

Empowering Feminism in Digital Manifestos

How digital feminist manifestos use empowerment through language.

M.M. Fouchier

SNR: 2012306

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Communication and Information Sciences
Business Communication and Digital Media
Faculty of Humanities and Digital Sciences
Tilburg University, Tilburg

Master Thesis Supervisor:	Dr S.R. Ashby	Tilburg University
Co-reader:	Dr. J. de Wit	Tilburg University

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Abstract

The internet has served as a platform for feminists to spread their ideas and ideals. One method employed by feminists to convey their messages is the use of manifestos. Although digital feminist manifestos aim to empower their readers as a primary objective, there is a significant research gap concerning the role of language in attaining such empowerment. To address this gap, this thesis offers insights into how empowerment through language is communicated in digital feminist manifestos. This thesis introduces the Manifesto Empowerment Language Framework, which is a framework that identifies and explores six fundamental elements and their corresponding linguistic features crucial to the process of empowerment in digital feminist manifestos. To gather data, a deductive content analysis method was employed, analyzing a corpus of 24 digital feminist manifestos. The qualitative analysis yielded evidence supporting the existence of the previously identified elements and their associated linguistic features. Using a deductive content analysis method, a corpus of 24 digital feminist manifestos was analyzed. Results provided evidence that substantiates the presence of the six identified elements and their corresponding linguistic features. Future research should consider incorporating participants, for example with the use of focus groups, to gather direct insights from readers, aiming to understand how the elements in the Manifesto Empowerment Language Framework contribute to the feeling of empowerment.

Keywords: digital feminism, manifestos, empowering language, deductive content analysis

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Introduction

“I am a feminist. And when I looked up the word in the dictionary that day, this is what it said: Feminist, a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes.” (Adichie, 2017). Adichie’s (2017) TedTalkX manifesto, “We should all be feminists,” serves as an embodiment of feminism in the digital age. By leveraging the digital platform of TedTalkX, Adichie’s (2017) feminist message achieves widespread accessibility and amplification. This is an example of how digitalization has played a crucial role in advancing feminist ideals (Baer, 2016), such as gender equality (Council of Europe, n.d.) and fostering their prominence within the public sphere (Moghadam & Sadiqi, 2006).

The start of the fourth wave of feminism in the early 2010s, known as *digital feminism*, represents a significant shift in promoting feminist ideals through technology (Cochrane, 2013). Unlike the earlier waves of feminism, which lacked digital platforms to amplify their message, digital feminism harnesses the power of the internet to empower women and facilitate the creation of influential and responsive movements (Cochrane, 2013). Through digital discussions, debates, and commentaries, there appears to be an active promotion of feminist ideals, leveraging the connectivity and accessibility provided by online platforms (Moghadam & Sadiqi, 2006; Baer, 2016; Cochrane, 2013). Notably, examples can be found on social media platforms like Twitter, where feminist solidarity and activism find expression, further highlighting the empowering potential of digital feminism (Zimmerman, 2017).

To express political and social goals, authors can use manifestos to spread powerful messages (Lyon, 1999). Manifestos can be defined as written statements issued by an individual or group to declare their beliefs, principles, and objectives. (Merriam-Webster, 2023; Hanna, 2009). They can be seen as unique forms of communication, which allow for the promotion of radical new ideas and urgent calls for action, without being restrained by the

norms of polite speech (Hanna & Ashby, 2022). Authors can use manifestos to generate awareness and push new ideas into the public sphere (Hanna & Ashby, 2022), which can make them powerful tools to bring change.

In this digital era, feminist manifestos have increasingly adopted digital formats, providing authors with a platform for representation within digital spaces, including social media platforms and blogs (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017). Through digital feminist manifestos, authors not only find avenues for representation but also seize the opportunity to articulate feminist ideals, express their struggles, and articulate their goals to a wide-ranging audience (Colman, 2010). This genre of manifestos intends to empower readers to act, while digital manifestos offer the added benefit of higher visibility and exposure (Linabary et al., 2020). Despite indications of the potential significance of digital feminist manifestos, there appears to be limited research available regarding their content and impact (Houghton & O'Donoghue, 2022). Therefore, conducting further research on digital feminist manifestos presents an opportunity to potentially enhance the understanding of their nature and significance.

Coming together, digital feminist manifestos can enable authors to express their beliefs and use those beliefs to drive readers to explore various positions, which can result in a sense of empowerment (Leong et al., 2018). Empowerment is a concept that can change depending on the context and discipline in which it is used (Gore, 1992). In the context of digital feminist manifestos, empowerment through language is defined as how readers of digital feminist manifestos can understand what the manifesto is about and feel empowered to act. The authors of manifestos want to express their political and social goals (Lyon, 1999), and get individuals to believe in and feel empowered to act upon these goals (Leong et al., 2018).

The ease of sharing content through social media platforms has the potential to

contribute to a sense of empowerment among individuals (Yuce et al., 2014). As digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have gained popularity, they have become important in enabling the sharing of messages to the public with minimal effort and costs (Yuce et al., 2014). The viral nature of social media content amplifies its reach, allowing messages to rapidly spread and potentially reach tens of thousands of people in a single moment (Zimmerman, 2017). This widespread reach creates opportunities for feminist ideals to gain more awareness and support, as more individuals are exposed to and engaged with the shared content.

By actively participating in sharing digital feminist manifestos, individuals can assert their agency and influence over the distribution of ideas, which can foster a sense of empowerment (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The enhanced visibility and accessibility of shared content further contribute to individuals feeling validated and recognized for their contributions, reinforcing their sense of empowerment (Linabary et al., 2020). Moreover, the act of sharing content easily facilitates connections with like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community and collective empowerment (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). These digital connections allow readers to engage in discussions and exchange ideas (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), and can potentially be empowering to readers through their interaction with digital feminist manifestos.

Another way digital feminist manifestos have been recognized for their ability to convey empowerment is through the language employed within them (Colman, 2010). Digital feminist manifestos are written with the intention to raise awareness, impart meaning, and influence readers to feel or act in specific ways (Christens, 2012). Through language, digital feminist manifestos illustrate strategies for achieving these objectives (Colman, 2010). However, despite the consensus among researchers (Colman, 2010; Christens, 2012; Houghton & O'Donoghue, 2022) on the significance of language in manifestos, there appears

to be limited research available that has specifically explored which linguistic features are responsible for their ability to affect and empower readers.

To contribute to the study of empowerment through language and digital feminist manifestos, a qualitative analysis will be conducted. The primary purpose of this study is to see in which ways empowerment is communicated through language in digital feminist manifestos. In addition, the results of this study have the potential to make a significant contribution to the under-researched field of digital feminist manifestos. Thus, the research question that guides this analysis is: *“How is empowerment communicated through language in digital feminist manifestos?”*

Theoretical Framework

Drawing upon multiple academic sources and concepts, this theoretical framework outlines the structure that emphasizes three key themes: feminism, manifestos, and empowerment through language. With a critical perspective, this framework examines the historical and social contexts of feminism, manifestos, and empowerment through language. The digitalization of feminism and manifestos will be a particular area of focus.

