

Democratic Prosopopoeia: The Rhetorical Influence of the I-Will-Vote Image Filter on Social Media Profile Pictures during the 2015 Canadian Federal Election

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ABSTRACT

Image filters, increasingly common in social media, are digital prosopopoeia. In this paper, I examine the act of voluntarily displaying the “I will vote Oct 19” image filter prosopopoeia on profile pictures during the 2015 Canadian federal election. Adopting the categorical voice of a voter through the image filter encourages like-minded family and friends to vote, the ostensible aim. But it also disciplines the image filter user into becoming a stronger advocate for voting through commitment and consistency, as well as social validation pressures; prosopopoeia both enhances and reinforces identification. By putting on the prosopopoeia mask, the social media rhetor *becomes* a representative of the commonwealth of

Canadian federal voters, and, as Kenneth Burke tells us, when we put on a role, the role puts on us. In “wearing” the filter on their profile picture, the individual has not simply *done* something, but has *become* something—the individual has become an electoral advocate through the process of identification, observed through recurrent political online statements, voting selfies, and the inclusion of political hashtags, embedding the “I will vote Oct 19” image filter user within the online collective of 160,000 similar voting peers on Facebook and/or Twitter during the 2015 Canadian federal election.

Keywords: prosopopoeia, social media, identification, voting image filter, voting selfie, hashtags, politics, activism, 2015 Canadian federal election, political rhetoric, Twitter, #votation, rhetorical figures

Canadian political satirist Rick Mercer insists that “voting is contagious” (Mercer; Nickerson 54). Not only is he right, he is one of the social contagions influencing voting. Mercer introduced his social sharing #votation campaign to advance voting through visually salient expressions during the 2015 Canadian federal election (Mercer). Civically engaged social media users were encouraged to use an “I will vote Oct 19” image filter, placing it over profile pictures on their Twitter and/or Facebook accounts prior to the election (#votation). Mercer suggests that using this image filter on a profile picture will do two things: first, give accountability and responsibility to those who have pledged to vote, for, if you say you will vote, you are more likely to do so; and second, encourage others to vote, as friends will view the I-will-vote image filter over profile pictures, and may also be inspired to vote.[1] What Mercer probably did not realize, however, is that image filters enact the ancient rhetorical figure, prosopopoeia

(literally, “to create a face/person,” to put on a mask). The “I will vote Oct 19” image filter may have been applied to a personal profile picture without a second thought, but in exhibiting the image filter *over* their profile picture, the individual has not simply *done* something, but has *become* something—the individual has become an electoral advocate through the process of Burkean identification.

A corollary effect ancient rhetoricians did not anticipate, however, is that in addition to influencing the audience, as intended, this act of “wearing” an image filter over their profile picture influences the rhetors themselves. Conventionally, figures and tropes are rhetorical tools used by rhetors, or performed by rhetors in language, as Johanna Hartelius notes in her application of prosopopoeia (and apostrophe) to immigration discourses (315). Paul de Man reverses this order. Figures and tropes, for de Man, operate on humans, and Hartelius shows how this is the case for prosopopoeia especially; it is, after all, a “mask” that allows the “wearer” to become someone, or something else. Image filters are especially interesting because the “mask” becomes almost literal again, overlaying a photograph of the rhetor. The image filter user may have used the I-will-vote language as a rhetorical operation, but the I-will-vote language operated on the image filter user. The visual I-will-vote prosopopoeia over a personal image affects the individual’s identity, in that the rhetor becomes bound to enact the promise described by the image filter. The object is speaking for the person, advancing their ethos by displaying their allegiance; considered *en bloc*, it visually encodes identification, like uniforms or conference badges.

After voting, many image filter users shared on their social network a statement indicating that they voted, posted a voting selfie, a Barthian *having-been-there* image (*Image, Music, Text* 159), and/or

applied a hashtag such as #votation, #cdnpoli, #canadavotes, or #elxn42, to demonstrate they had fulfilled their promise and enacted their role. Hashtags are another digital tool of identification, which show users “*acting-together*” in solidarity, consubstantial with others (Burke, *Rhetoric* 20–21). This article examines the rhetorical influence of placing an I-will-vote image filter *over* users’ personal profile pictures and charts the influence of the prosopopoeia image filter on users, and their online community, during the 2015 Canadian federal election.

ON PROSOPOPOEIA, WITH AN EXCURSUS ON RHETORICAL FIGURES

Like most rhetorical figures, prosopopoeia has an inconsistent history. It is often conflated with the trope, personification, and it has a variety of synonyms or partial synonyms (confirmatio; personae confictio; the counterfait in personation; allocutio; ethopoeia). We can start with a clear and representative definition, from the best general source in English, the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

A rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting. (“Prosopopoeia, n.”)

Paul de Man defines prosopopoeia as “the fiction of [...] an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which [...] confers upon it the power of speech” (75–76). The rhetorical function of prosopopoeia, he notes, is performative in that it “makes the unknown accessible to the mind and to the senses” (de Man 80; Davis 38). Cynthia Chase explains that de Man does not merely read prosopopoeia as the

giving of face, but he reads *face* as given by prosopopoeia (84; Davis 43). “What is given by this act is figure,” she says, “[f]igure is no less than our very face” (Chase 84; Davis 43). Diane Davis observes that “prosopopoeia *defaces* and *effaces* precisely to the extent that it *enfaced*” (43), meaning that the figure defaces the idea of essential selfhood, the thinking that there is a pre-existing and substantial self that the face would (mis)represent (43). In a sense, then, it enacts pure identification, where the rhetor is nothing but the associations conjured by the mask. The prosopopoeia image filter absorbs the social media user into a specified identity, a “self” in a community of selves, all viewing each other as what they prefer to be—voters, in our case, voting with others, for a common good. There is often an air of idealism, of Burkean perfection, in prosopopoeia. Demetrius cites a classic instance of the figure prosopopoeia from Plato’s *Menexenus* in his *On Style*, Socrates speaking directly for the fallen soldiers of the Peloponnesian war, addressing their families (pts.265–266). “[W]e might have lived dishonourably,” Socrates says under his rhetorical mask, “but have preferred to die honourably rather than bring you and your children into disgrace” (Plato pt.246d).

