



## **TWITTER FRAMING AND ONLINE BATTLE AGAINST EXTREMIST : A CASE STUDY OF #NOTINMYNAME MOVEMENT**

<sup>1</sup>Kartini Kamaruzzaman, <sup>2</sup>Norsimaa Mustaffa, <sup>3</sup>Khairunneezam Mohd Noor, <sup>4</sup>Safiyah  
Ahmad Sabri

<sup>1234</sup>Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia

Correspondence e-mail: <sup>1</sup>kartinikamaruzzaman@usim.edu.my

### **Abstract**

*This article centers on the #NotInMyName movement, initially instigated by a collective of British Muslims in the United Kingdom in September 2014. The movement's primary objectives were to respond to extremist groups and combat online radicalization. The research employs single-case study design and entails Twitter data collection and the analysis of Twitter data (tweets) of which used #NotInMyName hashtag and keywords. The findings of this research contribute to and broaden the ongoing discourse surrounding the involvement of Muslims in socio-political movements particularly in the West. It discerns on the increasing awareness, representations and the call for people to take action of which have significantly informed the utilization of digital media among users participating in the said movement.*

**Keywords:** *Twitter, Framing, Muslims, Denounce, Extremists*

### **INTRODUCTION**

On September 13, 2014, local and international news outlets, as well as social media platforms, were inundated with the unexpected and appalling news of the abduction and execution of David Haines, a British humanitarian aid worker, by a faction of militants and extremists known as the Islamic State (ISIS) or Daaesh. The public was shocked to learn that Mr. Haines, who had previously traveled to several countries, including Yugoslavia, Libya, and South Sudan, tragically met his end during his final journey to Syria. In a released video, Mr. Haines was seen attired in orange overalls, kneeling in front of a masked militant, moments before the brutal beheading occurred (The Sun, 2014).

These heinous acts spurred a group of British Muslims to voice their resolute opposition to Daaesh and inaugurate the #NotInMyName campaign. The inception of the #NotInMyName hashtag on the Twitter platform was spearheaded by a Muslim collective, inviting the broader public to collectively challenge the militant group's ideology and propaganda, which manipulatively invoked Islam to justify their malevolent and savage objectives. Furthermore, amidst the escalation of radicalization among Muslim youth and a series of devastating incidents, such as the 7 July 2005 London bombings and the murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013, attention toward the British Muslim community intensified. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the #NotInMyName hashtag

persevered as a symbol of the British Muslim group's empathy for the victims of violence and their steadfast unity with mainstream British society.

This research focuses on the aspect of peaceful socio-political mobilization within the #NotInMyName movement among British Muslims. This area merits additional scrutiny and exploration. While there exists a substantial body of research on Muslim activism and the utilization of digital media in Western contexts, the majority of these studies center around phenomena occurring within the framework of the war on terror. Specifically, they delve into how information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social media were harnessed to provide alternative frameworks for comprehending Muslim identity (Saeed, 2011; Storer-Church, 2015). In contrast, this research is focused on investigating the utilization of social media, in particular Twitter framing, within the context of online radicalization and the heightened prevalence of extreme ideologies. Within this context, the study aims to gain insights into how Twitter is utilized by Twitter users who tweeted using the #NotInMyName hashtag and keywords.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Framing Process**

The framing process, or frames, can be viewed as "the precise metaphors, symbolic depictions, and cognitive signals employed to portray or interpret behavior and events in an evaluative manner and to propose alternative courses of action (Zald, 1996). Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that framing processes exhibit variation, especially as awareness tends to significantly escalate during the mature phase of social movements. McAdam et al. (1996) assert that during this mature stage, framing processes are anticipated to be influenced by the expanding awareness and strategic choices made by social movement organizations, as well as the vigorous debates and disputes surrounding the issues at the heart of these movements. Consequently, it is often within the crucible of such contention that the majority of framing within social movements is conceived and subsequently undergoes transformation.

Furthermore, the framing process can also be conceptualized as a transformation in how participants within a social movement perceive and construct meaning to make sense of their surrounding world. Modern scholars, exemplified by Busher (2015), characterize this phenomenon as a cognitive framing process, which encompasses the development and refinement of beliefs. This process often involves the delineation of 'us' versus 'them' and revolves

around questions such as 'who is to blame' and 'what is to be done' (as outlined by Snow and Benford, 1988, and cited in Busher, 2016: 9), echoing the insights of Melucci (1994, 1995).