Feminism

According to Butler (1990), feminism challenges traditional gender norms, explores how gender is constructed and performed, and aims to dismantle oppressive systems that allow for gender inequality. Butler’s (1990) perspective on feminism incorporates the concept of intersectionality, which recognizes that systems of oppression, such as gender inequality, cannot be understood in isolation but must be analyzed concerning other social categories like race, class, and sexuality. Butler (1990) argues that feminist movements must strive to be inclusive and attentive to the diverse experiences of all individuals, particularly those who are most marginalized within society. Being marginalized means that individuals or groups are not given the same privileges and opportunities as others (Matich et al., 2018). Combining

feminism and intersectionality, Butler (1990) highlights the importance of centering the voices and perspectives of marginalized individuals or groups to promote inclusivity and empowerment.

Waves of feminism

Feminist movements are often described using the metaphor of waves, which helps to organize and understand the historical and social contexts of different feminist movements and their achievements over time (Cochrane, 2013). There are a total of four waves to be classified, starting from the late 19th century up until the early 2010s. The first wave of feminism, which originated in the late 19th century and extended into the early 20th century, primarily focused on attaining legal and political equality for women, with a key objective being the right to vote (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2016). In contrast, the second wave of feminism aimed to challenge the societal power dynamics that predominantly favored men, challenging cultural and societal norms related to gender and sexuality, such as reproductive health and workplace discrimination (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2016; Rampton, 2015). While the second wave saw some women of color becoming part of the feminist movement, the subsequent third wave focused specifically on their rights, emerging in the 1990s with an emphasis on diversity and intersectionality (Gillis & Munford, 2004; Rampton, 2015). Intersectionality acknowledged the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, and homophobia. The fourth wave of feminism, which emerged in the early 2010s due to digitalization, utilizes digital technology and social media platforms to amplify issues such as online harassment and body positivity (Munro, 2013; Cochrane, 2013; Evans & Chamberlain, 2014). The fourth wave of feminism is also referred to as digital feminism.

Digital feminism

According to Puente (2011), the internet offers an ideal platform for advancing digital feminism, as it fosters open conversations free from hierarchical limitations, allowing

individuals to engage with one another without restrictions on time, location, or identity (Friedman, 2003). This inclusivity facilitates equality and allows for diverse feminist perspectives to connect and participate in online activism, transcending geographical barriers and increasing engagement (Matich et al., 2018). Puente (2011) mentions that the internet can serve as a platform for visibility and collaboration, which can provide digital feminists with the means to plan actions, share resources, and achieve collective empowerment (Jouët, 2018). Additionally, Jouët (2018) argues that by using digital networks and open communication channels, digital feminist activists gain the ability to expand their reach and actively participate in a collective movement dedicated to empowering individuals.

Manifesto

Manifestos, as defined by Robertson (2004), are official statements that outline intended policies and cover various expressions of political intent or support during times of revolution. The broad use of manifestos can indicate that a diverse range of people can write a manifesto to publicly express their position on an issue (Jackson & Heath, 2023). Jackson and Heath (2023) motivate this statement by illustrating manifestos can be seen as an accessible medium, therefore allowing widespread participation and the ability for individuals to voice their perspectives and concerns.

However, as Fahs (2019) pointed out, the genre of manifestos has received limited scholarly attention and remains understudied. This gap in research becomes even more significant because manifestos can be authored by individuals from diverse backgrounds and perspectives (Fahs, 2019; Jackson & Heath, 2023). Building on this observation, Jackson and Heath (2023) further emphasized the importance of researching manifestos as a means of gaining new insights and understanding about the medium.

Digital manifestos

As illustrated by Hanna (2019) in his essay, manifestos appear to occupy a significant position within the domain of online formats. Digital manifestos use technology and the internet to potentially access a broader audience, which Hanna (2019) characterizes as having a “limitless public audience” (p. 2). Digital manifestos facilitate quicker responsiveness for both authors and readers when compared to traditional manifestos (Hanna, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020). According to Hanna (2019), authors of manifestos strive to create engagement by utilizing methods such as likes, retweets, promptly responding, and obtaining immediate feedback and validation from readers. By providing a platform for expressing and amplifying messages, the Internet can be seen as instrumental in initiating transformative change through the manifesto format (Hanna, 2019).

However, Hanna (2019) also highlights the potential drawbacks associated with the digitalization of manifestos. Hanna (2019) states that the resurgence of manifestos possesses a dual nature, often characterized by its emotional intensity, a tendency towards violence, and resistance to factual information. While manifestos hold significant potential for facilitating constructive change, they also serve as a reflection of the risks that arise from extremism and a fragmented society (Hanna, 2019; Linabary et al., 2020).

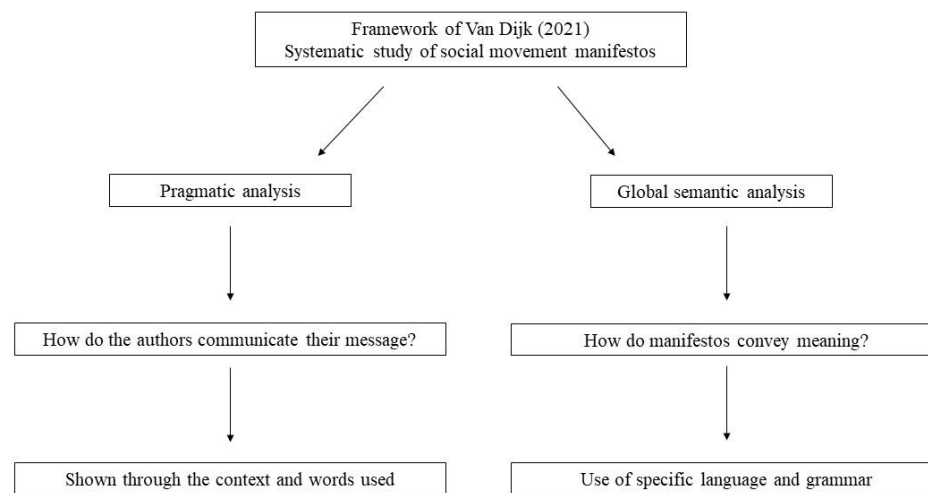
Manifesto analysis

The study and analyses of manifestos have received limited scholarly attention. The existing research of Van Dijk (2021) focuses on the analyses of social movement manifestos. Van Dijk (2021) highlights the importance of texts for activists to communicate concerns and express opinions. Van Dijk (2021) mentions that manifestos are frequently the first public discourse of movements. Hence, conducting a systematic study of manifestos is valuable according to Van Dijk (2021), given the manifesto’s prominent role within domains of protest, resistance, and solidarity.

To perform a systematic study of social movement manifestos, Van Dijk (2021) created a theoretical framework with two dimensions (see Figure 1). While there may be instances where these two dimensions overlap, it is also possible to view them as distinct and separate dimensions.

