Bryant as ‘a bit of a rock star’ and that his reputation and positions on animal cruelty influenced her in engaging with the MFW campaign:

‘He’s a TV chef and a vegetarian and I believe cooks meat in his restaurant but is a good role model and is interested in good food. I was originally just interested in the food side of things, now I feel strongly about animal cruelty.’

In another example, SB, an associate of medical reporter Sophie Scott (who had 8,825 followers at the time of the interview), said she re-tweeted the MFW post because of the reporter's role as an 'ambassador':

'She is an ambassador for the health message and helps to spread the word...

Many of my followers are a cross-section of the community... hopefully I will have a broader reach.'

The word cloud analysis of SB indicated the hash-tags of #cancer, #funds, #children and #living were dominant which indicates a broader community would be aware of SB's posting, which assists the process of agenda melding.

Intrinsic values seen to be important for advocates' legitimacy

The research points to how intrinsic values associated with celebrities and experts are considered important by social media followers. Even though a post from an influencer may have integrated less intrinsic concerns, interviews with associates indicated that they largely saw the influencer as credible and espousing ethical values. While further research could examine the relative influences of intrinsic and extrinsic values and associated frames in a meat reduction campaign, this study indicates that 'bigger-than-self' values associated with common cause goals (Crompton, 2010) show potential to increase receptivity to inconvenient messages. For example, in relation to how associates see Jamie Oliver in terms of his values, VH, an international associate, stated:

‘I have far reaching associations with [Jamie Oliver]. I have always been quite a fan. I am familiar with his books, TV shows, YouTube channel, social campaigns... My re-tweeting him was also because he was a trusted source for me.’

GP spoke of Sophie Scott’s reputation and professionalism: ‘I regard (her) as an excellent health presenter who does not sensationalise issues, explains matters very well and is very approachable online.’

Agenda melding through social networking

As demonstrated by many of the comments above, the MFW campaign found success through a two-way agenda melding framework facilitated by connective action. The analysis indicated that key influencers and second level associates, many of whom joined the campaign organically, were influenced by others’ or a group’s messaging, and attempted to cater to their followers’ interests. The subsequent broadening and deepening of the network indicates that social media offers productive paths to counter the older agenda setting influences of news media.

An example of an individual responding to a group agenda is provided by politician Dr Mehreen Faruqi, with 8,337 followers at the time of interview, who tweeted on August 1, 2016: ‘It’s #MeatFreeWeek – eat less, care more, feel good’. She believed that the multiple messages of the campaign were a suitable vehicle for her advocacy:

‘For me, it comes down to the three areas of the environment, it’s good for animal welfare and it’s also good for the health of the people. It was mainly about raising awareness... and also about supporting the campaign.’

An example of an individual attempting to reach those with different interests is provided by one of Sophie Scott’s re-tweeters, GP (with 7,026 followers at time of writing), who revealed he shared her interests in health, with other issues relating to meat production and consumption also important:

‘My thoughts were about bowel cancer or other gut issues. Although quite often, someone will tweet or write about... the damage caused by methane production of a ruminant... hopefully my sharing will get news pieces a little further.’

Word cloud analysis of GP’s hashtags indicates his interests cover a range of issues with terms such as #auspol, #raaf and #avgeek prominent. This provides some indication that his re-tweeting of the MFW post from the health reporter found a more widespread audience.

Another example of an individual trying to accommodate broader interests is provided by the Australian associate of Jamie Oliver, RW, with 1,854 followers at the time of interviewing. She said that she associates the celebrity chef with ‘healthy eating, and school programs’ but that his MFW post was a catalyst to her posting for ‘animal rights and animal protection’:

‘I wanted to promote Meat Free Week through Jamie Oliver to my followers, many of whom aren’t vegetarian/vegan. I’m not always tweeting to the converted.’

Discussion and implications

This research has implications for both social media research methodologies and effective communications strategies for reaching wider media publics with ‘inconvenient’ messages. The communications strategies employed by Meat Free Week raised the agenda and broadened the reach of campaign messages associated with meat’s impacts, which is a vital step in advocacy and eventual behaviour change. Effective media strategies are important for promoting sustainable actions as news media has traditionally disengaged from these issues. Importantly, if social media advocates wish to engage the public with sustainability messages, this research points to several key strategies. The finding that the environmental message achieved traction through being incorporated into campaign branding and a suite of frames can be understood by acknowledging that the environmental message can be difficult, challenging and confronting to many people.