Many rhetoricians extend the prosopopoeia from the dead, imagined, or absent to abstract concepts, physical objects, and the like—“to cities, beasts, birds, trees, stones, weapons, fire, water, lights of the firmament” (Ruffin 393). In these extensions, one can see how prosopopoeia can get mixed up with personification, the attribution of human characteristics to abstract concepts, as well as with anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics to animals and non-animate objects. And, of course, speech is a human characteristic.

But, as Randy Allen Harris argues, if we are to be precise with the way we use our technical vocabulary in rhetoric, we need a one-to-one mapping between our terms for rhetorical figures and their definitions; and, in turn, to the instances that exemplify those figures (18). This has rarely, if ever, been the case in rhetoric. In particular, instances are inevitably curated as representing only one figure, when multiple figures are not only present but in complete functional cooperation. The classic representative of antimetabole, for instance, “all for one and one for all” (reverse lexical repetition of *all* and *one*) would not achieve its effects without mesodiplosis (medial repetition of *for*) or parison (syntactic parallelism, which reverses the semantic roles of *all* and *one*); nor would it be as elegant without isocolon, or prosodic parallelism (Harris and Di Marco 218). The point made here is that figures very frequently co-occur, and not just “coincidentally” or “merely aesthetically” but cooperate functionally. As Harris maintains, “[f]igures work relentlessly in concert with one another” (16).

Returning to prosopopoeia, we find that rhetoricians often include examples like “[w]isdom crieth at the gate. [...] Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men” (Proverbs 8:3-4; see Ruffin 393). This is personification. The abstract concept, wisdom, is given human attributes, including speech. But it is also prosopopoeia, because the author speaks the words of that abstraction. Certain figures travel together (Harris 26). Antimetabole, mesodiplosis, and parison—as above—are very frequent companions. So are personification and prosopopoeia (as well as anthropomorphism and prosopopoeia). For the purposes of this article, however, I focus on examples of prosopopoeia in isolation. This excursus is primarily for clarification, to distinguish prosopopoeia from figures with which it is frequently enmeshed.

The most important aspect of prosopopoeia is that the rhetor does not just *attribute* human characteristics to absent people, objects, or abstractions; the rhetor *becomes* the absent person, object, or abstraction, giving it voice. Henry Peachum adds a particularly crucial concept to the figure, defining it as

the fayning of a person, that is, when to a thing sencelesse and dumbe wee fayne a fit person, or attribute a person to a commonwealth or multitude [...] the Orator by this figure maketh the common welth to speake. ([113])

The notion of speaking for a multitude, of speaking in a role, representing some commonwealth, is one of the central ways prosopopoeia functions. If we look back at Demetrius's example from Plato, for instance, we notice that Socrates is not giving voice to a single fallen warrior, but speaking on behalf of all the fallen soldiers of Athens from that conflict (pts.265–266).

When social media rhetors put on an image filter, everything they say from their digital pulpit is now “spoken” by the commonwealth that image filter designates; in our case, the commonwealth of the 2015 Canadian federal voters. What Peachum and other ancient figurists could not have anticipated is the reciprocal effect of a vast chorus of orators speaking in unison as a commonwealth.

A CANADIAN CHORUS OF 160,000 I-WILL-VOTE IMAGE FILTER USERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Over 160,000 Canadian federal voters spoke in the commonwealth chorus, having incorporated the “I will vote Oct 19” image filter over their social media profile picture on Facebook and/or Twitter

(Stanley).[2] With these users exhibiting this political filter as their virtual identity, the visual content and statements posted to social media newsfeeds prior to, on, and after the day of the election by these individuals discussed what their avatar promoted: voting in the Canadian election. Even a cute-cat video or fun pictures of friends and family came not just from Barbara or John, Chantal or Chloé, but from a representative of the commonwealth of Canadian voters. Even the cat videos were now explicitly part of a Canadian culture that the poster pledged to calibrate on October 19. They made this pledge to all their friends, friends of friends, or the public (in concentric groupings, depending on privacy settings). But they also made the pledge to themselves. Robert Cialdini proposes that commitment strategies “get us to take some action or make some statement that will trap us into later compliance through consistency pressures” (*Influence* 75). These commitment and consistency pressures are observable within the social media environment for those who use commonwealth-style image filters. Once the I-will-vote prosopopoeia image filter is applied to a profile picture and becomes a defining aspect of a person’s virtual identifiable avatar, the individual is expected to demonstrate and represent the political statement.