Framing processes are also designed to exert influence and elicit changes in individuals' emotions and sentiments. In this context, Chesters and Welsh (2011) expound on collective identity, moving beyond the confines of social roles and ethnicity. They emphasize that contemporary collective identity revolves around the manner in which individuals collectively shape and attain a shared comprehension of the challenges or issues within a social movement. This specifically pertains to the art of eliciting emotional responses and reactions to a particular issue or message, aligning with the perspective put forth by Busher (2015). In consonance with this viewpoint, Decreus et al. (2014) underscore the evolving paradigm of collective identity, which continues to foster the construction of a cohesive 'we' founded on symbolic struggles, including slogans, keywords, or manifestos that activists perceive as resonating with their sentiments.

### **Social Media And Framing**

The utilization of social media is heavily influenced by the experiential knowledge and insights that individuals possess regarding how these technologies operate. Tufekci (2017) provides a pertinent illustration, suggesting that both movement activists and ordinary individuals now independently leverage social media platforms to expand their reach beyond the confines of affiliated memberships. They employ these platforms to rally people for online actions or to mobilize attendance at offline marches and protests, thereby circumventing the intricate logistical challenges typically associated with formal movement organizations. Expanding upon this perspective, Clark (2016) highlights that social media enables a diverse array of groups and voices to establish a presence online. This means that individuals involved in social movements are no longer (completely) reliant on well-established organizations to convey their opinions and viewpoints on particular issues to the broader public. As contended by Gerbaudo (2014: 266), "technology is not solely instrumental; it also carries symbolic significance." In this context, movement actors utilize social media platforms not merely due to their functional capabilities but also because, in doing so, they imbue these platforms with meanings that encompass their experiences, cultures, and identities.

With the advent of ICTs and social media, the organizational and

coordination aspects of social movements have increasingly revolved around facilitating greater ease of participation and contribution to protest actions. The use of social media has also alleviated the burden on movement actors when it comes to rapidly and cost-effectively disseminating information and raising awareness among a wide audience (Theocharis et al., 2015). Furthermore, the narrative framework of hashtags not only enables movement actors to express opposition to their adversaries or share their personal stories and experiences but also fosters the development of solidarity (Ince et al., 2017; Tufekci, 2017).

Existing scholarship also suggests that social media platforms serve as alternative arenas for movement actors to shape public opinion (Earl and Garrett, 2017) or disseminate information and perspectives that may be unreported, underreported, or misreported by mainstream news outlets. For instance, by using hashtags or sharing URLs of YouTube videos or news articles on Twitter timelines, or by employing hashtags and sharing Twitter posts with URLs on Facebook, individuals can offer a clearer perspective on contentious issues. Some scholars also argue that the advent of the internet and communication technologies have significantly influenced the religiosity, practices, authenticity, authority and cultural dimension of Muslims (Campbell and Garner, 2016).

## **METHOD**

The #NotInMyName hashtag on Twitter was employed by a variety of layers in the society, including ordinary individuals and activists, for diverse objectives. These encompassed amplifying their voices and disseminating awareness about the campaign and movement. Consequently, the analysis of tweets assumes significance as it allows for an exploration of the discourse surrounding #NotInMyName and the evolving perspectives and opinions expressed over time.

Given that a hashtag serves as a means of categorization, it empowers users to tag, locate, discuss, and engage with specific issues based on their viewpoints, convictions, and sometimes, personal encounters (Konnolly, 2015). Consequently, the analysis of the utilization of the #NotInMyName hashtag proves valuable in gaining a deeper understanding of how individuals come together through their shared opinions, values, beliefs, and lived experiences.

In this research, only content data, comprising the text of tweets, and metadata associated with the #NotInMyName hashtag, are subjected to analysis. A dataset comprising approximately 40,000 historical tweets was collected spanning three distinct timeframes: from September 10, 2014, to October 9, 2014

(indicating the initial phase of the event); from October 10, 2014, to November 9, 2014 (representing the middle phase); and from November 10, 2014, to December 9, 2014 (reflecting the subsequent phase of the event). Subsequently, the raw Twitter content data was systematically organized into an Excel format and then imported into NVivo for comprehensive analysis.