Figure 1

Overview of the systematic study of social movement manifestos framework by Van Dijk (2021)



Pragmatic Analysis. The first dimension features the linguistic-pragmatic analysis of digital feminist manifestos. This analysis gives more insight into how the authors communicate their message, which is shown through the context and the words authors use in the manifestos. Van Dijk (2021) analyzed the context and the words used in each manifesto to define the communicative situation the authors of the manifestos were in. Van Dijk (2021) calls this communicative situation of authors the *context model* (Van Dijk, 2006). The goal of context models is not only to help structure discourse in a way that is fitting for the situation but also to govern how meaning is conveyed (Van Dijk, 2021). Van Dijk (2021) decided on five categories that helped with establishing the context models. In the context model of Van Dijk's (2021) pragmatic analysis, he looked at the time, place, participants (and their

identities, roles, and relations), the communicative act, and the knowledge of the participants (Van Dijk, 2021).

Semantic Analysis. The second dimension of the framework made by Van Dijk (2021) is a global semantic analysis of schematic categories. These categories are reflected in the way manifestos are written, using specific linguistic features and grammar, as well as in their structure which often emphasizes a clear division between *us* and *them* (Van Dijk, 2021). Van Dijk (2021) analyzed the use of specific linguistic features and grammar in his semantic analysis. The use of specific linguistic features and grammar can give more insight into how people can be influenced or empowered when reading manifestos (Van Dijk, 2021).

In his study, Van Dijk (2021) examined the linguistic aspects and grammar found in the manifestos of social movements. From this analysis, Van Dijk (2021) identified seven categories that are commonly present in these manifestos. These categories include identity, history, activities, participants (both allies and enemies), goals, norms and values, and resources (Van Dijk, 2021). However, it is important to acknowledge that Van Dijk's (2021) categories, and therefore his semantic analysis, are established with a focus on social movements manifestos. This raises the question of whether these categories could potentially be applied to digital feminist manifestos as well. Undertaking further research to explore the applicability of Van Dijk's (2021) semantic analysis would contribute to a deeper understanding of the analysis of digital feminist manifestos.

Empowerment in manifestos

Manifestos embody the need for action and can communicate this need by motivating the reader to act (Caws, 2001; Poggenpohl & Ahn, 2002). One way for authors of manifestos to accomplish this is by adding a *call-to-action* (Hanna & Ashby, 2022). The call-to-action serves as a direct appeal to the audience, empowering them to participate in the cause or movement advocated by the manifesto (Poggenpohl & Ahn, 2002). A call-to-action can be

seen as a manifesto characteristic and can frequently be found at the end of manifestos (Hanna & Ashby, 2022).

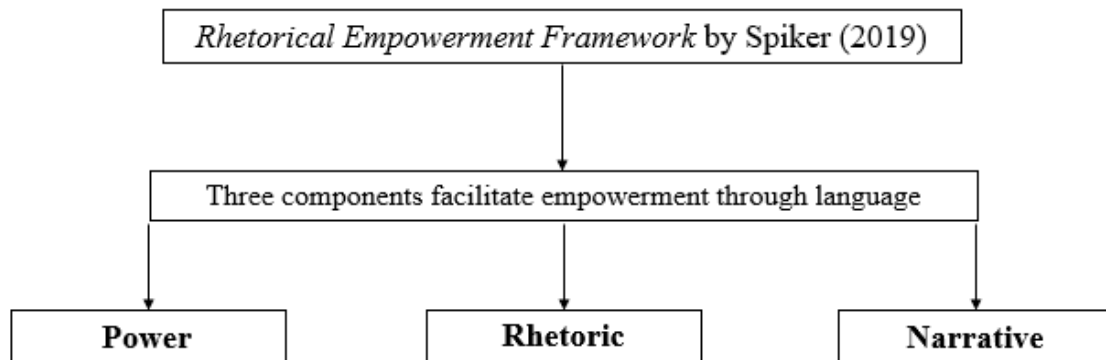
The goal of manifestos can be defined to empower people to take responsibility and to be committed to and actively take part to complete the goal of the manifestos (Fritsch et al., 2018). As Colman (2010, p. 379) says in her work, “The manifesto holds its immanent (and iconic) power as a power to affect”. According to Colman (2010), readers should be wanting to fight for the vision or ideals communicated in the manifesto after reading it. Similarly, Poggenpohl and Ahn (2002, p.46) state that manifestos should “publicly announce a desired change in human behavior”. Therefore, manifestos must use empowering language to motivate the reader to act (Fritsch et al., 2018; Colman, 2010; Poggenpohl & Ahn, 2002).

Empowerment through language

The concept of empowerment through language has been relatively understudied, particularly within the domain of feminist studies. However, there has been some research on empowerment through language within the domain of political studies. Existing research in this area, such as the work of Spiker (2019), has focused on analyzing political speeches delivered by women as a means of exploring empowering language. In her study, Spiker (2019) developed the Rhetorical Empowerment Framework (see Figure 2) to examine the speeches of female politicians. These analyzed speeches aimed to empower both women and the broader audience. While some speeches specifically targeted the empowerment of women, the majority aimed to instill a sense of empowerment in the listeners at large.

Figure 2

Overview of the rhetorical empowerment framework by Spiker (2019)



In her Rhetorical Empowerment Framework, Spiker (2019) argues that people can be empowered through language because of three components. These components are *power*, *rhetoric*, and *narrative*. Spiker (2019) states that power creates a bond of solidarity among women when women unite their power, resources, and efforts to positively affect the lives of others (Kabeer, 2010). Next to that, Spiker (2019) defines rhetoric as the symbolic action by human beings to share ideas, enabling them to work together to make decisions about matters of common concern and to construct social reality (Palczewski et al., 2012). Spiker (2019) also states that narratives play a significant role in public communications since narratives can form and maintain public memory and teach cultural values (Palczewski et al., 2012).

Empowerment Framework

Despite the existence of studies exploring key concepts related to manifestos (Van Dijk, 2021) or empowerment through language (Spiker, 2019), there remains a gap in the research when it comes to understanding how empowerment is specifically communicated through language in digital feminist manifestos. While individual studies have focused on either the elements of manifestos or the language of empowerment, there is a gap in research that examines the intersection of both key concepts. Further investigation can be helpful to

enhance the understanding of how empowering language functions within manifestos and the impact empowering language has on readers.

To investigate the language of empowerment in digital feminist manifestos, a new framework will be created. The semantic analysis of social movement manifestos framework of Van Dijk (2021) and the rhetorical empowerment framework of Spiker (2019) will be used for the creation of the new framework. Both frameworks illustrate one part of the analysis: whereas Spiker (2019) focuses on empowerment through language, Van Dijk (2021) focuses on the structure and analysis of manifestos. The two frameworks were compared to each other to see which concepts and ideas would overlap. The definitions of the key concepts given by Spiker (2019) had similarities with the key concepts given by Van Dijk (2021). Both studies are used to substantiate all key concepts in the new framework. The process of combining these key concepts is illustrated in Table 1 and will be explained in more detail afterwards.