METHODOLOGY

I examined the social media postings of 30 Twitter users who included the “I will vote Oct 19” image filter and #votation hashtag. (See 1 in Appendix). I assessed the selected users’ broader social media timeline and recorded the number of political statements and/or images tweeted the day before the 2015 Canadian federal election, the day of the election, and the day after the

election (i.e., October 18–20, 2015). I recorded whether image filter users included a voting statement, displayed a voting selfie after voting, and/or used voting–community hashtags. Twitter suffers from selection bias, in that it skews towards college-educated, affluent (over \$50,000 household income), city-dwellers under 50 years old (Duggan et al.; Ruest and Milligan). It is not a random sample of Canadian society, but a self-selecting portion of it—as with many non-digital archival collections (Ruest and Milligan). But Twitter can provide important insight into the thoughts, behaviours, and activities of everyday people, those that are not generally preserved (Ruest and Milligan). To identify the 30 image filter users, I hydrated a data set of #elxn42 tweets (Ruest) and manually searched for the #votenaion hashtag and posted “I will vote Oct 19” image filter. I also manually scraped Google and Twitter content posted from September 28, 2015, the day the image filter was released, to October 20, 2015, the day after the Canadian federal election.

A limitation with the Twitter platform is that profile images are not saved. Once the profile picture with the image filter is changed, it is not possible to revisit the earlier image. Thus, for this study, in addition to users posting the image filter over their profile picture, the selected users also tweeted the I-will-vote profile picture on their newsfeed, which is searchable. Another limitation of my project is its sample size, where 30 Twitter users is a small representation of the over 160,000 social media users who incorporated the “I will Vote Oct 19” image filter on their profile picture, but appropriately thick descriptions would not have been possible with a larger sample.

MOVING FROM “I-WILL-VOTE” TO “I-VOTED”

Modal verbs, such as “may,” “could”, and “will,” often express ideas of “possibility, constraint, and desire” (“Modal, adj. 1 and n. 1”). The phrase, “I may vote” has low modality, as the certainty of the action is inconclusive, whereas the phrase “I will vote” is highly modal, as it asserts a promise to act. Twitter users exhibiting the highly modal “I will vote Oct 19” political image filter statement as their virtual identity, perhaps unsurprisingly, posted many statements and visuals to Twitter on and around election day, to discuss what their avatar promoted, voting in the Canadian federal election (1). From my population, all 30 rhetors incorporated an election-related hashtag, 23 included a statement indicating that they voted, 10 included a voting selfie, and 21 included an election-related follow-up statement and/or image gesturing to the resulting change in government (1). In assessing the political statements and/or political images from users’ tweets during October 18 to October 20, 2015, of the 30 I-will-vote image filter users, 26 posted one or more political tweets while 4 of these users had no tweets during this timeframe. Of the 26 users who posted political tweets, 20 posted more political tweets than non-political tweets, 3 had an equal number of political and non-political tweets, and 3 had fewer political tweets than non-political tweets (1).

Typical of the political tweets, Adam Growe @adamgrowe stated on the day of the election, “I’m heading to the polls and hope for long lineups! #votation #elxn42 #canadavotes” (“@AdamGrowe on Twitter: I’m Heading to the Polls”) (Figure 1), while Jordan Roca @jroc23 commented, “I will vote on Oct 19 for Justin Trudeau as evident by my social avatar #canadavotes #votation” (“@JRoc23 on Twitter: I Will Vote On October 19th”) (Figure 2).

I'm heading to the polls and hope for long lineups!
[#VoteNation](#) [#E1xn42](#) [#CanadaVotes](#)



4:31 PM · Oct 19, 2015 · [Hootsuite](#)

Figure 1: Twitter picture of Adam Growe @adamgrowe with I-will-vote image filter.

I Will Vote On October 19th, For Justin Trudeau, as
evident by my social avatar.
[#CanadaVotes](#) [#VoteNation](#)



2:39 PM · Oct 19, 2015 · [Twitter Web Client](#)

Figure 2: Twitter picture of Jordan Roca (@jroc23 with I-will-vote image filter.

Laurie McNeill and John David Zuern suggest, “our exposure to the constant, expectant gaze of prospective audiences creates a rhetorical situation that pressures us to take on, simultaneously and perpetually, the roles of curator, dramaturge, and censor of our moment-to-moment performances of selfhood within our online networks” (xxvi). The pressure of audience expectations in the performance of selfhood shows “that a choice made actively—one that’s spoken out loud or written down or otherwise made explicit—is considerably more likely to direct someone’s future conduct than the same choice left unspoken” (Cialdini, “Harnessing” 76–77). By putting on the prosopopoeia mask of the image filter, social media users rhetorically *become* a representative of the commonwealth of Canadian federal voters, and, as Burke tells us, when we put on a role, the role puts on us (*Philosophy* 267–68). In talking about assuming a role, he says that becoming a representative of a commonwealth is a kind of

translation into a different medium of communication, a way of amplifying a statement so that it carries better to a large or distant audience. Hence, the persuasive identifications of Rhetoric, in being so directly designed for *use*, involve us in a special problem of *consciousness*. (Burke, *Rhetoric* 36)

Burke is not invoking prosopopoeia explicitly here, but the ethotic situation he describes is of a piece, with adopting an image filter—putting on a rhetorical mask in order to present oneself as a particular sort of person—and he notes that it affects the mask-wearer’s consciousness. Burke’s talk of a “different medium of communication” effectively means a change of terministic screens (*Language* 45), taking on a new vocabulary consistent with the

adopted role, but it surely applies at least as fully to the different medium of visual communication that the image filters manifest.

My extension to social media of Burke's role-adoption ideas are supported with a study by Joel Penney, which shows that social media users who took the symbolic step of replacing their Facebook profile picture with a red equal sign, symbolizing the fight for marriage equality, were more strongly identified with the movement, and "may be more likely to go further in their participation" in future activism (62). My extension also aligns with a study by Paolo Gerbaudo, which found that social media users who replaced their profile pictures with protest avatars, "experience[d] a collective fusion in an online crowd" (916), with participants presenting a highly selective collective identity, a version of themselves that they wanted their targeted audience to find out about (920). As Cialdini puts it, "most people, once they take a stand or go on record in favour of a position, prefer to stick to it" and "even a small, seemingly trivial commitment can have a powerful effect on future actions" ("Harnessing" 76).

