

Rhetoric in Scandinavia

Retoryka w Skandynawii

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The Sweden Democrats and the Twitterstorm of the decade – from social media to riot through a rhetorical vision

Partia Szwedzkich Demokratów i Twitterowa burza dekady – od mediów społecznościowych do zamieszek poprzez retoryczną wizję

Abstract

Amidst the European migrant crisis, a provocative advertisement campaign by the far-right party the Sweden Democrats was destroyed by a mob. No other campaign in Sweden had attracted a similar amount of attention and resentment. This qualitative case study analyses the activism rhetoric that caused the ‘Twitterstorm’ of the decade. Through a fantasy theme analysis, it determines how the protesters defended their anti-racist rhetorical vision. Action themes connected to fantasy types and symbolic cues provoked the Twittersphere, leading activists to destroy the campaign, transcending the virtual for the physical. This event is a paradigm case for rhetorical-political social media activism and gives insight into how the SD’s provocative rhetoric functions.

W czasie europejskiego kryzysu migracyjnego prowokacyjna kampania reklamowa skrajnie prawicowej partii Szwedzkich Demokratów została zniszczona przez tłum. Od lat żadna inna kampania w Szwecji nie przyciągnęła podobnej uwagi i niechęci. To jakościowe studium przypadku przedstawia retorykę aktywizmu, która wywołała „Twitterową burzę dekady”. Poprzez analizę motywu fantazji określono, w jaki sposób protestujący bronili swojej antyrasistowskiej wizji retorycznej. Motywy działania powiązane z typami fantazji i symbolami-sygnalami sprowokowały aktywistów do akcji, które z wirtualnej Twittosfery przeniosły się do rzeczywistości fizycznej. Omawiany przypadek jest modelowym przykładem retoryczno-politycznego aktywizmu w mediach społecznościowych i daje wgląd w to, jak funkcjonuje prowokacyjna retoryka Szwedzkich Demokratów.

Key words

Sweden Democrats, rhetorical vision, social media activism rhetoric, fantasy theme criticism, public begging
Szwedzcy Demokracy, retoryczna wizja, retoryka aktywistyczna w mediach społecznościowych, krytyka motywu fantazjowania, żebractwo w miejscu publicznym

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1. Introduction

In its infancy, social media was expected to facilitate democratic deliberation and active citizenship on a scale previously impossible (Jenkins et al. 2009). Instead, many negative phenomena have dominated (Persily and Tucker 2020). Regarding political activism engagement, we need to better understand the role of social media in mobilising citizens. The core of the matter is rhetorical and the key to understanding social media-based activism is to understand what makes political social media messages engaging. A ‘like’ on Facebook may only be a click. However, groups that form around a hashtag can take to the streets if sufficiently motivated – for example, as in this case – through a rhetorical vision.

2. Background: A provocative campaign in Stockholm

On 3 August 2015, passengers at the Östermalm underground station in central Stockholm were greeted by an unusual campaign by the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD), Sweden’s most prolific far-right party, in parliament since 2010. The text on the banners hung over the escalators read as follows (2018 refers to the next General Election):

Sorry about the mess here in Sweden = (We have a serious problem with forced begging! International gangs profit from people’s desperation. Our government [sic] won’t do what’s needed. But we will! And we are growing at record speed. We are the opposition and we promise change! We are the Sweden Democrats! Welcome back to a better Sweden in 2018. (Justitiekanslern 2015, August 7)

This station has a relatively low ceiling, and occupying the total advertising space creates an immersive experience. The SD managed to maximise the use of this space using floor-to-ceiling banners (Figures 1 and 4). Tourists were the implied readers as the text was in English. However, no one at the station could ignore the campaign.



Figure 1: Part of the campaign at Östermalm's underground station: The escalators (Andersson 2015: © 2015 Pelle T. Nilsson/All Over Press).

The SD spokesperson at the time, Henrik Vinge, told the reporters that the choice of venue was deliberate. The effects of using the escalators appealed to them. Moreover, begging was ‘widespread around the Östermalm Square and a lot of people frequent the area’ (Larsson 2015a).

The next day an angry mob destroyed the campaign. The event was fuelled by anti-racist sentiments and mobilised both on social media and through public events.

In the background we had two prolific issues in Sweden in 2015: the European migrant crisis and the question of public begging. These issues overlapped since most beggars came from Romania. In 2015, the number of foreign beggars reached approximately 5,000 – more than ever in recent history (Nationell samordnare... 2016, 13). Many municipalities described the situation as ‘acute’ (Österberg 2015).

The situation of the beggars was well-known at the time, due to an ongoing public debate. In this particular campaign, however, only the most superficial aspect was referred to, the visual one, utilising huge pictures of beggars sleeping on the streets with their paraphernalia of sleeping bags, covers, mattresses, etc., creating the visual impression of a mess. In this campaign, the beggars were used as props at a theatre.

Another discussion during this time, was whether begging was organised, perhaps by criminal networks. The issue gave rise to long-drawn heated debates. Suggesting that begging was organised and connected with criminal networks engaged in human trafficking and other illegal activities (Malmqvist 2015) delegitimised the activity; conversely, advocating that it was not organised put focus on the plight of the individual having to beg to survive. This debate was polarised between Left and far-Right. Although the outcome was unclear then,

Sweden was ‘slowly and with considerable agony’ moving towards forbidding begging (Nilsson 2015).

The phenomenal rise of SD as a party had caused a heated debate for some years (Hübinette and Lundström 2012; Oja 2015). The upcoming General Election and the SD’s claim to power were specifically mentioned in the campaign.

Although the SD often have used provocation to attract attention in their campaign materials, this campaign received the most public attention and attracted the most resentment. For example, their next provocative underground campaign, in May 2019, did not spark notable reactions (Nordevik 2019). The only event that comes close is the reactions to the ‘tear down mosques’ speech during the SD’s national congress in November 2023, especially since Sweden’s Nato application required the acceptance of predominantly Muslim Turkey, which was blocking Sweden’s membership (*SVT Nyheter/TT* 2023; Malmström 2023). Here, reactions were mainly from the establishment, whereas the ‘Östermalm campaign’ also engaged the grassroots, making it an unusual example of citizen mobilisation.

Three background-reasons present themselves for the exceptional impact of the 2015 campaign. First, it took place during the most heated debate in recent memory regarding public begging, a then sensitive topic. Implying that beggars are trash that needs to be cleaned away was provocative, especially in the then Left governed Sweden.