Table 1

Overview of the combinations of concepts from Spiker (2019) and Van Dijk (2021)

Key concepts defined by Spiker (2019)	How is the key concept communicated? Based on Spiker (2019)	Which feature of social movement manifestos communicates this? Based on Van Dijk (2021)	Final combination
Power	Create a sense of unity	Identity	Establish identity – who are we?
	Exert influence	Resources	Explain resources – what defines our (lack of) power?
Rhetoric	Construct reality	Time – history, present	Construct reality – what is our history and present?
	Sharing ideas	Actions	Describe actions – what do we do?
Narrative	Communicate values	Aims	Communicate aims – what is good/bad for us?
	State opinion of the public	Actors	Identify actors – who are our allies and enemies?

Power

The first key concept that is defined is *power*. Power is a key concept that has been established in the original framework by Spiker (2019) and can be substantiated by the framework of Van Dijk (2021). Power can be communicated in two ways: by establishing an identity and by explaining the resources of groups.

Authors can establish the identity of the collective by writing in a way that makes readers feel like they are part of a group. This is done by highlighting a common purpose and shared experiences (Kabeer, 2010). Both the identity of the author and the identity of the intended target audience can be mentioned (Van Dijk, 2021). An example can be found in the research of Van Dijk (2021, p.19) with the sentence: “We, Indigenous women.” This sentence establishes both the identity of the author and the intended target audience.

Authors can also define what gives a group power, or why a certain group has no power at all. This refers to the resources needed to resist and fight back (Van Dijk, 2021). When a group has no power, people can come together and pool their resources to make a change (Allen, 1999). An example can be found in the research of Van Dijk (2021, p.11) with the sentence: “whose mission was to build local power and to intervene when violence was inflicted on Black communities.” The missions “build local power” and “to intervene” are mentioned, which refer to the resources used to give back power to a group.

Rhetoric

The second key concept is defined as *rhetoric*. Rhetoric is a key concept that has also been established in the original framework by Spiker (2019) and can be substantiated by the framework of Van Dijk (2021). Rhetoric can be communicated in two ways: by constructing reality and by describing the actions of groups.

Authors can construct reality by telling the readers more about the history and the present in which they are located. Constructing reality helps to create a perception of the

world, which helps readers understand the texts more (Foss, 1996). This can be done by mentioning time in manifestos, as shown in this example: “into the historical process of transformation of our peoples” (Van Dijk, 2021, p.22). By referring to the historical process, the authors show that the struggle of Indigenous women has been going on for many years. This knowledge helps the reader to construct reality and understand why action is necessary.

Authors can also describe the actions done by groups. When authors share actions, people can become motivated to contribute and participate (Palczewski et al., 2012). When communicating the actions that groups have done, a discursive form of resistance can be shown, which is one of the goals for manifestos in general (Van Dijk, 2021). For example, the sentence “Raise our voices” (Van Dijk, 2021, p.19) emphasizes the action of speaking up for what the authors believe in, thus showing importance to the readers.

Narrative

The third key concept that is defined is *narrative*. Narrative is a key concept that has also been established in the original framework by Spiker (2019) and can be substantiated by the framework of Van Dijk (2021). Narrative can be explained in two ways: by communicating aims and by identifying actors.

Authors can communicate the aims of the manifesto to show what needs to change. Authors can write down what their aims are by for example identifying the missions or goals of a group (Van Dijk, 2021) to ensure that readers are willing to fight for that change (Palczewski et al., 2012). An example can be found in the sentence: “for the purpose of seeking alternatives to eliminate injustice, discrimination, machismo and violence against women” (Van Dijk, 2021, p.20). In this sentence, the aim of the authors is communicated, thus showing readers what needs to be done according to them.

Authors can also identify the actors in a manifesto, which explains who the allies and enemies are. When readers know who the allies and the enemies are, they are more likely to

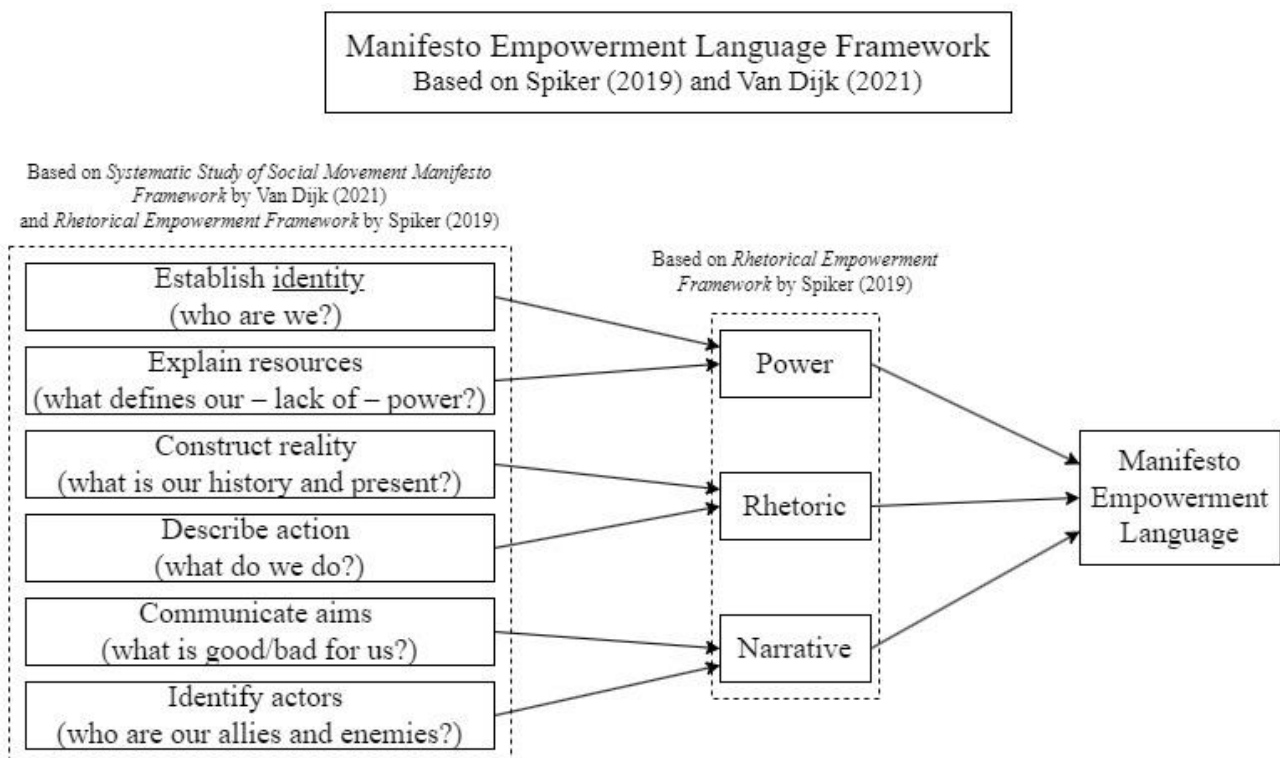
be influenced by the authors to fight for the same cause (Palczewski et al., 2012). In the sentence: “even though a few oligarchs and imperialists seek to plague it with death in their quest for their god called greed” (Van Dijk, 2021, p.20) the enemies are established and the reader gains insight into the reasons behind the enemies’ portrayal in such a manner. This characterization can make the reader feel like they want to fight the enemies to stop them from harming the community.