To to facilitate a more manageable data analysis process, a systematic sampling method, akin to the 'simple random sample' technique elucidated by Bryman (2012), was employed. As expounded by Babbie (2016: 217), systematic sampling involves the systematic selection of every Nth element from the total list. In this case, every tenth tweet from the larger Twitter dataset was chosen for detailed analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A thematic analysis was implemented to identify key themes, both inductively and deductively. Twitter played a pivotal role in shaping the narrative of the #NotInMyName movement, as online conversations, posts, and tweets contributed to mobilization and framing process. In particular, the internet and digital media can alter the agendas and frames adopted by movement actors, including social media sentiments, while allowing individual citizens to voice their concerns and shape various issues and frames. Therefore, analyzing tweets is crucial to understand what people were expressing about #NotInMyName during that particular period of time. The research sought answers on how the Twitter users framed their cause, grievances, and collective identity, and how these views evolved over time, ultimately influencing the framing of #NotInMyName.

No	Themes	Number of Tweets Coded
1	Increasing awareness about the hostages in the #NotInMyName movement	106
2	Raising awareness for the #NotInMyName movement	1442
3	Utilizing #NotInMyName Keywords for Awareness to Condemn Extremist Groups	512
4	Representations in the #NotInMyName Movement	241
5	Calling people to take action in the #NotInMyName Movement	238

**Table 1. Themes and Number of Twitter Coded**

### **1. Heightened Awareness Regarding the Hostages**

The first theme highlighting the growing awareness of British hostages in the context of Twitter framing. This theme was evident in 106 coded tweets. Twitter users leveraged the #NotInMyName hashtag to champion a cause, raise

awareness, and garner greater attention for the movement's issues, aligning with previous research by Ince et al. (2017) and Tufekci (2017). These users closely connected their tweets with the abduction and tragic demise of British hostages at the hands of Daaesh, which served as the catalyst for the #NotInMyName campaign and movement.

For instance, some users tweeted phrases like '#NotInMyName hope Alan Henning is released and comes back home' and 'Making a stand with @JonAshworth @SulemanNagdi #NotInMyName free Alan Henning.' These tweets underscored the solidarity of Twitter users against the kidnappings and murders of individuals such as Alan Henning, David Haines, and John Cantlie. Notably, Twitter users went beyond merely disseminating information about the hostages; they actively urged other users to voice their opposition to these atrocities. An example can be found in a tweet that urged, 'ISIS is using John Cantlie for their own gain stand up to them and say #NotInMyName.'

## **2. *Raising Awareness about the #NotInMyName Movement***

Twitter users also employed the #NotInMyName hashtag to actively raise awareness of the movement, thereby contributing to its growth and development. This theme is the most prominent in the #NotInMyName Twitter framing, with 1,442 tweets coded accordingly.

Within the #NotInMyName context, Twitter users shared information about the campaign's purpose, its participants, its initiators, and its stance against specific groups or individuals. This information was disseminated through tweets and retweets, often sourced directly from news media Twitter accounts or by sharing URLs from news media websites. As established in existing literature, sharing Twitter posts with URL links containing comprehensive information can enhance people's understanding of contentious issues (Tufekci, 2017). For instance, a user tweeted a message related to #NotInMyName, which was linked to a news media Twitter account, stating, 'Muslims Are Campaigning Against the Islamic State's Corruption Of Their Religion - #NotInMyName <http://huff.to/1AXcMii>' via @HuffPostRelig.

Twitter users not only disseminated information from news media sources but also contributed their unique narratives about the #NotInMyName movement. For example, a user tweeted, 'Young British Muslims are using an online campaign to take a stand against the Islamic State using the hashtag #NotInMyName.' In this context, the utilization of the #NotInMyName hashtag provided Twitter users with a platform to share personal stories and narratives (Clark, 2016; Ince et al., 2017; Tufekci, 2017).

In the broader context, an effective framing process entails the extent to which social movement participants share information and facilitate a deeper understanding of the #NotInMyName movement. As argued by Snow and Benford (1988), social movements encapsulate ideas and meanings, necessitating movement participants to disseminate information in order to facilitate the process of constructing meaning and comprehending the issues at the heart of #NotInMyName."

### ***3. Utilizing #NotInMyName Keywords for Awareness to Condemn Extremist Groups***

Twitter framing also prominently featured the denunciation of Daaesh as a central theme, with 512 tweets coded accordingly. Twitter users frequently employed terms like 'condemn,' 'refuse,' and 'reject' to collectively denounce Daaesh's ideology, representations, and actions. This indicates that digital media often serve as battlegrounds for individuals to challenge differing beliefs and viewpoints (Karatzogianni, 2015).

Arguably, hashtag was not only used to voice resistance but also to declare and shape a collective sense of identity. The formation of this collective identity on Twitter was evident through the consistent use of #NotInMyName to signify who individuals were and what they stood for (Gerbaudo and Treré, 2015). Concurrently, as argued by Melucci (1996), actors in New Social Movements (NSMs) often imply collective identity by framing themselves in terms of their objectives and their alignment with or opposition to specific causes.