Second, the venue was public and a place that many citizens use daily. There was no escaping the message; as Dan Hallemar, chief editor for *Arkitektur* (Architecture), explained, ‘The room became the ad’ (Hibombo and Pettersson 2015).

Third, the SD was at a point of their rise to power where the future was uncertain: would the massive opposition from all other parties suffocate their growth, keeping them on the fringe of the political establishment, or would, among other things, the rising dissatisfaction with Sweden’s open arms policy towards immigrants, beggars, and other groups, which by the SD were considered unwanted, fuel the party’s growth? The SD were only in their second period in the parliament.

3. Research task

The focus here is not on the political rhetoric of the SD in general because, from this perspective, the campaign did not contribute much novelty. The divisive rhetoric of the SD has already been described elsewhere (Oja 2015), alongside the rise of the alt-right in Europe, including their populism and political ideology (Rydgren 2018). Indirectly, however, an analysis of the campaign demonstrates well-known features of SD’s rhetoric, such as the use of xenophobic and racist

themes in a provocative and populist manner. The unusual and interesting aspect of the Östermalm case relates to the strong public reactions on social media, which were overwhelmingly negative, mobilising those opposing the far Right. The rhetoric of the far Left is here put aside, albeit for a few remarks.

The series of events that the Östermalm campaign launched are best analysed from the perspective of civic social media activism rhetoric. The ensuing anti-campaign fulfils the criteria for a social movement (Diani 1992), displaying ‘the logic of connective action’, also following Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 748), who describe how ‘formal organizations are losing their grip on individuals, and group ties are being replaced by large-scale, fluid social networks’. This action is significantly rhetorical, and understanding how social media actors enable connective action on Twitter has been noted to require further research, including qualitative methods (Vaast et al. 2017). The Östermalm case is perhaps the clearest case during the last ten years for studying social media activism rhetoric in Sweden.

Consequently, this study focuses on the role of social media rhetoric in the brief anti-campaign prompted by the most notable SD-campaign during the party’s time in parliament (2010–). This Östermalm case presents itself as a paradigm of the relationship between social media and social-political activism, illustrating how an overarching narrative within the framework of a rhetorical vision engages citizens. The rhetorical dynamics of engagement are explored using the hypothesis that the advertisement campaign amplified a compelling rhetorical vision that motivated action. Among the many questions that could be put to this material, a delineation is made by exploring the following three questions: What role did social media play in mobilising activism? What type of online rhetoric seems to motivate engagement? How should we understand the SD’s role in the campaign?

4. Material

The events of 3–4 August 2015 were examined, focusing on the first day. Combinations and variations of ‘SD’, ‘*Sverigedemokraterna*’, and ‘*Östermalms T-bana*’ were searched and topically and chronologically relevant hits were selected from the first twelve pages (printed out as pdf-pages for documentation). Only publicly available materials were analysed and collected in the autumn of 2015.

It was challenging to devise neutral quantitative selection criteria for this type of analysis. However, a quantitative automated search would not have revealed how the narrative was established or carried forward. The manual selection was guided by the following criteria: posts that (1) were part of central feeds and/or (2) contributed a new angle or information picked up by others. Although this method

cannot claim statistical validity, as it is subjective in principle, it can provide a deeper understanding of the material (see Section 5).

Social media users are exposed to messages and threads from accounts to which they subscribe. However, extraordinary events such as the Östermalm campaign can reach users outside their regular interests. The broad selection of material reflects the types of messages an interested citizen would encounter when searching for posts on the Östermalm campaign. Although this is not how a user typically engages with social media, it provides a broader picture than examining select accounts alone.

Individual posts were the units of analysis, not accounts or ‘handles’, as this approach provides a better expression of how social media functions in this case, which – for the most part – is characterised as ‘hashtag activism’ (Yang 2016).

On Twitter, the search was restricted to *#SLSpriderRasism*. During these two days, approximately 1,900 tweets were posted with this hashtag, which in Sweden is an unusually high amount for a societal topic. In translation, the hashtag states that the SL is spreading racism. ‘SL’ is Stockholm’s regional public transport company (*#SLSpriderRasism* 2015).

On Facebook, a search for *#SLSpriderRasism* resulted in the equivalent of 37 pdf-pages. However, Facebook did not drive the debate, and most posts were similar or identical to those on Twitter; therefore, Facebook will be discussed only briefly.

The Flashback Forum (Flashback) is one of Sweden’s most visited discussion fora. It has a free speech focus outside of the general ethical guidelines of established media (Wikipedia 2021). Here, postings began at 9:58 a.m. in the thread ‘the SD’s campaigns against begging’, covering the topic 3–21 August 2015 (*#673–1,591; SD:s kampanjer mot tiggeri* 2015). By midnight the next day, 767 new messages had been posted.

Following Townsend and Wallace (2016), the user IDs of private citizens were pseudonymised (and italicised), whereas those of public figures were not. Some debaters use pseudonyms, which were not required to be further anonymised. All analysed posts were originally in Swedish (translations by the author are shown). To prevent tracking down the original posts, the original texts, and in some cases the URLs, have not been provided. The complete, non-anonymised original source-material is available with the author.

5. Theoretical framework and methods

This case study involves a qualitative rhetorical analysis. The methods used here originate within literary criticism and communication but have been incorporated into the toolbox of rhetoric (Kuypers 2016).

First, through a narrative close reading (cf. Lieblich et al. 1998, 14–15), features in the material related to the research interests were noted, and thereafter *the critical thirty-six hours preceding the riot* were focused on. A close reading is often included as an initial step for a consequent critical perspective (Campbell and Burkholder 1997). It helps us understand the nature of the rhetoric in the material. In this case, the rhetoric is obvious in the material, but deeper rhetorical insight requires systematic criticism. Following the interests of this study, a fantasy theme criticism supplemented with an initial narrative close reading provided the best results.

A full-fledged narrative analysis was not required since the end-answers sought were better found through a fantasy theme analysis. Here, the narratology typical for life story research sufficed. This first step of the analysis, *a chronological narrative close reading*, was undertaken in the autumn of 2015. This was valuable to capture the sentiments at that time and ensure interpretations true to the political climate of 2015. Based on this first reading, the material was later re-visited with a *fantasy theme* analysis. This combination of methods enabled capturing the overarching narrative and its internal rhetorical dynamics.