I contend, however, that image filters are even greater expressions of identification, and greater commitment motivators, than Penney's equal signs or Gerbaudo's protest avatars. "Wearing" one on a personal image presents a person amalgamated with a cause more fully than moves of replacement or substitution can. Prosopopeia is a *becoming*. Replacement by an object or symbol is metonymic, an *association*. Substitution by an avatar is an effacement of the rhetor. In our case, the I-will-vote image filter expresses an explicit commitment, the public formation of a voting plan, and we know voting plans increase voter turnout by up to 9.1 percentage points (Nickerson and Rogers 195).

By wearing the words “I will vote Oct 19” as a frame over their personal image every day while communicating within their social network, the rhetor enters an “imposed system” that “calls for specific kinds of personal recitations” (Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life* 10). Cialdini suggests that “whenever one takes a stand that is visible to others, there arises a drive to maintain that stand in order to *look* like a consistent person” (*Influence* 88). By wearing the pledge to vote, the individual is likely to become a more engaged democratic citizen in a “variety of other circumstances where his compliance may also be desired, and he is likely to continue his public spirited behaviour for as long as his new self-image holds” (Cialdini, *Influence* 101). This publicly spirited behaviour is evident in the Twitter postings of both Adam Growe and Jordan Roca (Figures 1 & 2). On the day of the election, for instance, Growe posted 23 vote related Twitter messages, 8 of which were humorous political memes (“@AdamGrowe on Twitter”). And the day after the election, Growe posted a new picture with a modification to the I-will-vote image filter, one that interpolated a phrase about his continued engagement, stating, “I will talk about the vote Oct. 20” (“@AdamGrowe on Twitter: #DayAfterVoteNation”) (Figure 3).

#DayAfterVoteNation



7:40 AM · Oct 20, 2015 · Hootsuite

Figure 3: Twitter picture of Adam Growe @adamgrowe with “I will talk about the vote Oct. 20” filter.

Roca remained similarly engaged. On the day of the election, Roca posted 55 political tweets, one being, “I did not see a majority Liberal government coming. Here we are Canada & Prime Minister Trudeau @macleansmag” (“@JRoc23 on Twitter: I Did Not See a Majority Liberal Government Coming”). In addition to tweeting ‘at’ *Maclean’s Magazine* @macleansmag, which shows his level of civic engagement, Roca also incorporated a hyperlink to the breaking news announcement from *Maclean’s* on the election of a Liberal majority government. Two and a half weeks after the election, on November 4, 2015, Roca continued to discuss election-related material with the comment, “Now that my boy Justin Trudeau is the Prime Minister designate of Canada, I may have to relax on informally referring to him as ‘my boy’” (“@JRoc23 on Twitter: Now That My Boy”).

These politically engaged personal statements are examples of how “in these and other social situations people assume positions as actors within known scripts” (Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life* 11). The practices that are attached to Grove and Roca by voluntarily wearing the “I will vote Oct 19” image filter on their profile picture “function as one form of ‘discipline’” (Smith and Watson, *Getting a Life* 12). A study by Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer, testing the effects of priming intrinsic motives and applying varying degrees of extrinsic pressure on voters, found that social pressure is profoundly important as an inducement to political participation (33). Grove and Roca, through prosopopoeia, with its attendant commitment and consistency pressures, are disciplined into becoming stronger advocates for voting.

THE “*HAVING-BEEN-THERE*” VOTING SELFIE

In recognition of their commitment to vote and pressure to appear consistent and meet audience expectations, I-will-vote image filter users proved to their social media audiences that they upheld their pledge to vote and further outwardly demonstrated ethos framed by the act of prosopopoeia. Burke suggests that rhetors “seek to display the appropriate ‘signs’ of character needed to earn the audience’s good will” (*Rhetoric* 55–56). In addition to filter users linguistically expressing their voting action, I-will-vote image filter users substantiated their avatar’s claim visually by posting a voting selfie. Barthes tells us that “the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional” (*Image, Music, Text* 152) and that is nowhere more apparent than in the endemically look-at-me ethos of social media

selfies. In the digital sphere, “the selfie is far more effective as relay than text ever could be, allowing others to see and experience the moment, the thought, and the space of the experience simultaneously, that is, as they too are having their own experiences” (Mottahedeh 82). Dan Speerin @danspeerin captioned his voting selfie, “No pressure, it’s just your civic duty and the fate of a nation. So, no biggie. #canadavotes #votation #elxn42” (Speerin) (Figure 4). Jessica Maria @AFabulousState said on her voting selfie, “Get out and have your say for your #Canada! #elxn42 #votecanada #votation #federalection #cdnpoli #nlpoli #yyt” (Maria) (Figure 5), while Ken Seto @kenseto on his voting selfie said, “It only took me 20 mins to vote for change and to restore dignity to Canada. Please vote! #only20minutes #votation” (Seto) (Figure 6).

No pressure, it's just your civic duty and the fate of a nation. So, no biggie. #CanadaVotes #votation #elxn42



2:19 PM · Oct 19, 2015 · Twitter Web Client

Figure 4: Twitter voting selfie of Dan Speerin @danspeerin.

Get out and have your say for your #Canada! #slm42
#VoteCanada #votation #federalection #cdnpoli
#nlpoli #yyt



4:46 PM - Oct 19, 2015 - Twitter for iPhone

Figure 5: Twitter voting selfie of Jessica Maria @AFabulousState.

