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## Setting the scene for racism: A Burkean analysis of Twitter in the time of Covid-19

Jieun Son

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# Thesis of Jieun Son

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

## Master of Arts Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Nova Southeastern University  
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

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SETTING THE SCENE FOR RACISM:  
A BURKEAN ANALYSIS OF TWITTER IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Jieun Son

Halmos College of Arts and Sciences

Department of Communication, Media, and the Arts

Nova Southeastern University

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## ABSTRACT

Social media platforms facilitate high-speed information sharing among digital technology users. But unregulated production of content across social media raises questions about the credibility of this content. During the COVID-19 pandemic, viral phenomena such as misinformation and conspiracy theories about the virus have spread rapidly across the globe, prompting misunderstanding, bias, and, at times, extreme actions both online and off. This thesis examines how language choices in social media posts function as a mode of action that not only can misinform but can serve to target certain groups for bias during a time of crisis. Specifically, it uses Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism to analyze a collection of tweets that contain the hashtag "#ChineseVirus" in order to better understand the attitudes, beliefs, and values associated with this controversial term. My findings consider the motives embodied in the collected artifacts and encourage readers to develop the rhetorical insights necessary for critical literacy in the age of social media.

*Keywords: Dramatism, Misinformation, Tweets, Social Media, COVID-19, Racism, Critical Literacy*

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## Introduction

The emergence of social media allows people to access, interact, and produce content on a wide scale. Social media even encourages people to move beyond being mere passive readers to become what Alvin Toffler calls digital *prosumers*—individuals who produce and consume content in digital spaces. Prosumers have changed the ways in which information is created, disseminated, and consumed, and they have also changed the ways that misinformation is circulated as well. Digital content is shared and consumed quickly through social media, often with little regard for who is sharing what and for what purpose. Because social media platforms and digital technologies have facilitated high-speed information sharing among prosumers, questions about the credibility and trustworthiness of digital content need to be asked if that information is to be used for shaping individual or collective action. Without effective quality controls or gatekeeping, social media thus reveals a dark side of social discourse, which is the spread of erroneous beliefs and conspiracy theories that can prompt misunderstanding, bias, and extreme actions both online and off (Pulido et al., 2020). Because of such reasons, effective approaches to teaching critical reading skills and developing understanding of the rhetorical functions of digital content have become increasingly important, especially in times of crisis; the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception.

While COVID-19 spread rapidly globally, many societies witnessed the spread of other viral phenomena such as fake news, conspiracy theories, and general mass suspicions about the pandemic (De Coninck et al., 2021). Although many of the fake news stories were eventually debunked, the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories on social media has spawned an information epidemic—or *infodemic*—connected to the pandemic (WHO, 2020). The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that "We're not just fighting an

epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic. Fake news spreads faster and more easily than this virus, and is just as dangerous" (WHO, 2020a). These fake news postings include misinformation and conspiracy theories that can shape user behavior and may evoke user biases that lead to unethical behavior online and offline. Thus, widespread intentional misinformation about the pandemic is an example of arguments that can seriously impact public discourse and public health.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has become the new flashpoint in what has been called the "post-truth era." According to Bruce McComiskey (2017), the term post-truth "signifies a state in which language lacks any reference to facts, truths, and realities" (p. 6). In the book *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition*, McComiskey argues that relying on emotion while forsaking logos—the realm of fact, logic, and valid reasoning—in decision making and critical thinking may risk violence. The defining characteristic of a post-truth world, according to McComiskey, is that "truth is no longer a concern for people when they speak, and therefore language becomes merely strategic" (McComiskey, 2017). There are no truths or lies in a post-truth scenario because a lie requires a sense of truth to identify it as false. When one finds oneself in a setting of "merely strategic" communication, it thus becomes important to ask questions about *why* an individual is posting something, not just what is claimed or whether it is factual. In other words, when one finds oneself in a post-truth scenario, it is important to think rhetorically about human actions. To help better understand the strategic human actions that social media postings represent, this thesis turns to Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism.