Social media users encounter variations in their narratives depending on their individual social media feeds. Moreover, the users influence the narrative by liking, quoting, or resharing posts, becoming an active audience – a rhetorically complicated social media dynamic (Vatnøy 2018). This study attempted to convey *the general overarching narratives* in the material, an endeavour that required a qualitative rhetorical method. In addition to answering the above research questions, this study aims to demonstrate the versatility of a rhetorical perspective, in this case through a method that has been less utilised in latter years (fantasy theme criticism is no longer included in Kuypers 2021).

Qualitative rhetorical criticism can capture aspects that would be lost in a quantitative study. Vatnøy and Wheatley (2022, 539) see it as ‘the critic’s task to explore and highlight qualities in the texts that provide deeper understandings of their overall rhetorical significance, providing theoretical descriptions, explanations, or evaluations’. Large-scale analyses do not capture the social complexity of rhetorical engagement, particularly how users understand it (Wheatley and Vatnoey 2019, 11).

5.1 Narrative reading

A narrative can be defined as ‘a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values’ (Merriam-Webster n.d.). In the collected material, the narratives are fragmented into short texts, photographs, and memes. Together, many individual

posts form overarching narratives in the readers' minds. As Lieblich et al. (1998, 7) have noted, '[w]e know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell' – including what stories we re-tell. The stand of the discussants is expressed more clearly by narratives than by individual arguments, often through intertextual references and symbolic cues, which are often indirect.

Narrative studies usually do not posit *a priori* hypotheses. As Lieblich et al. (1998, 10) have noted, '[t]he specific directions of the study usually emerge from reading the collected material, and hypotheses then may be generated from it'. During the initial analysis, the narratives in the material were established during close reading. As Vatnøy and Wheatley (2022, 541) have proposed, close reading of this type is 'to identify patterns and themes that appear central for the texts' persuasive and constitutive potentials'. Through this narrative close reading, the highly rhetorical and ideological nature of exchanges led to the hypothesis that action was motivated by the campaign through the amplification of a pre-existing rhetorical vision.

A more detailed narrative analysis, with a more developed narrative method, would have enriched our understanding of features of the material considerably, but for this particular study, a simple use of narratology had to suffice. A fantasy theme criticism then fleshed out the most interesting aspects of the narrative.

5.2 Fantasy Theme Criticism

Fantasy Theme Criticism (FTC) is based on the American communication theorist Ernest Bormann's symbolic convergence theory (SCT; Bormann 1985; originally proposed in 1972). FTC 'is used to look at how a group dramatizes an event and how dramatization creates a special kind of myth that influences a group's thinking and behaviours' (St. Antoine and Althouse 2016, 167). Here, 'fantasy' is understood as a mental image, from the Greek *fantázoo*, to make visible. This theory can be used to address questions such as, 'How does communication function to create a sense of community, integrating individuals and groups into large cooperative units? How does communication function to interpret reality [...]?' (Ball 2001, 221). The veracity of fantasies is a non-question. The purpose is to understand their *functions*.

There are four fundamental concepts: *fantasy theme*, *chaining*, *fantasy type*, and *rhetorical vision*. The first refers to 'a narrative construal that reflects a group's experience and that helps the group understand that experience' (St. Antoine and Althouse 2016, 168). This is a dramatisation of events. Fantasy themes can be further divided into *setting*, *themes*, *character themes*, and *action themes*.

Chaining refers to elaborations on a fantasy type when dramatisations 'catch on'. For instance, 'evidence of chaining may become manifest when creators of

texts borrow, adapt, and disseminate frequently used, dramatized images and ideas' (St. Antoine and Althouse 2016, 169). A fantasy type is a categorical example of a recurring fantasy theme, 'a stock scenario repeated again and again by the same characters or by similar characters' (Bormann 1985, 9).

The broadest term in FTC is the *rhetorical vision*, which refers to 'a composite drama that is made up of related fantasy themes and fantasy types' (St. Antoine and Althouse 2016, 170). It provides a holistic picture of a community's shared beliefs and stories that resonate within specific communities, such as during the Cold War. It comprises five elements: *dramatis personae*, *plotline*, *scene*, *sanctioning agent*, and *master analogue*.

A fantasy can be described as a life cycle with five stages: *emergence* or *creation*, *consciousness-raising*, *consciousness-sustaining*, *vision-declining*, and *terminus* (a later development of SCT; Bormann et al. 1996).

Finally, St. Antoine and Althouse (2016, 171) noted that rhetorical analyses tend to pursue 'key characteristics of a *message* or to discern the appeal of a message's *source*.' However, 'fantasy-theme analysis places emphasis on the *audience* and their reactions to and utilizations of dramatizing messages'. This aligns well with recent calls for rhetorical critics to include the audience seriously (Kjeldsen 2018).

6. Analysis

6.1 The build-up: Reactions on 3 August 2015

Unless otherwise mentioned, all messages from 3 August 2015 are presented along with the hour, where available. For Flashback posts, the author's signature followed by '#' and the post-number in the thread have been provided (Flashback Forum 2015).

Twitter

Among the first wave of comments, was a tweet at 10:10 a.m. by Liberal Youth West (LUF Väst 2015), posting a picture of a quickly produced leaflet held in front of the escalators, with one of the banners in the background. The text on the leaflet stated, 'Sorry for the ridiculous message on the ceiling – we have a big problem with a racist party in the parliament' – a parody of the SD's original message – and 'Don't let racist slurs ruin your vacation' (Larsson 2015b). A spokesperson commented, 'Their campaign is not directed towards tourists, one should think, but when we make this connection it more clearly becomes an anti-campaign' (Larsson 2015b).

By performing an act at the scene of the controversy, the youth league appeared proactive. Moreover, there was a double agency at play – first, the act of handing

out leaflets and, second, posting of photographs of the leaflet at the site. The second agency resulted in amplification, such that even if only a few leaflets were actually handed out, the act was perceived by many.

The chief *fantasy theme* was established on the morning of the first day: the SD's attack on the beggars. The *setting* was the underground station. The *characters* were 'the racist party', the SD alongside all others, who reacted against the SD's campaign.

The first *action theme* was to speak up against the campaign on social media and, in some way, physically engage against the campaign. The slogan with 'sorry' and 'we have a problem with a racist party' immediately caught on and was iterated in various forms. This was the first *chaining* of the fantasy themes.