Numerous Twitter users utilized the term 'we' to signify a collective identity in opposition to Daaesh. For instance, some users tweeted messages such as 'we condemn the beheading of #AlanHenning from #Bolton by #ISIS, a terrorist state. That is not #Islām. #NotInMyName' and 'We refuse to call them the Islamic State #NotInMyName.' This usage of 'we' or 'us' referred to those who collectively opposed extremist groups, irrespective of their religious affiliation. In contrast, 'them' referred to the extremists and was characterized with terms such as 'violence,' 'brutal,' 'extreme,' 'evil,' and 'barbaric.'

For example, a user tweeted, 'We condemn the brutal murder of an innocent aid worker Alan Henning by IS #NotInMyName #ISIS.' Twitter users leveraged the #NotInMyName hashtag to establish a clear distinction between the values of peace and tolerance promoted in Islam and the violence and terror exhibited by Daaesh, emphasizing the construction of Daaesh as 'them.' Social media users involved in the #NotInMyName movement often use sharp antinomies,

such as 'them versus us,' 'yes versus no,' 'victory versus defeat,' and 'now versus never,' to construct their identities."

#### **4. Utilizing #NotInMyName Keywords for Awareness to Condemn Extremist Groups**

The subsequent theme, which appeared 241 times, underscores the significance of Twitter users framing representations of Daaesh within the #NotInMyName movement as a critical issue. Tweets about these representations revealed a clear disassociation between Daaesh and Islam. For instance, some users tweeted statements like 'No ISIS, you DO NOT represent me or my religion #NotInMyName' and 'How can people believe that ISIS is a representation of Islam?! Our religion is based on principles of peace and harmony. #NotInMyName.'

As previously argued, social media users involved in the #NotInMyName Movement often frame social movement issues in the context of identity, culture and occasionally, sub-cultural issues related to lifestyle. In this context, Twitter users highlighted a diverse array of concerns, interests, and issues stemming from ideology, religion, identity, representation, norms, and values (Campbell, 2016). Notably, the use of the #NotInMyName hashtag to spotlight the (mis)representation of Daaesh was intertwined with the growing emphasis on religious expression and representation."

#### **5. Calling People to Take Action in the #NotInMyName Movement**

Furthermore, a notable theme within the #NotInMyName movement was the call to action, constituting the fifth prevalent theme with a total of 238 tweets coded accordingly. Twitter, as a platform, has been effectively utilized to disseminate calls to action and inspire political engagement (Tufekci, 2017; van Haperen et al., 2018).

Twitter users harnessed the #NotInMyName hashtag to mobilize individuals towards specific actions, such as urging them to employ similar keywords and hashtags to condemn Daaesh. For instance, a tweet implored, 'Please use the hashtag #NotInMyName and stand with us to unite against ISIS.' Some users even utilized the #NotInMyName hashtag while encouraging others to utilize and disseminate information about the movement, thereby demonstrating the unity of Muslims (particularly those in Britain) against Daaesh. One user tweeted, 'Please read and share. Without a doubt, it's #NotInMyName. "http://fb.me/2JMqAasTo' (Legal, 2014).

In addition to these calls for action, certain Twitter users also shared news articles related to the murders of British hostages, requesting their followers to retweet the article links. For example, a tweet stated, 'Could you please share this:



Muslim youths counter ISIS with #NotInMyName Twitter campaign  
"http://news.yahoo.com/muslim-youths-counter-islamic-state-notinmyname-twitter-campaign-172421559.html."

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of tweets underscores the influential role of Twitter in shaping the processes of framing within the #NotInMyName movement. Specifically, the platform has served as a primary conduit for users to frame and disseminate information pertaining to various aspects of the movement. This includes the prominent framing of British hostages, raising awareness about the #NotInMyName Movement, the condemnation of extremist groups, all of which — highlighting the versatility of Twitter as a tool for framing.

Furthermore, it's noteworthy that the #NotInMyName hashtag has also been employed by users to frame discussions surrounding the issue of representations shedding light on the incongruous values, ideologies, and practices of Islamist extremists and, concurrently calling people to take action. The findings reveal that Twitter users often incorporated religious affiliations as a means of signifying their support for #NotInMyName, with some even incorporating the sentiments of religious beliefs into their tweets. This also shows that the dynamic landscape of online media encompasses various tactics, including hashtag campaigns and the sharing of sentiments, aimed at fostering a more informed and engaged public discourse on critical issues.

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