It only took me 20 mins to vote for change and to restore
dignity to Canada. Please vote! #only20minutes
#votation



3:22 PM - Oct 11, 2015 - Twitter for iPhone

Figure 6: Twitter voting selfie of Ken Seto @kenseto.

By posting voting selfies, Speerin, Maria, and Seto enact what Barthes calls a “biographeme” (*Camera Lucida* 30) to inscribe themselves into a national event (McNeill 155) and visually record that they cast a ballot. Cialdini argues that individuals feel particularly “obligated to live up to their commitments [when] those commitments were active, public, and voluntary” (“Harnessing” 76). And in virtual environments, David Graxian notes that it is important to present oneself as authentic in conforming to an idealized representation of reality (qtd. in Smith and Watson, “Virtually Me” 75). In this way, Speerin, Maria, and Seto demonstrated that they have met their commitment to vote and proved themselves to be authentic by visually displaying an image, a piece of public evidence, that meets “a set of expectations regarding how such a thing ought to look, sound, and feel” (Smith and Watson, “Virtually Me” 75). They are living up to their acts of *prosopopoeia*. Like Burke, Barthes is also concerned with consciousness, and states that “[t]he type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the *being-there* of the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its *having-been-there*” (*Image, Music, Text* 159). The *having-been-there* image that the voting selfie depicts when shared with social media audiences provides greater salience of authenticity and truthfulness than simple text could ever produce. It is with no surprise then, in maintaining their consistent behaviour in the eyes of their audience, the completion of the I-will-vote image filter users’ commitment to vote would be publicly displayed with a voting selfie.

THE PULL OF IDENTIFICATION WITH VOTING HASHTAGS

In addition to employing voting selfies to publicly display their civic engagement, the I-will-vote image filter users also incorporated hashtags specific to the 2015 Canadian federal election on posts and images such as #votation, #elxn42, #cdnpoli, and #canadavotes. According to Twitter Canada, there were over six million election-related tweets sent over the two-and-a-half month period leading up to the election (Ladurantaye) with #cdnpoli as the most mentioned “made in Canada” hashtag, while #elxn42 was listed as the third most mentioned (Doyle). The official hashtag of the 2015 Canadian federal election, #elxn42, received 3,685,885 Twitter mentions (Ruest and Milligan) throughout the campaign, compared to only 715,000+ mentions of #elxn41 during the 2011 Canadian federal election campaign (“What Role Did Social Media Play in #ELXN42?”). Hashtags ostensibly are methods of generating archives, which users can sift through for relevant postings, links, videos, and so on. But they also build communities, becoming symbols of engagement. Alice R. Daer, Rebecca F. Hoffman, and Seth Goodman argue that metacommunicative hashtags are “communicative genres” in that “they are dynamic, interactive functions of designed software being appropriated by users for tacit, recurring purposes of meaning-making within and across technology” (14). As acts of identification and consubstantiality, hashtags are not as salient as image filters, but they create a “collective sensorial solidarity online” (Mottahedeh 17), which provides “social validation [...] through communicating with others and confirmation that personal beliefs fit with social norms”

(McNeill 155–56). Burke’s remarks on identification reads like a recipe for image filters and hashtags:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. [...] In being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (*Rhetoric* 20–21)

The profile picture testifies to the user’s distinct substance, the image filter to her consubstantiality with other adopters of that filter. The user’s specific tweet (as well as other features) testifies to a distinct substance; the hashtag to consubstantiality.

Hashtags are not examples of prosopopoeia. They work quite differently. Tweets are in a sense apostrophe, since even the most active Twitter user encounters tweets asynchronously (the addressees are not “there” when the tweet is posted). But hashtags allow the addressees to call up tweets in a group. The hashtags are tickets that serve to redeem or de-apostrophize the tweets. So, hashtag users do not speak primarily as *representatives* of a community. They speak as *participants* in a community. They effect identification from the other direction. Ethotically, they work more from the bottom up (just another voice *in* the community) than from the top down (a voice *for* the community). Hashtags and voting selfies are concrete examples where the image filter *acting* on the social media user can be observed, including themselves within the greater #votation community.

As the I-will-vote rhetors encounter others with the same filter and are united through hashtags, they engage with the accepted social

norm of their commonwealth. By entering into the I-will-vote movement, they “receive a psychological benefit from expressing identity with the group or individual” (Jankowski 2). They consider themselves as embedded within the online collective; that is, they are part of a group of voters speaking as a homogenous “we” (Smith and Watson, “Virtually Me” 84) and assimilate within an environment of over 160,000 similar peers. They are both participating in and representing online commonwealths.

MOBILIZING FRIENDS TO VOTE

To this point I have discussed how an individual who employs the I-will-vote image filter increasingly becomes a publicly spirited citizen. However, Evgeny Morozov views this type of digital activism as “slacktivism” (“The Brave New World of Slacktivism”), suggesting that Twitter and Facebook might be doing more harm than good (Marichal 109). For Morozov, slacktivism is described as “feel good but useless Internet activism” (“Iran”). However, research has found that online participation does not damage civic engagement offline (Christensen; Penney 55), but may be doing more good than Morozov expects, by “extending the life of various social movements” (Hackman). As we have seen, putting on a mask has not just social implications (others will vote) but has personal implications as well (increased likelihood of voting, and increased civic behaviour). With the individual becoming increasingly engaged in the voting process through wearing the I-will-vote prosopopoeia on their profile picture, the individual’s sharing of information to their social network can also influence the family and friends who view this commitment. Research shows that “online political mobilization works” (Bond et al. 297) and close friends

exert about four times more influence on mobilizing voters (Bond et al. 298). In Cialdini's phrasing, "social creatures that they are, human beings rely heavily on the people around them for cues on how to think, feel, and act" ("Harnessing" 75), offering a kind of social-science moral to Burke's famous parlour allegory, where without having been there from the beginning, one can listen in on an argument to catch the tenor and join in the conversation (*Philosophy* 94–95).