Simultaneously, the Green Party's youth league also acted against the SD campaign. At *Swedenborgsgatan* (centre of Stockholm), on the street itself, they wrote the text 'Sorry about the mess. = (We have a serious problem with racism)', with coloured crayons, in several languages (Figure 2; Larsson 2015b), thus chaining the fantasy theme with a similar action theme as LUF Väst suggested: to do something concrete, document it, and spread it on social media. A spokesperson commented as follows (Larsson 2015b): 'Some say that we inflate their campaign by anti-campaigns but to leave their message unchallenged is much more dangerous'.



Figure 2: Green Youth's response to the campaign (Grön Ungdom 2015).

These two reactions illustrate the transcendence of time and space typical of social media. It did not matter how many people saw these two demonstrations *in situ*. Through social media, they proliferated and reached digital editions of established media, also. For an individual who viewed pictures of these events, the protest became immediate, regardless of exactly when and for how long the physical events occurred.

The act of visibly responding against the campaign connects with the *fantasy type* of opposing something that is wrong – the classic theme of the righteous rising against the unrighteous.

By afternoon, a ‘Twitterstorm’ had built up around the campaign (Thambert 2015). The main thread on the subject on Twitter is found under *#SLspriderRasism* (SL spreads racism).

One of the first posts agitating towards action came from comedian and television personality Soran Ismail (Ismail, n.d.; 10:51 a.m.), who encouraged his readers to begin using local transportation without tickets: ‘High time to start gate-crashing, then *#SLSpreadsRacism*’. His post went viral, and a central hashtag was established with it. Ismail’s suggestion was ridiculed on Flashback (8711, #683¹, 11:58 a.m.). However, this action theme was picked up by others as a concrete mechanism to protest against the campaign.

Another left-wing politician, Hanna Gunnarsson (2015a, 11:39 a.m.) wrote, ‘Tear down, plaster over, destroy! This shit will be gone tomorrow’. Later she clarified (2015b, 5:31 a.m.), ‘I don’t want to see racist messages in the public city space. Racism needs to be removed’. This was the first exhortation to material destruction and a strong action theme, surpassing the previous ones about posting messages, gate-crashing, handing out flyers, or writing on the streets. Thus, before noon, the fantasy theme was already chaining out towards the action theme that was later realised in the actual destruction of the campaign.²

The general tones were of surprise, offence, and disgust. Several could not understand how the SL could condone a campaign that they perceive as clearly racist, and some even specifically as an incitement of racial hatred, a legal offence. The following tweets were typical of the tone:

- Johansson 2015, 7:16 p.m.: ‘Damn how disgusting, SL!!! do you really think that there’s any doubt about this being pure hatred-propaganda?’
- Tarberg 2015, 7:25 p.m.: ‘Damn how embarrassing. Fuck good manners you pathetic hypocrites. Talk about displaying a bad side of Sweden. Embarrassing, SL’.

1. The sources that have the symbol # followed by a number are from Flashback Forum 2015.

2. The leader for the SD in Lund, Ted Ekeröth, reported Gunnarsson’s tweet to the police. At the core of her defence, she upheld that, ‘[t]he purpose was not that anyone would act’. She was acquitted (Sjögren 2016). In the General Election of 2018 (mentioned in the SD campaign), Gunnarsson was elected to parliament for the Left Party.

- Asdfgg 2015, 7:27 p.m.: ‘GODDAMMIT I am so shocked and disturbed really don’t understand the SL, sick to my stomach and want to vomiiiiit’.

Strong language makes these appear as immediate, unfiltered reactions. They constitute a character theme: the righteous – the heroes of the drama – react with disgust and share their sentiments. Emotive epideictic rhetoric amplifies the narrative: We are truly worried that this is wrong. Severity was underlined by basal bodily reactions. For the reader, such expressions are immediate; they do not require cognitive processing but instead lend themselves well to a direct empathic response.

Soon after *#SLSpriderRasism* spread, the connection between racism and Stockholm’s local transportation occupied centre stage. Argumentation: If the SL allows racist propaganda at its underground stations, then the SL is racist. Thus, the SL emerged as the other villain, and the one that carried more blame, as the SL is a public service company (the SD has already from its conception been labelled a racist).

A Facebook page was formed by a few private citizens with the aim of rallying participants to a demonstration (page deleted but referred to by, for example, #741, @longbow4y, 1:49 p.m.). Initially, the invitation was for the same day, Monday at 6 p.m. However, it was not possible to hold a demonstration within this time; therefore, it was postponed by twenty-four hours.³

At times, the Twitter stream is uncharacteristically harsh for Sweden. Around midday, the then-active pseudonymous tweeter Hen-Erik Arnstad (Arnstad 2015; 3:13 p.m.) wrote, ‘Today: Racist propaganda on the subway. Tomorrow: Trains go one way to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Stand up against evil!’ Later, Left tweeter and author Daniel Cederqvist (2015, 8:40 p.m.) noted, ‘A few decades ago, the name of the SL was in fact SS’. Pseudonymous tweeter claretbalaclava (n.d., evening) asked, ‘Is it true that they’ve replaced all the turnstiles in the whole underground system with swastikas?’

Although remarks such as these are meant to be dark humor, they indicate the perceived connections between the SL and the 1930s fascism in Germany (until 1967, the SL was SS, *Stockholms Spårvägar* (Stockholm’s Railways), not the Nazi SS (*Schutzstaffel*; Wikipedia 2015). This tendency is visible in other fora as well as the fantasy theme chains out in different directions. It can be considered as an attempt to connect the fantasy theme with a fantasy type of Nazi behaviour, the master analogue for the rhetorical vision, where the SD is ideologically analogous to Nazism.

A sympathetic analysis of such offensive remarks would be that arguers want to emphasise the importance of halting alarming tendencies. The hyperbole signals

3. Public rallies in the Nordic countries require permission from the police, who protect the demonstrators and uphold order. The Facebook page is no longer public, however, there are references to the earlier date for the demonstration (8711, #733, 1:31 p.m.).

the temperature of the debate, that there is a need to react strongly. The wordings are symbolic cues reminding of the SD's ideological roots (Widfeldt 2018) and the historical example of the consequences of attacking an ethnic group.