Manifesto Empowerment Language Framework

Combining the concepts from the frameworks of Spiker (2019) and Van Dijk (2021) resulted in a new framework, which will be referred to as the *Manifesto Language Empowerment Framework*. This framework can be found in Figure 3. This framework will be the guidance for the analysis of digital feminist manifestos, and to answer the research question: “*How is empowerment communicated through language in digital feminist manifestos?*”

Figure 3

Overview of the Manifesto Empowerment Language Framework



Method

The goal of this thesis is to find out how empowerment is communicated through language in digital feminist manifestos. A qualitative research design was chosen, and a framework based on a combination of Spiker (2019) and Van Dijk (2021) was used to conduct a directed content analysis. First, the process of the literature selection is discussed. Lastly, an outline of the process for analyzing the data is presented.

Selection of Literature

To perform the analysis, digital feminist manifestos were selected and collected in a database. Traditionally, feminism operated under the binary of male versus female, neglecting to account for the subcategories of race and ethnicity (DeFelice & Diller, 2019). According to Crenshaw (1989), an analysis of the oppression of for example black women requires a consideration of the intersecting factors of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Leaving out any of these factors would make it impossible to fully understand the need for feminism (DeFelice & Diller, 2019). Therefore, the selected digital feminist manifestos must be diverse, tackle different issues, and do not take only the perspective of “white feminists” (DeFelice & Diller, 2019). Fahs (2020) assembled seventy-seven feminist manifestos (both printed and digital) and divided those manifestos into eight themes. These eight themes (see Table 2) are the guidelines for this thesis to make the collection of digital feminist manifestos as diverse and inclusive as possible.

Table 2
Overview of the themes with descriptions based on Fahs (2020)

Themes	Description of possible topics
Queer/trans	Gay liberation; queer culture; trans rights.
Anticapitalist/anarchist	Freedom from constraints of a society based on capitalism and institutional oppression.
Angry/violent	Destroying the status quo and rebuilding something new; feminist rage.
Indigenous/women of color	Oppression and inequality of women of color and indigenous women; solidarity between women of color
Sex/body	The female body and its political context; the use of body and sexuality to broaden and redefine feminist politics.
Hacker/cyborg	The intertwining of technology and feminism; cyberfeminism.
Trashy/punk	Revolt and revulsion; an ode to trashiness, rudeness, and outrageousness
Witchy/bitchy	Embracing two tropes of being a feminist – being seen as a witch and/or as a bitch

For each theme, three manifestos were selected, which lead to a total of 24

manifestos. The selection process of the manifestos consisted of reading books and looking up manifestos on the internet. Fahs (2020) did not analyze any manifesto in her book: she only assembled them and divided them into a category. Most of the manifestos Fahs (2020) featured were not originally posted on a digital platform. This is why only some manifestos were relevant to this study. Eventually, three manifestos used in this study were referred to by Fahs (2020) but were examined from their original source. The Digital Manifesto Archive (2023) assembled some manifestos on their website; however, the website was only accessible a few times during the research due to website errors. In the end, six manifestos used in this study that were linked on the website of the Digital Manifesto Archive (2023) were examined from the original source. Lastly, manifestos were looked up online via search engines. Key terms that were entered into the search engines were for example “*manifesto on feminism*”, “*feminist manifesto*”, or “*digital feminist manifestos*”. In total, 15 manifestos used in this study were found with the use of search engines. The inclusion criteria for the manifestos were:

1. The manifesto must originally be published on a digital platform.
2. The manifesto must be written or translated into English.
3. The manifesto must tackle one of the eight themes above to create as much diversity and inclusivity as possible.

Directed Content Analysis

To analyze the text of the digital feminist manifestos, a directed content analysis was conducted. For the directed content analysis, the structure as explained by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) was followed. To define the codes used in the directed content analysis, the newly created Manifesto Empowerment Language Framework (see Theoretical Framework, Figure 3) was used. This resulted in two codes per key concept. Table 3 shows an overview of the created codes and considered linguistic categories.

Table 3

Overview of the key concepts, created codes and linguistic categories

Key concept	Codes created	Linguistic category	Example phrase (from Van Dijk, 2021)
Power	Establish identity (EI)	First person pronouns; named entities referring to people or organizations	“We, <u>Indigenous women</u> ”
	Explain resources (ER)	Noun phrase combined with infinitive phrase	“Whose <u>mission</u> was <u>to build</u> local power and <u>to intervene</u> when violence was inflicted on Black communities”
Rhetoric	Construct reality (CR)	Temporal words; named entities referring to geographical locations	“Into the <u>historical</u> process of transformation of our peoples”
	Describe action (DA)	Imperative verb phrases	“ <u>Raise</u> our voices”
Narrative	Communicate aims (CA)	Declarative sentences	“For <u>the purpose of</u> seeking alternatives to eliminate injustice, discrimination, machismo and violence against women”
	Identify actors (IA)	Named entities that convey positive or negative affect	“Even though <u>a few oligarchs and imperialists</u> seek to <u>plague it with death in their quest for their god called greed</u> ”

Several linguistic categories were considered, including the use of first-person pronouns, named entities, noun phrases in combination with infinitive phrases, temporal words, imperative verbs, declarative sentences, and named entities that convey positive or negative affect. First-person plural pronouns such as “we” and “us” were examined to see where the authors would write about a shared identity. Named entities were examined to identify references to specific individuals, places, or entities that contribute to the understanding of a text. For example, named entities referring to geographical locations would be coded under constructing reality, whereas named entities referring to people would be coded under establishing identity. Noun phrases in combination with infinitive phrases were analyzed to see which factors could have contributed to power. For instance, the combination of the infinitive phrase "to support" with the noun phrase "mission" sheds light on how these words work together in explaining resources. Temporal words were used to identify references to time employed by the authors, for example, “yesterday” or “today”. Imperative verbs were studied to determine the presence of actions. Examples of sentences with imperative verbs are “Join the revolution” and “Love your body”. Declarative sentences were analyzed to see the expression of aims for writing the manifestos. Lastly, named entities that convey positive or negative affect were examined to assess the authors' use of language in characterizing individuals or groups as enemies or allies.