Those who incorporate the I-will-vote image filter over their profile pictures are repeatedly communicating that linguistic and image-based message with people within their social network when they post, like, comment, or retweet. And although people often think of *prescriptive* norms as being the way to influence others, telling an individual what they should do, research shows that *descriptive* norms, observing what people *actually* do, is much more effective in mobilizing a community (Tannenbaum). Imagine a social-media image filter that said, "Get out and vote on Oct 19," or simply "Vote on Oct 19!" Such a filter might have some positive effects, dependent on pre-existing conditions of identification and ethos, but it could certainly have negative effects as well, and definitely lacks the norms-through-osmosis persuasion of "I will vote on Oct 19."

Descriptive norms describe the way things are and what should be done, but most people respond more favourably to what others actually do (Tannenbaum). The persuasion of observing what others are doing is extremely effective when it comes from peers (Cialdini, "Harnessing" 75). The simple action of posting a profile picture with the statement, "I will vote Oct 19" has the potential to mobilize others to vote, as people respond particularly strongly to descriptive

norms set by the people we care about most, which, presumably, includes the people we are linked to on social media (Tannenbaum). Publicly acknowledging a pledge to vote along with thousands of other people who are also publicly displaying their promise makes the attitude on the issue of voting clearly obvious. It is likely then that if respected friends have made a pledge to vote, others will observe this to be socially normal and do the same. Kylie Cardell and Emma Maguire suggest that “the personal voice, the authentic perspective, is a highly valued commodity, and digital contexts make this even more apparent” (219).

CONCLUSION

The visual prosopopeia of the “I will vote Oct 19” image filter proves that Rick Mercer is right. Voting is contagious. Perhaps millennials are especially susceptible, a powerful political force that can be mobilized, impacting the outcome of elections (Bleviss and Coletto). They are avid social media users and they made a difference in 2015. The 18.3 per cent youth-voter increase, along with the change of government in the 2015 Canadian federal election, shows that (Elections Canada, *Voter Turnout by Age Group*). Over 70,000 of those who voted in 2015 were students who registered and cast their ballot in the advance polls at university and college campuses across the country (Elections Canada, *Voting at Select Campuses, Friendship Centres and Community Centres*). As many factors influence voter engagement in elections, it is not possible to unequivocally confirm that the I-will-vote image filter and the #votation initiative directly contributed to the greater turnout in the 2015 Canadian federal election, but given the circumstantial data and the supporting theories, I suggest that the psychological effect

from the over 160,000 people who voluntarily displayed the I-will-vote image filter prosopopoeia on profile pictures and the incorporation of #votation hashtags in social media posts influenced this growth. Once an individual pledges to vote and assumes this visual identity online, the individual is likely to be a “publicly spirited citizen in a variety of other circumstances” (Cialdini, *Influence* 101). Voluntarily placing the I-will-vote image filter onto a profile picture could have trapped users into “later compliance through consistency pressures” (Cialdini, *Influence* 75). Once the image filter was applied, the user was compelled to fulfill what the utterance stated and vote in the federal election on October 19, 2015, as reflected in the posts, voting selfies, and hashtags, before, on, and after the day of the election. Linguistically campaigning on the importance of voting upholds their visually stated conviction and conforms to social expectations of an individual who is wearing the I-will-vote message as their avatar. In addition to the image filter mobilizing those who pledged to vote, the principle of social proof suggests that family and friends who viewed this I-will-vote image filter were also more likely to vote to conform to the social norm, for like-minded people tend to want to appear similar to their peers. Further, through identification, individuals who wanted to include themselves as part of the collective movement incorporated focused hashtags that represented the election, such as #votation, #cdnpoli, #canadavotes, and #elxn42. All these combined factors had an effect on the individual’s identity once the I-will-vote image filter was incorporated onto their profile picture. Thus, the I-will-vote image filter user became more civically engaged and mobilized others as the democratic activist post appeared alongside the “records of meals eaten, photos taken, and milestones reached” (McNeill and Zuern xii). As we

create and “curate” our lives online, and as the I-will-vote image filter is removed and replaced with another profile picture or subsequent visual political statements, it becomes obvious how unique the social online medium is in sculpting our prosopopoeia (face/person) in real time. In this instance of catching the contagious I-will-vote democratic identity, it contributed to an enhancement of civic engagement within ourselves and within our society, both online and offline on election day 2015.

“The *formation* of role,” Burke tells us, “involves, in its working out, a *transformation* of role” (*Philosophy* 33). Prosopopoeia reflects this kind of transformation broadly in rhetoric, but the I-will-vote image filter prosopopoeia of the 2015 Canadian federal election demonstrates its moral or civic dimensions in a particularly striking way; it involves how “one would symbolically form a role by becoming ‘most thoroughly and efficiently himself’” (Burke, *Philosophy* 33).

NOTES

[1] See also The Samara Centre for Democracy, “Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation” (Anthony et al.).

[2] A total of 161,963 users downloaded the Vote Nation “I will vote Oct 19” image filter. The English language downloads totaled 159,515. The French language downloads totaled 2,448 (Stanley).