The final invitation to the demonstration spread by early afternoon (*Ungdom mot rasism* 2015, 2:44 p.m.). The modified SL logo on the invitation read 'SD' instead of 'SL' (see *Ungdom mot rasism* 2015; the modified logo was first published independently; Linde 2015; and then appropriated into the invitation). The condensed iconographic message could be reconstructed as follows: the SL is conducting the SD's business. The production of images of this type chains out messages and facilitates the rapid spread of views without much text. The debate inspired caricatures, pictures, wordplay, and memes.

Around half past one in the afternoon, the counter-campaign had become viral. Posts overflowed on social media, making it practically impossible to follow all that was said on the matter (noted by 8711, #719, 1:15 p.m.). For example, a defence lawyer, Viktor Banke (Banke n.d.) had posted 47 tweets on Twitter before 1:25 p.m. (noted by SoulSurvivor, #725, 1:25 p.m.).

Radio journalist Kevin Shakir tweeted (Shakir n.d.; 1:26 p.m.), 'It's so cool how #SLSpriderRasism is trending, how we start to mobilise and how different engagements click like a puzzle. We are the majority'.

Flashback Forum

Unlike Twitter, which mostly gathered SL critics, the Flashback thread became an almost all-out support thread for the SD campaign. Several posters referred to the party as 'we'. Thus, Twitter and Flashback, simultaneously provided two parallel and opposing narratives of and reactions to the campaign.

Notably, on Flashback, public reactions were primarily provided by the politically organised Left (8711, #702, 12:44 p.m.). Member Golonka (#724, 1:21 p.m.) warned that one should not 'underestimate the "leftist twitter's" ability to mobilise social media'.

Thereafter, right-wing members expressed their hatred and disgust against reactions from left-wing members such as Hanna Gunnarsson. Member 8711 wrote (#680, 11:45 a.m.), 'A Leftist politician exhorts to sabotage and law-breaking', to which Arkhamist commented, '[t]he Left is so deeply disgusting on every level that I do not find words for my hatred for them' (#682, 11:57 a.m.). Notably, the topic of disgust was voiced earlier as well on the opposite side. Arkhamist (#685, 12:08 p.m.) was the first to raise the problem of breaking the law, which was later picked up by established media, 'They are really at the peak of their hatred now, and as the cavemen that they are, law-breaking and rough behaviour is closest at hand when they react with feelings instead of the brain'.

Speculations regarding attempts to sabotage the campaign were made (Flyer6, #713, 1:02 p.m.). Notably, the banners above the escalators were placed such that it would be dangerous to attempt to remove them (8711, #717, 1:11 p.m.).

To clarify, on the Right, the characters in the fantasy theme were reversed. Villains disrespected the SL and made unlawful suggestions. The Right emerged as a hero, respecting the law and suggesting discussion rather than destruction. These elements connected with a different fantasy in which law-abiding citizens uphold the morals of the nation against anarchists.

On Flashback, emotions and irony were commonplace. The *evidentia* of a hoard of cavemen filled with hatred, causing mayhem across the city, was derogatory. Arkhamist's attempt to dehumanise his opponents was non-constructive vilification – hate speech. Critics on the Left tended to focus on *action themes*, whereas those on the Right tended to focus on *character themes*.

SoulSurvivor (#687, 12:09 p.m.) commented on SD's possible gain from the campaign, and noted that the campaign and strong reactions against it from the Left, 'will give the SD new sympathisers'. That an anti-campaign might inflate the SD campaign was noted earlier by the LUF Väst spokesperson. Member delernen noted (#731, 1:30 p.m.) that for a few thousand kronor for a small local campaign in Stockholm, 'ALL of Sweden now knows about this. Brilliant move for the SD'. At 5:17 p.m., flashbackdasen (#816) noted that after only one day, the campaign had been 'a huge success'. This was also the prevalent opinion in established media later in the week (Andersson 2015).

Facebook

Although Twitter was driving the narrative, Facebook was flooded with posts about the campaign. Discussions on Facebook are more diverse, as posts are sent to friends and often continue to their friends instead of being centred around a hashtag. Posts also reach people who do not share the opinions expressed. For instance, Figure 3 presents a 'hitlerisation' of the SL-logo, with four dissonant comments (Svensson 2015; this logo was perhaps first tweeted by the editor-in-chief of *Dagens Arbete*, Klein 2015, 2:55 p.m.).



Figure 3: 'Hitlerisation' of the SL-logo, with dissonant discussion (Facebook, no longer available).

The comments regarding the deformed SL logo succinctly illustrate the typical dissonant voices in the debate on begging in Sweden at the time. Two rhetorical visions collide: one in which begging is a societal problem connected with migration that should be regulated, and another in which Sweden should assist all people in need – in this case, primarily Romani, who have to beg publicly.

- *Erik Svensson* (August 3, after 2:55 p.m.): ‘How tiresome. When will this end?’
- [Comment] *Axel Buske* (August 3, 8:06 p.m.): ‘I’m not a SD voter and I was going to be silent, BUT don’t you see any problem with begging?’
- [Answer] *Erik Svensson* (August 4, 11:41 a.m.): ‘Nobody should have to beg. But to claim that it is organised and all they write in bad English is disgusting. And then that the SL lets them spread their false propaganda as in Nazi-Germany is just sick.’
- [Comment] *Danne Amazemusic* (August 4, 1:03 a.m.): ‘I think that all people in the world in hardship should be allowed to come to Sweden! We can afford it ... and it shows solidarity!’
- [Answer] *Erik Svensson* (August 4, 8:28 a.m.): ‘I think so too!’

Although the first comment is moderately neutral, the response is adamant and spiced with reference to Nazi Germany inspired by the logo, which functions as one of the symbolic cues of the fantasy theme.

An overly strong reaction regarding a grammar error was noted earlier in the SD campaign, where ‘government’ was spelt without an ‘n’. *Erik Svensson* found this ‘disgusting’, as his own text simultaneously exhibited worse errors. There was a polarised situation in which phrases were reproduced from social media without reflection.

References to Nazi Germany were abundant. The tweet of *Johan Matsson* is typical (Matsson 2015; August 4, 11:16 p.m.), ‘the SD uses Joseph Goebbels’ strategy from 1933 against begging. It is frightening that history repeats itself in the SL’s underground in 2015!’ In this fantasy theme, the SL provides the scene where the powerful and racist SD and SL conspire a plot against beggars. Attempts to connect this theme with the master analogue of Nazi Germany’s propaganda would, however, appear to be a false analogy (the SL did not want to implement Nazi propaganda). For others, this may have elicited an effect.