Coding Strategy. After the 24 manifestos were collected, a database was created in which the texts of the manifestos were stored. These texts were individually stored in plain text in a digital document. In this study, words, phrases, and sentences from the collected manifestos were coded based on specific linguistic categories to ensure a systematic and consistent approach. The manifestos were analyzed individually line-by-line to see which words, phrases, or sentences could be coded. Sentences that were not coded, were later looked at again to see if there were reoccurring themes that were not covered by the

framework. A directed content analysis allowed for revisiting uncoded sentences to identify unaddressed recurring themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Results

A qualitative content analysis was performed using a deductive approach with predetermined elements. The following chapter contains six subsections that correspond to the six coded elements observed in the dataset: establishing identity, explaining resources, constructing reality, describing action, communicating aims, and identifying actors. There were no other elements found in the dataset. However, there were sub-elements found in one of the elements. For the element establishing identity, two sub-elements were found: shared identity and the author's own identity. The 24 analyzed manifestos (Appendix 1) provided insights into how the authors of digital feminist manifestos can communicate empowerment to the reader.

Establishing identity

While coding the manifestos, it was decided that there was one element that would benefit from having sub-elements. This is also encouraged in the structure explained by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) to strengthen the analysis. For the code "establish identity", there were two sub-elements defined: shared identity and the author's own identity. For "shared identity", the authors focused on establishing a common bond between the authors and the readers, reflecting shared experiences, values, perspectives, or traits. Meanwhile, "the author's own identity" focuses more on the authors' own distinct identity, writing about their unique characteristics, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives.

Shared identity

In 21 of the 24 analyzed manifestos, the authors tried to establish a shared identity. For example, in *Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis* (hereafter, M11): "*We, Black women, are always given the burden of doing labor for everyone else*" *Cite Black Women* (2018) characterizes the fact that they are part of a group, namely Black women. By using the first-

person plural pronoun “we” and immediately using the named entity “Black women” afterward, Cite Black Women (2018) emphasizes that they feel connected with their identity and that they are speaking up on behalf of other Black women. Thus, if the readers are Black women themselves, they can relate to the experiences Cite Black Women (2018) write about if the readers have been through something similar. This feeling of similarity can lead to a feeling of empowerment and understanding.

Another example can be found in *Skin: A feminist manifesto* (hereafter, M13):

“[W]here we love the ways our bodies make us feel, where we can joyfully appreciate touch on our scars, our wrinkles, our jelly rolls”. Ratliff (2018) tells the reader something about “we” and “our bodies”. Ratliff (2018) is writing on behalf of people who feel insecure about their bodies. Ratliff (2018) herself has revealed in the manifesto that she struggled with body issues in the past and wants everyone to appreciate their bodies to the fullest. By using first-person plural pronouns “we” and “our” four times in one sentence, Ratliff (2018) emphasizes that the readers of the text should be able to celebrate their bodies.

Author’s own identity

In 16 of the 24 analyzed manifestos, the authors established their own identities. One example can be found in *Nope* (a manifesto) (hereafter, M7): *“I’m a Black woman and expansive in my Blackness and my queerness as Blackness and queerness are always already expansive”*. Another example can be found in *The GINK Manifesto* (hereafter, M14): *“I call myself a GINK: green inclinations, no kids”*. The authors of M7 and M14 both explicitly state in what way they define themselves or what group they belong to. They do this by using the first-person singular pronouns “I” and “my”. The author of M7, Jane (2016), talks about her identity as a queer Black woman. The author of M14, Hymas (2021), talks about how they would define themselves as someone who chooses to have no kids because of the environmental impact.

There is a difference between establishing a shared identity and sharing the author’s

own identity. When aiming to establish a shared identity, examples show that authors of manifestos often opt for first-person plural pronouns such as "we" and "us". On the other hand, authors who seek to assert their individuality, experiences, or unique perspectives tend to use first-person singular pronouns such as "I" and "my". The selection of first-person pronouns, whether plural or singular, can serve as a way for manifesto authors to establish identity.

Explaining resources

In the analysis of 24 manifestos, it was observed that in 20 manifestos the authors provided explanations regarding resources. The concept of resources, as defined by the manifesto authors, exhibited a wide range of breadth and inclusivity, ranging from feminism to the creation of platforms.

In *Feminists for Sex Workers: Our Manifesto* (hereafter, M15): *"Feminism, as it has always done in the past, has to support women's agency and self-determination over their work and their bodies"*, the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (2023) emphasizes the importance of feminism supporting women's agency and self-determination regarding their work and bodies. This passage demonstrates how the noun phrase "feminism" is linked with the infinitive phrase "to support," where the noun phrase represents the catalyst for change and the infinitive phrase highlights the recommended course of action. European Sex Workers' Right Alliance (2023) highlights that feminism is in this case the resource that is needed to return power to women.

In *VISION FOR BLACK LIVES* (hereafter, M10): *"We have created this platform to articulate and support the ambitions and work of Black people"*, M4BL (2022) discusses the creation of a platform aimed at amplifying and endorsing the ambitions and efforts of Black individuals. The noun phrase "platform" is associated with the infinitive phrases "to articulate" and "to support." Specifically, M4BL (2022) has established a platform known as "The Black Hive," which directly supports and empowers Black individuals by providing a

space for promoting their work. This platform serves as a crucial resource to restore power and agency to the Black community. Readers of the manifesto and users of the platform can become aware of the platform's contributions and feel more empowered to support the platform.

Constructing reality

In the analysis of 24 manifestos, it was observed that in 19 of them, the authors constructed a reality. In both Art Fluid Manifesto (hereafter, M2): *“The country I live in and grew up does not make it possible for me to stick to all the articles in this manifesto”* and I Hate All Men (hereafter, M19): *“Having grown up in a small Luxembourgish village, I kept hearing that being queer is wrong and that my identity is deviant”* the geographical location of the authors holds significant relevance to the contextual understanding of their manifestos. Using named entities of specific geographic locations, such as "Luxembourgish village" and "country," the authors establish a connection between the content of their manifestos and the places they refer to. These named entities of geographical locations provide context that shapes the authors' perspective.

In M2, Akdemir (2020) explicitly states that writing this manifesto is necessary since they cannot express their identity in their home country Turkey. This statement by Akdemir (2020) highlights the significance of the author's location, Turkey, in shaping their perspective and the context of their manifesto. By employing the named entity of the specific geographical location, Akdemir (2020) establishes a connection between their manifesto and the social and cultural realities they experience in their home country. The mention of the location serves to provide a contextual understanding of the challenges faced by the author. In M19, Kapgen (2023) reflects on their upbringing in a small village in Luxembourg, which significantly influenced their perception of their queer identity. By citing their geographical location, Kapgen (2023) highlights the negative impact of their surroundings on the acceptance of their queer identity. This inclusion of location in M19 helps the reader grasp

the specific cultural and societal context that influenced the author's manifesto. Thus, the mention of the author's location is essential in both M2 and M19 as it can aid readers in understanding why the geographical context is crucial for interpreting and contextualizing the authors' experiences and the issues discussed in their manifestos.