The meat reduction campaigns thus benefitted from individuals who promoted or represented a range of complementary messages, such as environmental, animal welfare and health issues surrounding food. Harnessing a range of messaging, including environmental frames, via influencers who are associated with a number of causes has two-pronged benefits: firstly, an overarching objective such as meat reduction can be achieved through various means, and secondly, the environmental frame is awarded extra import by campaign participants who then associate it with their own personal motivations. The reach of a social media campaign benefits from

an individual such as Jamie Oliver who has connections with many different communities and is associated with a range of messages. A campaign also benefits from the involvement of influencers who may be less well known but who are considered credible and authoritative sources within their communities.

A significant finding also relates to how associates viewed advocates' values, with interviews with associates indicating that they largely saw influencers as credible and espousing ethical values. This adds weight to the argument that a difficult and 'inconvenient' message, such as that involving environmental action, can be packaged within a range of other messages and values in order to make it more 'convenient' so long as the bearer is associated with intrinsic values. This supports a tenet of common cause values theory (Crompton, 2010), which argues that bigger-than-self values are important for successful advocacy, and indicates that celebrities are not always seen through the lens of extrinsic values. Further research could provide insights into the relative role of underlying frames and the values associated with softer messaging such as health and food concepts. Arguably, not all celebrities are useful for protracted and genuine engagement with a sustainability cause, but this research indicates that the high-profile advocate can assist when they embody trust and credibility.

Recognising the expert's or celebrity's embodiment of messages, social media advocates should strive to engage a wide range of cultural intermediaries who have a reputation as ethical and knowledgeable and who represent multiple messages. This can be facilitated through a single person who is associated with many frames (a 'meta-frame') or a group of individuals. Social media meta-frames, or a package of complementary frames, are a response to an ever-expanding universe of information, and are arguably both metaphoric and broader representations of information that can

be touch points for individuals to provide a foundation for deeper analysis. The superficial nature of much of contemporary social media's communication raises concerns that the complexity in arguments and a balanced representation of relevant facts may be compromised through its offerings. However, responses from individuals engaging with key influencers indicate that the meta-frames used in the campaigns encouraged many to broaden and deepen their knowledge through further social media interactions and enquiries. Further research could examine how those engaging with campaigns through influencers and associates derive and expand this information. This research could also be complemented with analysis of interactions with other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, and with other news sources.

This research indicates that contemporary media frameworks of agenda melding (Shaw & Colistra, 2008) and connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) can facilitate the uptake of food sustainability messages. With individuals influenced by their social media friends' and influencers' posts and reputations, social media offers strategies for campaigners who wish to counter the political and economic interests and messaging that often control heritage news media. Both the pull and push attributes of the agenda melding research (Berger & Freeman, 2011; Ragas & Roberts, 2009; Shaw & Colistra, 2008) were demonstrated through associates engaging with the MFW campaign because of experts' and celebrities' involvement, and through first level influencers and associates attempting to incorporate their followers' interests into their posts. While digital networks and heritage news media can both engage high-profile celebrities and experts, social media assists the dissemination of messages and the broadening and deepening of connections through lower levels of entry and the connective action framework.

Scholars are now asking who the ‘we’ are in the new media landscape and how the new permutations of media can not only connect but also contribute to a broader collective identity (Berger & Freeman, 2011; McCombs, 2014). This paper has identified contemporary social media’s potential, through its ability to convey a ‘meta-frame’ or a series of complementary frames embodied or facilitated by experts or celebrities, to meld and build broader, engaged groups and break through echo chambers. Incorporating the mainstream and disengaged is important for environmental and other inconvenient messages to achieve traction and counter the gatekeepers of traditional news who wield political and economic power. This research indicates that social media offers opportunities to engage the public with ‘inconvenient’ messages such as the impacts of meat production and consumption and raise and meld the agenda of environmental issues.

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