Traditional media

Before noon, the chief daily and evening newspapers cautiously reported on the campaign. In *Aftonbladet*’s report, representatives of the SL explained that even after massive initial negative reactions, they saw no reason to abort the two-week contract for the campaign. The main arguments were freedom of speech and freedom of publication (Kvarnström 2015). For critics, this reaction strengthened their view of the SL as a racist organisation.

Aftonbladet noted some early ‘international attention’ (Kvarnström 2015). *The Scotsman* noted ‘a controversial anti-immigration campaign’ (Hinde 2015). The more significant international newspapers did not report on the campaign immediately (e.g., *BBC* and *The Independent* wrote about it the next day, and *Bloomberg* the day after).

The discussion was driven by Twitter users, rather than traditional media. The rapid exchange of information and reactions and emotional rhetoric

created momentum. Every new article, interview, or reaction was applauded or scrutinised. The sheer number of posts and tweets alone provided the impression that something was happening, and an invitation to an upcoming demonstration provided a concrete aim. This is a *consciousness-sustaining* activity, to use the life-cycle terminology of SCT.

6.2 Two narratives and two rhetorical visions

SD's campaign drove people to gather on two opposing fantasy themes. First, the 'stand up against racism' theme, which mobilised the political Left – in a broad sense – and connected to a rhetorical vision of a tolerant Sweden. Second, the 'stand up for free speech' group, which mobilised the political Right and connected to a rhetorical vision of a Sweden without the 'mess', such as beggars. Notably, *migrants* were not a topic in this debate, however, since most beggars were Romani migrants, the SD's campaign was perceived as both racist and xenophobic.

Several reasons exist for the antagonists being more visible compared to the supporters. First, supporting the SD was a sensitive issue in the 2015 political climate. Politically and in mainstream media, the SD was, in practice, ostracised, both in parliament and in most municipalities. Associating with the SD was tantamount to being racist. Therefore, latent supporters hesitated to publicly express their support for the SD.

Second, the campaign was designed in a top-down manner. There was no *a priori* grassroots support for the campaign per se, although its tenets were accepted within the SD.

On the opposite side, reactions against racism – as well as xenophobia – gathered private citizens at grassroots level over party lines. The antagonists were united by a common denominator: disapproval of racism generally, and of the SD campaign specifically. This narrative was embedded in the rhetorical vision of a welcoming and tolerant Sweden. A shared rhetorical vision and its varying manifestations on social media drew groups and individuals together. Establishing the *SLSpriderRasism* hashtag significantly contributed to cohesion among debaters (see similarly Yang 2016 regarding #BlackLivesMatter).

6.3 The next day: 4 August 2015

On 4 August 2015, the SD campaign was the main subject in newspapers, online and television news, and workplaces in Sweden. By lunchtime, the SL had received approximately two thousand complaints from the public, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice (JK) had received 46 reports, and the Ombudsman for Advertising (RO) had 36 complaints (Svensson and Assarsson 2015).

On the first day, some pictures had been vandalised, and others were partly torn down on Tuesday. Tweeter *ER* shared a picture of a partly torn down poster (2015, August 4, 5:53 p.m.) saying, ‘Anonymous hero!’ A symbolic cue to support the action theme of doing something concrete. A picture of a woman in the process of vandalising the campaign was published by Sweden’s chief newspaper, *Svenska Dagbladet* (*SvD*, independent right wing) (Figure 4), along with the observation that the photographer arrived at the station ‘just as a woman was tearing down one of the SD’s large posters’ (Svensson and Assarsson 2015). Thus, *SvD* inadvertently and indirectly supported the action theme of destroying the campaign. *Aftonbladet* (independent left-wing) straightforwardly called the campaign, ‘The SD’s campaign of shame’.



Figure 4: Woman tearing down one of the posters (Svensson & Assarsson 2015: © 2015 Pi Frisk).

The established media further chained out the elements of the emerging fantasy theme. They iterated pictures of the setting, showcased characters who acted against the campaign, and evening papers used headlines to elicit emotional reactions. However, they did not connect fantasy themes to the underlying fantasy types mentioned earlier. References to Nazi Germany were absent, nor did they engage in a discussion about freedom of speech at this point; they mostly remained at the level of reporting, analysing only later.

Dagens Nyheter (10:58 a.m.; Säll 2015) reported that on Monday, 2,900 people signed up for the upcoming public rally on Facebook. Owing to the enormous participation announced on Facebook, the rally was moved from Östermalmstorg to a larger venue, Norrmalmstorg.

The protests were not simply against the campaign. As one Sara Braat (Braat n.d.) tweeted, ‘Today we demonstrate against the normalisation of racism in our public spaces’ (August 4, 6:32 p.m.).

The reactions on social media continued throughout the day. Figure 5 presents the chaining of the action theme of denouncing the SL concretely, by suggesting cutting of the commuter card in two, as singer and public activist Sofia Jannok (2015, August 4, 6:03 p.m.) wrote, ‘Sweden has a problem with racists who now are allowed to carry on freely in the subway, also. I don’t care to use the SL anymore’.



Figure 5: A suggested action theme (Jannok 2015).

Although the question of racism is not party-political, the speeches at the rally were heavy with Leftist rhetoric. ‘Agnes’ from *Allt åt alla Stockholm* (Allt åt Alla n.d.), connected with several rhetorical visions: ‘The only thing we can do is organise ourselves on the foundation of class-fellowship, to ourselves fight against racism, fascism, sexism, and capitalism in every way possible’ (*Tal från demonstration...* 2015).

In her speech, the *pathos* of togetherness, solidarity, and unity were reminiscent of posts, particularly those on Twitter, leading up to the rally. In addition to socialist rhetoric and red flags, feminist and LGBTQ+ movements were visibly present with their symbols, signs, and rhetoric. Several groups signalled their support by including many symbolic cues, and several citizens could be drawn into the fantasy-type of protest against what is wrong based on their particular values. The rally was conducted ‘peacefully and orderly’ (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2015).

After the protest, akin to the *peripeteia* of a novel, peaceful and orderly protest transformed into frenzy and destruction when a mob of people marched to the underground station. It is difficult to ascertain when this idea originated from the collected data. No public exhortation was identified on social media to destroy the campaign at this specific time, which would have been unwise for legal reasons. The idea of walking to the underground station may have been circulated in private groups on Facebook or similar platforms, or discreetly at the rally.