Time can also be used to construct reality, as seen in A Feminist Manifesto for the 21st Century (hereafter, M6): *“It was only in the 1960s and 70s that these issues began to be viewed as political”* and in Ghost Manifesto (hereafter, M22): *“today = new Date (); once again, it's the future that's being sacrificed ...”*. M6 and M22 adopt different temporal perspectives in their writings. While M6 focuses on the past, M22 centers its attention on the present and the future. These temporal orientations are reflected through the deliberate use of temporal words, such as "today" and "1960s and 70s," which serve to provide readers with contextual information about time. By employing these temporal markers, German and Power (2015) and Da Rimini (1998) enhance the readers' understanding of the time in which their respective manifestos are situated.

Describing action

Out of 24 manifestos, 21 manifestos were identified to contain descriptions of actions. This was achieved by employing imperative verbs to convey directives to the readers. For instance, in the Pajama Femme Manifesto (hereafter, M1) *“So join the pajama femme revolution”*, a call to join the pajama femme revolution was made, promoting a shift away from the notion that women need to conform to societal expectations of dressing up and using makeup to be considered feminine (Tastrom, 2012). The use of the imperative verb "join" in this manifesto urges readers to embrace this perspective and actively participate in the revolution.

Similarly, the MoAnA Manifesto: My Personal Statement on Defending, Supporting and Protecting Black Lives (hereafter, M12) *“So, together let's speak up and change the world”*, emphasizes the significance of speaking up and effecting change about the Black

Lives Matter movement (Luu, 2020). The imperative verbs "speak up" and "change" employed by Luu (2020) encourage readers to act and address the challenges faced by Black individuals, as speaking up holds the potential to contribute to a better world.

Communicating aims

In the analysis of 24 manifestos, it was observed that in 20 of them, authors communicated their aims for writing the manifestos. For instance, in *I Hate All Men* (hereafter, M19): *"This is not the discussion we should be having, let's instead focus on why queer and non-male folks keep mistrusting the straight cisgender male"* Kapgen (2023) conveys their aim by urging readers to shift the focus of discussion away from a specific topic and instead concentrate on why queer and non-male individuals have mistrust towards straight cisgender men. By placing this declarative sentence in the opening paragraph, Kapgen (2023) signaled the direction and purpose of the manifesto, providing readers with a clear understanding of the forthcoming content and the motivation behind the author's choice of topic.

Another example can be found in *I don't want to have to compromise my morals in order to make a living* (hereafter, M21): *"I dont want to live in a world where im gonna have to start employing body guards because this kind of behavior is so commonplace."* Grimes (2013) communicates her aims through declarative sentences and the repetitive use of the phrase *"I don't."* By illustrating what she does not want to happen, Grimes (2013) conveys her aim of highlighting the importance of treating her and others with respect. The communication of aims in M21 differed from M19, as Grimes (2013) chose to focus on what readers should avoid doing, rather than explicitly stating what actions should be taken.

Identifying actors

In the analysis of all 24 manifestos, it was found that each manifesto included some form of identifying actors. This is done with the deliberate use of named entities that convey positive or negative affect. The Islamic Republic is framed as the enemy in *The Rally*

Manifesto (hereafter, M4): “[T]he Islamic Republic's entire existence has been so tightly intertwined with enforced hijab-wearing that its abolition in practice means its ideological and political suicide”. Feminists4Jina (2022) tells the readers that because of the Islamic Republic, women and LGBTQIA+ people are dominated, discriminated and excluded. The named entity in this example is the Islamic Republic, and by sharing the wrongdoings, Feminists4Jina (2022) conveys negative affect. Feminists4Jina (2022) illustrate to the readers how the Islamic Republic can be seen as the enemy in the manifesto by giving examples of the Islamic Republic’s wrongdoings.

Named entities can also be framed as allies. This can be seen in The Angry Indian Feminist Manifesto (hereafter, M8): “As John Marcotte pointed out, “Don’t allow men who hate women to define feminism as women who hate men””. In this example, John Marcotte serves as the named entity, and Anand (2016) agrees with this viewpoint, conveying positive affect. By incorporating this quotation from Marcotte, Anand (2016) effectively communicates their vision. The quote exemplifies Marcotte's support for feminists, a message that resonates with Anand (2016) and is intended to be shared within their manifesto.

Discussion

The research question of the current study was: “*How is empowerment communicated through language in digital feminist manifestos?*” This chapter aims to evaluate the extent to which the research question has been addressed in this study, by further discussing the results, as linked to the Manifesto Language Empowerment Framework presented in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis. Subsequently, the limitations of the present study are examined, and theoretical implications and suggestions for future research are presented.

Significance of Power for Empowerment

The results of this study provide insights into the communication of power within digital feminist manifestos, aligning with the key concept of power in the Manifesto

Language Empowerment Framework, which links back to work by Van Dijk (2021) and Spiker (2019). The findings reveal that authors of manifestos can communicate power through the strategic use of different linguistic devices to establish identity and explain resources.

First-person pronouns

Authors of manifestos utilize first-person pronouns to share their individual experiences and perspectives, fostering connection and relatability among readers (Hyland, 2008; Spiker, 2019). This connection empowers readers to engage in meaningful conversations, advocate for change, and promote positive transformations (Hartelius & Browning, 2008). By immersing themselves in the author's story, readers gain the confidence to shape their own experiences (Hartelius & Browning, 2008; Spiker, 2019).

First-person plural pronouns such as "we" and "us" can be employed by authors of manifestos to foster a sense of inclusivity and commonality between themselves and the readers (Van Dijk, 2021). The linguistic choice of using first-person plural pronouns can contribute to the formation of collective identity within the text (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), which can make readers feel more empowered since collective identity fosters a sense of belonging (Spiker, 2019; Kaakinen et al., 2020; Greenaway et al., 2015; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). First-person singular pronouns such as "I" and "my" can establish credibility and communicate the unique perspectives (Hyland, 2008) of manifesto authors with the use of first-person singular pronouns.

Noun- and infinite phrases

In addition, the authors of manifestos can employ noun phrases combined with infinitive phrases to explain resources. The noun phrase can be seen as the element that can bring this change, whereas the infinitive phrase explains what should be done. This combination enables authors of manifestos to articulate the available means and capabilities

for effecting change (Van Dijk, 2021). By explicating the resources that contribute to power disparities and power equality, manifesto authors can raise awareness (Allen, 1999; Van Dijk, 2011), providing individuals with a sense of empowerment and unity, and inspiring them to pursue change (Spiker, 2019). These explained resources play a crucial role in helping readers comprehend the systemic or structural barriers that hinder certain groups from accessing or exercising power (Van Dijk, 2021; Van Dijk, 2011), fostering empathy and empowering readers to address these issues (Spiker, 2019).

Rhetoric as a Strategy to Empower

The results of this study substantiate how rhetoric is communicated in digital feminist manifestos. These findings align with the Manifesto Language Empowerment Framework's key concept of rhetoric which links back to the work by Van Dijk (2021) and Spiker (2019). The findings show that manifesto authors can communicate the concept of rhetoric by using a variety of linguistic devices to construct reality and describe action.