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Table 1: Select “I will vote Oct 19” Image Filter Users’ Public Twitter Posts During The 2015 Canadian Federal Election

I-will-vote statement / image / hashtag(s) (e.g. image filter)	I voted statement / image / hashtag(s) (e.g. voting selfie)	Election follow-up statement / image / hashtag(s)
Jordan Roca @jroc23, Toronto, ON; 70 political tweets and 84 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-19, 14:39, image filter and statement, “I Will Vote On October 19th, For Justin Trudeau, as evident by my social avatar. #CanadaVotes #VoteNation”	2015-10-19, 19:37, voting selfie and statement, “The classic unflattering view from the Front Camera. #IVoted #VotingSelfie. Yes, this was my version of the Niqab.”	2015-10-19, 22:47, reply to @MacleansMag and statement, “I did not see a Majority Liberal Government coming. Here we are, Canada, & Prime Minister Trudeau. V/ @MacleansMag”
2015-10-19, 15:23, statement, “While I am voting for Justin Trudeau, I’m pretty sure my actual 1 Physical Vote is not worth as much as my Tweets.”	2015-10-19, 19:40, statement, “Apparently, I took the #VotingSelfie way too literally—As I took it when casting my ballot, and not posing in front of an Election Sign.”	2015-11-04, 10:30, statement, “Now that my boy, Justin Trudeau is the Prime Minister-Designate of Canada, I may have to relax on informally referring to him as ‘My Boy.’”
Adam Growe @AdamGrowe, Toronto, ON; 38 political tweets and 10 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-18, 19:02, image filter and statement, “Not that any election should be different, but this one’s a mon! You gotta VOTE! #VoteNation #clxn42 #CanadaVotes”	2015-10-19, 16:31, image filter and statement, “I’m heading to the polls and hope for long lineup! #VoteNation #Elxn42 #CanadaVotes.”	2015-10-20, 7:40, modified image filter, “I will talk about the vote Oct. 20.” Statement, “#DayAfterVoteNation.”
Dan Speerin @danspeerin, Toronto, ON; 115 political tweets and 16 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-19, 13:29, image filter and statement, “Have you voted yet? #CanadaVotes #clxn42 #VoteNation”	2015-10-19, 14:19, voting selfie and statement, “No pressure, it’s just your civic duty and the fate of a nation. So, no biggie. #CanadaVotes #votation #clxn42”	2015-10-19, 22:12, statement, “Justin Trudeau is a GenXer but what’s more Millennial than having to move back into the place you grew up? #clxn42 #CanadaVotes”
Jessica Maria @AFabulousState, St. John’s, NF; 7 political tweets and 4 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-18, 12:30, image filter and statement, “Tomorrow I’m voting for #NoMoreStoiletSisters #WomensRights & SO MANY OTHER THINGS! Why are you voting? #canadavotes”	2015-10-19, 15:26, statement, “Hi ho! Hi ho! It’s off to vote I go! #clxn42 #votation #Cdnpoli #CanadaVotes”	2015-10-20, 22:34, statement, “Nice hair, tho!”
	2015-10-19, 16:46, voting selfie and statement, “Get out and have your say for your #Canada! #clxn42 #votecanada #votation #federalelection #cdnpoli #nlpoli #yyt”	2015-10-20, 00:12, statement, “May Sophie Grégoire be our Michelle Obama.”
Ken Seto @kenseto, Toronto, ON; 3 political tweets and 1 non-political tweet October 18-20, 2015		
2015-09-30, 14:30, image filter and statement, “I will vote on October 19th. Go to http://votation.ca to make your ‘I Will Vote’ profile pic. #VoteNation #clxn42”	2015-10-11, 15:22, voting selfie and statement, “It only took me 20 mins to vote for change and to restore dignity to Canada. Please vote! #only20minutes #votation”	2015-10-20, 6:35, Canada flag image and statement, “Thank you Canada! You did it! I’m very proud to be a Canadian this morning. #clxn42 #RealChange”
Dulce Rosales @dulceisnormal, Vancouver, BC; 16 political tweets and 8 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-09-29, 9:15, image filter and statement, “We’ve got voices, let’s take the time and use them. elections8.ca #VoteNation #cdnpoli”	2015-10-10, 16:31, voting selfie with “Use Your Voice” text on image. Statement, “Why wait til the 19th? I just voted! Done and done.”	2015-10-19, 22:04, statement, “I am so happy of all the people who turned out and voted today. YOU ARE ALL AMAZING. #clxn42 #votation.”
Johanna Hart @york_cottage, Toronto, ON; 11 political tweets and 3 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-09-28, 17:58, image filter and statement, “If I can do it while attending University in Virginia, you have no excuse. #VoteNation”	2015-10-19, statement, “I did it all the way from Virginia. Let your voice be heard. Take an hour out of your day and vote. #CANPoli #Elxn42 #VoteNation”	2015-10-19, 22:37, statement, “Way to go Canada. You just elected a camp counselor as our new leader. #Seriously #YouHadOneJob #cdnpoli #clxn42”
		2015-10-19, 23:41, statement, “So will Justin get his old room back at 24 Sussex Drive? #canpoli #Elxn42”
Ann Tran Fazzalari @anntranfazz, Toronto, ON; 2 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-18, 9:10, image filter and statement, “We live in a great nation! Vote on Oct 19th and go to votation.ca to make your own profile pic #VoteNation”	No	2015-10-20, 7:19, image of autumn leaves changing colour. Statement, “A new day...”
Brittany Burek @bechburek, Toronto, ON; 0 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-07, 12:56, image filter and statement, “thumbs up, let’s do this 19-25. #votation #clxn42 #cdnpoli”	No	No
Caleb Harder @cjhaharder, Vancouver, BC; 44 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-18, image filter and statement, “Will you be voting on October 19th? I know I will! First time voter and I’m proud to exercise my democratic right!”	2015-10-19, 20:49, voting selfie and statement, “I am so happy to have voted for the first time! #clxn42 #VoteNation”	2015-10-20, image of Trudeau in crowds. Statement, “Congratulations @JustinTrudeau on becoming the next Prime Minister of Canada! #RealChange.”