Burke, an American scholar and literary critic, developed his dramatism theory to account for language use and thought as a mode of action. Dramatism provides those interested in rhetorical action a focus on human symbol use as a social process of embodying and influencing motives. It is concerned mostly with motivation—people are motivated to respond to

situations just as actors are motivated to act, speak, or more in certain ways within a drama. Rather than look just at the symbols used (i.e., the words on the screen), however, it places these actions in the context of the larger communicative context, accounting for how everything from the audience to the location to the “props” available to the speaker influences human action. For this reason, dramatism is a useful method for analyzing human communication in all its complex forms and can be used as part of rhetorical analysis to help us understand how individuals navigate the presence of ambiguity within scenes of persuasion. Helping the audience understand the dramatistic situation of modern social media rhetorically can be one step toward making them critical prosumers of digital content able to communicate ethically and effectively and to resist and rebut misinformation on social media. Burke’s dramatism allows readers to analyze both writer’s rhetorical choices in a certain situation and audience’s responses to their choices (West & Turner, 2017). This analysis can include their own responses, making them more mindful social media prosumers. Furthermore, since dramatism helps the audience become conscious of their own capacity to take action through language, successful writing pedagogies can be built that value activism or resistance (Kneupper, 2009, p. 308).

This study aims to better understand the actions of social media prosumers who exert influence through the sharing of (mis)information, and to understand the potential connections between social media activity and discrimination. To facilitate such inquiries, this study builds on Kenneth Burke’s theory of dramatism to understand the communication of (mis)information about the COVID-19 pandemic. Dramatism is a theoretical system that allows one to understand human life as drama, as well as a practical method to reveal human motives (West & Turner, 2017, p. 324). Burke’s theory of dramatism can be a helpful method to examine the motivations for the spreading and acceptance of misinformation on social media. The scope of this thesis will

be limited to researching the circulation and reception of misinformation and conspiracy theories found in tweets about coronavirus, including the hashtags that stigmatize certain ethnic groups. It looks closely at the period of time immediately following former President Donald J. Trump's initial use of the hashtag #ChineseVirus, and how these tweets may have contributed to anti-Asian sentiment when the COVID-19 pandemic emerged at the beginning of 2020.

In this study, I analyze prosumers' rhetorical choices and the attitudes, beliefs, and values surrounding the controversial term, "Chinese virus." I apply Burke's theories of dramatism via a rhetorical analysis of Trump's Twitter presence in hopes of gaining a better understanding of the motives behind these specific strategic communications, as well as to consider how best to prepare others to be critical prosumers of such content. Ultimately, I am interested in how the affordances of rhetorical theory and social media combine to allow individuals to engage in acts of advocacy. In order to develop the rhetorical insights necessary for critical literacy in the social media domain, this study investigates the following questions: To what degree does a rhetor's language choices reveal motives and impact readers' attitudes, beliefs, and values? How can we prepare individuals to be ethical and effective social media users capable of operating in post-truth conditions?

These questions are important, not only to researchers and teachers, but to all who participate in, and hope to be heard in, today's social discourse, whether online or off. Answers are especially important to those who participate directly in online discourse communities, and those who might become the targets of campaigns to disparage social groups. Better understanding the strategies used in these forums might serve as one step toward reforming the rules that govern these spaces, a task which we are perennially told is both ongoing and incomplete. At the least, this understanding can form the basis of new insights into how we use

rhetoric in online spaces. Before presenting in the methods section below how I intend to answer my questions, I introduce in the literature review section the current conversations around social media, rhetoric, and racism.

### **Literature Review**

This section focuses on the intersection of scholarship on social media, misinformation, and dramatism. This literature review grounds these conversations in rhetoric and critical literacy as well as justifies why this study is important and necessary. The field of rhetoric has a strong foundation in understanding the motives of discourse and applying these approaches to social media can be helpful in understanding the affordances these digital spaces provide.