Temporal words

The inclusion of temporal words such as "now," "today," or "in the future" can create a sense of urgency and timeliness, potentially influencing readers' perceptions (Jaworski & Fitzgerald, 2008; Kopytowska, 2015). The use of temporal words can emphasize the immediate relevance of the manifesto's message to the readers' lives (Foss, 1996; Jaworski & Fitzgerald, 2008; Kopytowska, 2015). This linguistic feature helps readers perceive the content as more significant and personally relevant, increasing their interest and engagement (Foss, 1996; Jaworski & Fitzgerald, 2008; Kopytowska, 2015). By evoking a time-sensitive element, temporal words emphasize the need for immediate action, empowering readers to engage with the content (Jaworski & Fitzgerald, 2008; Kopytowska, 2015).

Geographical named entities

Similarly, the use of named entities associated with specific geographic locations may contribute to a sense of concreteness and contextual relevance (Klatzky, 1998; Reynolds,

1993). Previous research shows that by incorporating named entities such as cities, countries, or landmarks, manifesto authors can establish a connection between their message and real-world contexts, which can enhance the manifesto's relevance and credibility (Klatzky, 1998; Reynolds, 1993; Van Dijk, 2021). These feelings of urgency, relevance, and credibility can contribute to an increased feeling of empowerment (Foss, 1996; Spiker, 2019).

Imperative verbs

Furthermore, the imperative verbs can serve as a call to action (Hanna & Ashby, 2022), motivating readers to actively engage with the manifesto's ideas. These verbs can evoke a sense of empowerment, positioning readers as active participants to come into action (Pennock-Speck & Fuster-Marquez, 2014; Zjakic et al., 2017). Imperative verbs are known to have transformative power in political speeches, as shown in research by Jordà (2007) and Alvi and Baseer (2011). The empowering function of imperative verbs lies in the ability to directly convey the intention of the manifesto authors to the readers, without using a second-person pronoun such as “you” (Alshemmery & Alshemmery, 2021). By utilizing terms like "raise," the manifesto can communicate the importance of raising one's voice and advocating for justice and equality (Van Dijk, 2021). Similarly, imperatives like "join" may encourage readers to resist oppressive systems and actively challenge existing power structures (Van Dijk, 2021; Spiker, 2019).

Empowering Readers Through Narrative

The results of this study provide evidence of how narrative is communicated in digital feminist manifestos. These findings align with the Manifesto Language Empowerment Framework's key concept of narrative, which links back to the work by Van Dijk (2021) and Spiker (2019). The findings show that authors of manifestos can communicate the concept of narrative by different using linguistic devices to communicate aims and to identify actors.

Declarative sentences

The use of declarative sentences can potentially contribute to the communication of aims and objectives within the manifestos (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Spiker, 2019). By using declarative sentences, manifesto authors can convey their goals and intentions directly to the readers, establishing a clear direction and purpose for writing their manifesto (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Previous research on advertisements indicates that the use of declarative sentences helps people feel more certain and motivated, inspiring them to support the objectives and take action to achieve them (Linghong, 2006; Flergin, 2014; Romaneko, 2014). Manifestos have been linked with advertising (Hanna et al., 2019), employing similar techniques and strategies. Manifestos possess the capacity to serve as work to promote or advocate for specific ideas or causes, similar to advertisements (Hanna, 2017). The use of declarative sentences can contribute to the promotion and advocacy of ideas or standpoints, therefore giving manifesto authors the ability to empower readers.

Named entities to identify enemies and allies

Moreover, the deliberate use of named entities that convey positive or negative affect can have an impact on identifying prominent figures within the narrative of digital feminist manifestos (Greenaway et al., 2015; Van Dijk, 2021). By categorizing individuals or groups as positive or negative, manifesto authors can position specific actors as either allies or enemies, thereby shaping the narrative and influencing how readers perceive it (Pasini, 2019; Van Dijk, 2021). For example, when the noun "states" is coupled with negative adjectives like "anti-immigrant" and "Islamophobic" (see Feminists4Jina, 2022), "states" can be seen as an enemy. Categorizing allies and enemies in line with the us/them polarization study of Pasini (2019). Manifesto authors can emphasize the involvement of specific people, organizations, or institutions, assigning them responsibility and influence within the manifesto (Pasini, 2019; Van Dijk, 1998). Authors of digital feminist manifestos can use these linguistic features as a way of influencing the narrative and empowering the readers.

Limitations

The study's scope was constrained by the availability and accessibility of digital feminist manifestos that could be accessed and coded. This deliberate decision was made to streamline the data collection process and maintain a manageable sample size. Despite the careful selection of manifestos to ensure intersectionality and representation of diverse perspectives and contexts, the limited sample size of 24 digital feminist manifestos restricts the generalizability of the study's findings.

The directed content analysis of the collected data was performed by a single coder, who also collected the manifestos and interpreted the results. This may have introduced some bias in the analysis process. Furthermore, the coding consistency was not assessed through testing intracoder reliability, which means that it cannot be confirmed if the coding was done consistently.

An issue that was not addressed in this study was whether there is an impact of translation on the analysis of manifestos. The absence of an examination of the translation process allows for the possibility of altered messages, which could influence the overall analysis when comparing translated versions to the original manifestos. This limitation underscores the effect of translated manifestos in future research, as it influences the interpretation and analysis of manifestos across different languages.

Future research

The findings of this study lay the groundwork for various potential directions in future research, offering opportunities to delve deeper into the understanding of empowerment through language. One potential direction is the incorporation of focus groups to gather direct insights from readers regarding what they find empowering in a text. By engaging participants in discussions and soliciting their perspectives, focus groups can provide valuable firsthand accounts and capture interpretations (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups can

help uncover the specific textual features, themes, or narrative elements that resonate with readers and empower those interpretations (Morgan, 1996). Additionally, future studies could incorporate diverse reader demographics to examine potential variations in responses and identify any intersectional aspects of empowerment. By including individuals from various backgrounds, such as different genders or cultural and ethnic identities, researchers can explore potential variations in responses to manifestos and uncover any intersectional aspects of empowerment. This approach would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of how manifestos resonate and can shed light on the contextual factors, personal backgrounds, or individual preferences that influence the perception of empowerment in texts.

Conclusion

This study set out to gain a better understanding of empowerment through language in digital feminist manifestos. A deductive content analysis was performed on 24 digital feminist manifestos. By developing the Manifesto Empowerment Language Framework, which integrates the prior studies of Van Dijk (2021) on manifestos and Spiker (2019) on language empowerment, this study has defined six distinct elements that can convey empowerment through language within digital feminist manifestos. These elements are establishing identity, explaining resources, constructing reality, describing actions, communicating aims, and identifying actors. This research contributes to the under-researched domain of digital feminist manifestos, and the insights gained from this study add to the comprehension of how empowerment can be communicated through language.

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