The police guarded the entrances of the station for some time; however, they soon retreated. Thereafter, a full-scale destruction of the remaining posters and banners ensued. While a mob shouted slogans, every last one was torn from the ceiling and walls. The activity was hazardous, and although it involved the illegal destruction of property, the police did not stop it, for example, by closing down the station (see Figure 6). Pictures and videos of demolitions spread across social media (see videos: avpixlat 2015; watteus 2015). Scenes of anger and determination spread as protesters tried to tear down every poster, jumping hazardously on the rails between escalators, and reaching for the ceiling.



Figure 6: The demolition of the campaign (Metro Sverige n.d.).

Immediate reactions were divided along the same lines as those in the debate. Some were unashamedly jubilant, whereas others lamented that words met with violent action – providing voice to the two primary groups in the drama. One Bea Mark (Mark n.d., 10:31 p.m.) tweeted about a picture, where the chaos and danger were evident, ‘The best I’ve seen today!’ Another one, Hjalte Lagercrantz (n.d., 10:34 p.m.), echoing the above speech, tweeted, ‘Thanks to all of you who attended the demonstration tonight #SLSpriderrasism! Let’s roll. You who are not organized ... Organize yourselves!’ Another one tweeted (Jonas n.d., 10:21 p.m.), ‘To all of you who helped tear down the hatred – thank you, I love You’. The type of citizen action manifested in the event was unusual in the Nordic context.

Critics also voiced their concerns more strongly after the campaign had been violently demolished. One tweeter lamented, ‘The fact that the Left cannot debate their opinion, but instead takes to violence is extremely problematic in a democratic society’ (Atlas Verum n.d., August 4, 8:49 p.m.). On Flashback, -Info- notes, ‘the SD comes out of this as a political party that stands for law and order and democracy, whereas their opponents – the Left – come out as mobsters against law and order and democracy’ (#1417, August 4, 9:50 p.m.).

What set this situation apart was its location: a public space many considered non-political. The next day, *Trafikförvaltningen* (the public transport agency in Stockholm) announced that the damaged posters over the escalators would not be replaced because of ‘security-considerations’. They referred to the dangerous situation in which the banners on the roof above the escalators were torn down (Beslut 2015). Thereafter, the entire campaign was discontinued.

As a conclusion of the description of these two days, we return to Norrmalmstorg, where participants at the public rally used crayons, similar to those used at Swedenborgsgatan, to write anti-racist messages on the ground in several languages, covering a large area of the square. ‘The fight goes on!’ tweeted feminist academic Linnéa Bruno as she posted pictures of these messages (Bruno 2015, August 4, 10:17 p.m.). One *Fred* critically responded (n.d., 10:51 p.m.), ‘Invent a conflict and exist’.

7. Results and discussion

What role did social media play in mobilizing activism? What type of online rhetoric seems to motivate engagement?

The events of 4 August 2015 could not have occurred as they did without social media. Before social media, what would then have taken days was now obtained within twenty-four hours. On the first day, the SD campaign’s message and negative reactions against it reached a considerable part of the Swedish population through the Twitterstorm of the decade.

Two features capture what occurred in the narrative: *provocation and amplification*. With reactions beyond what is customary in Swedish debates, the social media rhetoric intensively amplified a low-budget advertising campaign at a medium-sized underground station in Stockholm. For two days, it appeared as though an exceptional event had occurred that required an immediate and intense reaction.

The chronological reading vividly illuminated the features of communication. It is the unfolding story and the branching out of substories, individual reactions, and comments that together enriched the main narratives, which were opposing for the Left and Right. Regarding the participants of the conflict, the narrative approach helped reach some part of the ‘subjective world of the person, [...] portraying the social and historical world that the person is living in [...] illuminating the causes (and meanings) of relevant events, experiences, and conditions’, only to mention a few criteria for evaluating a narrative enquiry (Lieblich et al. 1998, 172).

The impetus for individual motivation leading to action lies in the attack against a shared rhetorical vision, a drama where the righteous stand up against racism in Sweden, manifested here in the fantasy theme of citizens in Stockholm standing up against the SD and a racist system incorporated by the SL, who were considered as attacking the Romani beggars. The amplification that occurred through provocation could only arise this quickly and forcefully by tapping into a pre-existing rhetorical vision. The hypothesis was confirmed.

Simultaneously, although the debate may have empowered some individuals, its value for democratic discussions was hampered by its nature. Murthy (2018, 2) has stated that ‘high levels of noise’ and information overload can result from this type of activism, as in the Östermalm case, illustrated by the exceptional number of postings across platforms. As the analysis revealed, through the use of a central hashtag, Twitter functioned as an ‘organising mechanism’ shaping a social movement, not simply as a mode of communication (Segeberg and Bennett 2011).

A fantasy theme analysis provided interpretative keys to analysing how the debate on social media motivated groups of people. Understanding the underlying rhetorical vision and the constituent fantasy theme framed the analysis and helped explain how this particular situation escalated as it did.

The social media environment clearly enhances affective practices. Nikunen (2018, 18) observed that political action is ‘shaped’ by ‘technologies and economics of social media’, whereas Murthy (2018, 1) proposed that they have ‘fundamentally changed the landscape’. Similarly, Vikøren Andersen (2021, chap. ‘Digital media’) concluded about flaming that an inflamed debate is ‘a consequence both of the technology and the particular social context’.

In 2015, the question of racism was omnipresent in Sweden. Thus, there was no need for the *creation* phase of the life cycle of fantasy, and not many words were required for *consciousness-raising* either. A picture of the banners above the escalators was sufficient for social media users to tap into the narrative, allowing events to unfold quickly.

Further, established media had set a frame within which both the campaign and the anti-campaign could naturally function. As described by Ellinas, the media can help to ‘legitimize a political space in which the radical right can thrive’ by ‘framing key issues such as immigration and crime’ (Ellinas 2018). Further, the way in which the media cover political issues ‘affects the structure of incentives activists face to mobilize’ (Ellinas 2018, 271). The campaign capitalised on existing narratives about begging and immigrants, amplifying current topics of xenophobia and racism.

The amplification of the narratives surrounding the event mobilised people, driving them to air their frustration within their respective rhetorical visions, which operated around two opposite fantasy themes: the ‘stand up against racism’ group, connected with the rhetorical vision of a tolerant Sweden, and the supposedly ‘law and order’ group, suggesting lawful procedure, and connecting with a rhetorical vision of a Sweden without the ‘mess’, such as beggars and other unwanted migrants. The latter group mostly occupied the backseat position of spectators as the SD did not need to mobilise. Their campaign did the work for them.