Table with 3 columns: I-will-vote statement / image / hashtag (e.g. image filter), I voted statement / image / hashtag (e.g. voting selfie), Election follow-up statement / image / hashtag (e). Contains numerous rows with personal social media posts from various users.

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I-will-vote statement / image / hashtag(s) (e.g. image filter)	I voted statement / image / hashtag(s) (e.g. voting selfie)	Election follow-up statement / image / hashtag(s)
Ben Keast @coach_keast, Vancouver, BC; 1 political tweet and 1 non-political tweet October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-07, 15:24, image filter and statement, "October 19, 2015 #VoteNation #OhCanada"	2015-10-19, 11:30, statement, "Exercise your right #VoteNation #OhCanada"	No
Glenda Ann Robertson @gar5061, Montréal, QC; 5 political tweets and 5 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-09-29, 00:47, image filter and statement, "Replying to @rickmercer @rickmercer"	2015-10-19, 17:19, image of voting sign. Statement, "I did it! Did you? #RealChange #elxn22 #GetOHYrArseAndVote"	2015-10-19, 22:28, image of Trudeau's face on Jose Bautista bat flip. Statement, "@markrichth @JustinTrudeau @allahmahadevle @allahawco Have you seen the Trudeau bat flip? #majority"
Sarah C M @SarahCoutureMc, Toronto, ON; 0 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-09-29, 17:34, image filter and statement, "I will Vote Oct. 19th. Let's vote together! Make the pledge and announce it via: votation.ca #VoteNation"	No	No
Nikkivee @nikkivee2, The Prairies, Canada; 4 political tweets and 4 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-09-28, 22:08, "Replying to @rickmercer @rickmercer Create an 'I Will Vote' profile pic @votation.ca Voting is contagious. #cdnpoli #elxn22"	2015-10-19, 21:18, Link to Instagram image of an "I Vote!" sign with a red Canadian Maple Leaf instagram.com/p/9CmlX4k_uS/ Statement, "mehmusie!"	2015-10-19, 22:28, Image of Trudeau and money with the words, "Change, because that's all you'll have when I'm done..." Statement, "#elxn2015 Welc..."
BrandonAmyot @BrandonAmyot, geographic location not specified; 4 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-13, 20:48, image filter and statement, "In 11, 1.8M ppl. 18-24 didnt vote. Take the pledge, vote Oct 19. #e42 #Elexn22 #elxn2015 #elxn22 #GGTV #VoteNation"	2015-10-19, 19:53, statement, "7 out of 7 ridings reported in Newfoundland-Labrador, Liberals and NDP exclusively. And so it begins. #elxn22 #e42"	2015-10-20, 1:19, statement, "@jinparker resigned as Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. Gilles Duceppe (Leader, Bloc Québécois) has lost his seat to the NDP. #e42"
Rahul Mehta @OpportunitCity, Mississauga, ON; 52 political tweets and 7 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-13, 23:17, image filter and statement, "Let's do this! For me, you, Canada AND @rickmercer! ROCK THE VOTE OCT 19th, or sooner! votation.ca #elxn22 #votemob!"	2015-10-13, 13:41, voting selfie and statement, "Because, democracy! On Oct 19th, make it count! #votingpride #govote #votation #elxn22 www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/10/12/govote-advance-polls_n_8279852.html"	2015-10-19, 10:37, statement, "BOOM. LIBERAL MAJORITY. #elxn22"
I-will-vote statement / image / hashtag(s) (e.g. image filter)	I voted statement / image / hashtag(s) (e.g. voting selfie)	Election follow-up statement / image / hashtag(s)
Robert White @rbrtwhite, Vancouver, BC; 5 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2016-10-16, 22:24, statement, "Getting my hair did in the beardbership, when #elxn22 comes up and almost all say it's the first time they're voting. YES! #VoteNation"	2015-10-19, 19:50, voting selfie and statement, "Douglas Park Community Centre in @VanGran, in and out in 6mins! Get your vote on! #voted #votation #elxn22"	2015-10-20, 00:38 statement, "Welcome back, Canada. We missed you. #elxn22"
Priscilla Smith @PriscillaSmith7, geographic location not specified; 0 political tweets and 0 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-17, 00:08, image filter and statement, "Votation! #VoteNation @RickMercerreport @rickmercer"	No	No
Sarah Olmstead @sarahjolmstead, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, ON; 10 political tweets and 2 non-political tweets October 18-20, 2015		
2015-10-18, 16:34, image filter and statement, "Go to VoteNation.ca to generate an 'I Will Vote' pic & help increase voter turnout on Oct 19th #VoteNation"	No	2015-10-19, 22:24, statement, "A Liberal Majority Government!! What an incredible shift, I'm so excited to see what comes next, Canada #elxn22 #cdnpoli"
		2015-10-20, 1:15, link to Chateleine article: "Ladies in the House (81) #elxn22 #voot. Statement, "Fantastic, a new record number of women elected tonight! #elxn22"

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Media Attributions

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- Figure 4 – Dan Speerin @danspeerin
- Figure 5 – Jessica Maria @AFabulousState
- Figure 6 – Ken Seto @kenseto
- Kampher Table – 1
- Kampher Table – 2
- Kampher Table – 3
- Kampher Table – 4
- Kampher Table – 5

- Kampher Table – 6