The *plotline* comprised a perceived racist – or even neo-Nazi – party rising to power, challenging an open and tolerant society. This development was under attack by the *sanctioning agent* the SD, and its sympathisers. The *master analogue* was the Nazi party in Germany in the 1930s, which, similar to the SD, rose to power through democratic elections. Against this background, the fantasy theme of a racist plot against Romani beggars, described as a mess that needed to be tidied up, emerged naturally. Within this rhetorical vision, it was easy to oppose the campaign. Several *symbolic cues* elicited responses. As with the concurrent #BlackLivesMatter, the narrative agency played a significant role (Yang 2016).

Furthermore, this case study illustrates the challenges of deliberative democracy: there was no striving for a democratic resolution or any readiness to await the results of a democratic process. The campaign was viewed as too provocative to be allowed to stand. When the SL immediately announced that it would not cancel the campaign, it became clear that it could not be stopped through conventional means since the available complaint processes would have taken longer than the duration of the campaign. In the age of social media, some democratic processes require a fast track to be useful.

After the campaign was terminated, discussion subsided quickly. The fantasy theme was no longer relevant. Some Twitter accounts and Flashback profiles showed no activity after August 2015, and some debaters deleted posts written during the heat of the moment. An active tweeter, Viktor Banke, even wrote a book regretting contributing to the polarisation of the migration debate (Bodin 2017). The following weeks saw discussions in established media with analyses of free speech and racist messages. However, the *terminus* of the fantasy theme was reached within a month.

How should we understand the SD's role regarding the campaign? Several answers have been suggested in the analysis. The focus was on the immediate rhetorical effects of the Östermalm campaign, but the analysis also gives some insight to the intricate rhetoric of the SD. As noted, the provocation was planned, and the ensuing indignation could not have been unforeseen. Considering the sentiment supporting beggars, SD's message went far beyond morally acceptable language use. However, the forceful responses with unusually strong commotion online, with physical manifestations in the capitol, and the final tumult at the site of the campaign, all played right into their hands, further polarising SD supporters against the Left and vice versa.

In addition to strengthening their current support, the SD also wanted to attract new voters. A highly visible debate on a current topic made potential voters aware of the SD's political views, ironically not so much through the small advertisement campaign itself as through the loud reactions against their campaign. It was noted that what happened was probably precisely what the SD had hoped for, '[t]he impact of the campaign could hardly have been bought with money' (Mattson 2015). In addition, the SD got off inciting hatred towards a group of people while simultaneously appearing as victims since their campaign was attacked and brutally destroyed. The SD's strategic use of words, although morally deplorable, was rhetorically efficient.

Now, over eight years later, the urgency of the rhetorical vision of an open Sweden that welcomes beggars – and migrants in general – has receded into a *vision-declining* stage. The number of migrants entering Sweden has declined significantly, partly because many earlier promises have been revised and restrictions introduced. The situation of the beggars was never settled, and discussions with Romanian authorities and other organisations did not yield any significant results. Fifteen months after submitting his final report to the government, the national coordinator on the begging-question reversed his mind, noting 'a considerable and cruel level of exploitation' wherefore he found that begging should be regulated (Huitfeldt and Svenberg 2017). In practice, however, the matter was resolved as most of the beggars left Sweden. As a conclusion on the whole matter, begging

may soon become forbidden as a motion to this end has been put forward by a member of the currently leading political party (*Moderaterna*, the conservative party), a motion that would have been highly controversial in 2015 (Parliamentary Motion 2023/24:1436).

All of this demonstrates the centrality of *kairós*. Today, the campaign could not work in the same manner.

8. Conclusion

The Sweden Democrats' provocative underground campaign, 'Sorry about the mess here in Sweden', was arguably successful. The media space and discussions around Sweden that the campaign attracted engaged new voters. The campaign voiced a frustration that the SD has built its support on: a voice against Sweden's stand on migration. The success was possible because of three factors: the possibility for antagonists to reach out widely and quickly using social media; strong anti-reactions from left-wing and anti-racist groups, which amplified the debate; and the pre-existence of two active opposing rhetorical visions, which catalysed the debate.

That the campaign was terminated on its second day was by anti-racist activists framed as a victory in the struggle against the SD and racism, but the SD were the actual victors because of the media frenzy. In the next general election, 2018, the SD received 17,53 per cent of the votes, which was 4,67 percentage points more than in the previous election, and in the next, 2022, an additional 3,01 percentage points, making it the second largest party in Sweden (Valmyndigheten 2023a, b, c).

The Östermalm campaign is a paradigm example of how social media rhetoric catalyses citizens towards political action on significant issues of societal conflict. Half a decade later, the Capitol riot in Washington, DC, exhibited a similar build-up on social media (Frenkel 2021; Timberg et al. 2021).

The analysis indicates the value of a rhetorical analysis in which, in addition to the content and wording of the messages, their context, purpose, and *kairós*, are considered, particularly as part of an overarching narrative. Analysing the underlying rhetorical vision and constituent fantasy theme helped frame the debate on social media and provided its interpretative keys. The method of fantasy-theme criticism should usefully remain part of the rhetorical toolbox.

A narrow scope, examining a singular event within a limited thirty-six-hour timeframe, allowed a fairly detailed analysis, at points hour-by-hour. While fantasy-theme analyses typically examine broader social movements, this study demonstrates how the method can also be used to examine small-scale events. In analysing the role of social media and what motivates engagement, the study

suggests a low threshold of interplay between social media and reality, between physical and virtual space, bridging the gap between virtual and physical protests when the temperature of the debate gets high enough, reaching, as it were, a boiling-point.

A limitation of this study is the subjective selection and reading of the material. However, as the collected data is fairly substantial for qualitative analysis, the explanations and interpretations offered can be considered valid, although not in a strict sense. The analysis should, in theory, be reproducible based on the information and detailed explanations provided.

The analysis confirms the hypothesis that the campaign amplified a compelling rhetorical vision that motivated action. Regarding the step from virtual to physical protests, dominant action themes appear to provide an idea of how events may unfold. Sentiments on social media, although hyperbolic, voice real concerns, which if sufficiently provoked or supported, may turn into action, as in the case of the riot at the Östermalm underground station in Stockholm.

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