#### **Misinformation through Social Media**

The most pertinent aspects of social media today are their ubiquity and ability to communicate with large groups quickly without gatekeeping. According to Deng, Sinha, and Zhao (2017), social media texts are online communications that are currently the largest source of public opinion. Because social media platforms and digital technologies facilitate information sharing rapidly and easily among prosumers, there is little oversight as to what gets shared. Especially in the midst of the global pandemic, many societies have witnessed the spread of misinformation, conspiracy theories, and general suspicions about what is going on. For instance, some of the rumors about COVID-19 claim that the virus is caused by 5G cellular technology (Vincent, 2020), that the virus was created as a biological weapon in a Chinese laboratory, or that coconut oil kills the virus (Pennycook et al., 2020). Even though much of this fake news is eventually proven untrue, the rumors, conspiracy theories, and “alternative truths” tend to thrive in environments of high fear and low trust (Shahsavari et al., 2020). Unfortunately, misinformation and conspiracy theories tend to outperform real news in terms of popularity and

audience engagement (Silverman, 2016). These online environments thus become the foundation of an infodemic that can lead to severe impacts on public discourse.

After his first use of it on 3/16/2020, Trump posted several tweets using #ChineseVirus over the following week. This phrase may have encouraged the use of hate speech and discrimination in the U.S. against Asian communities., increases in which can lead to increases in race-based violence. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, Asians have been targeted by attacks and discrimination that appear linked to the pandemic. Just over a year after President Trump's first use of the phrase "Chinese virus," during which racist rhetoric has continued to circulate, a shooter killed eight people at three Atlanta-area spas, six of whom were women of Asian descent (Fausset et al., 2021). In the immediate aftermath of this event, questions of purpose were difficult to answer. The suspect denied having a racist motivation for the attack, and the Mayor of Atlanta, Keisha Lance Bottoms, simply stated the obvious when she announced that "[w]hatever the motivation was for this guy, we know that the majority of the victims were Asian" (Fausset et al., 2021). Regardless, the killings sparked outrage in the Asian American community, which has faced a dramatic spike in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chen). Such incidents require us to examine the possible connection between online discourse and face-to-face action. Offline actions of bias and hate, even if unable to be identified as being prompted by specific tweets, are still part of the same discourse that targets and condemns minority groups during times of crisis. These crises can be natural, political, or economic, but regardless of the source, such incidents raise important questions such as: why do crises often prompt discriminatory speech acts? To what extent do speakers gain some rhetorical advantage by exploiting deep-seated biases during times of crisis? How can one respond to such strategies in critical ways, without the likelihood of prompting offline actions such as hate crimes? If

discriminatory acts and on/offline hate crimes are the potential results of the reception of biased speech or misinformation, then it is even more important to pay attention to the conversations happening within social media.

A growing body of literature discusses what constitutes misinformation or conspiracy theories, and such work might help pressure social media companies to take a more active role in identifying and stopping misinformation (De Coninck et al., 2021). Researchers sometimes define “misinformation” simply as false and misleading information (Mena et al., 2020) or as “cases in which people’s beliefs about factual matters are not supported by clear evidence and expert opinion” (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). Conspiracy theories, similarly, “are attempts to explain the ultimate causes of significant social and political events and circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more powerful actors” (Douglas et al., 2019, p. 4). These definitions focus primarily on the quality of the information being circulated. De Coninck et al. (2021), however, consider *misinformation* as “publishing wrong information without meaning to be wrong or having a political purpose in communicating false information” (p. 2). Such definitions consider the role of motive in misinformation, thus drawing attention to the rhetorical situations in which misinformation circulates. Although several scholars have determined the definitions for misinformation, applying them to actual tweets can be more difficult, and deciding the consequences to individual users for engaging in such acts has proven difficult to do without backlash from groups complaining that they are being targeted for political reasons. Many of these approaches focus solely on the truthfulness of the information being presented (without considering the social processes through which claims attain the status of “truth”) and leaves questions of why the misinformation was presented, or the impacts of its presentation, unanswered. These questions are traditionally the domain of rhetorical theory.



As mentioned earlier, the method used for analyzing Trump's tweets, and for gaining greater insight into the motives and consequences of these communications will be based on the dramatistic pentad of Kenneth Burke. Burke developed dramatism as a rhetorical theory that analyzes languages and thoughts as modes of human action. His book, *A Grammar of Motives*, is viewed as a significant development in the study of communication and rhetoric that can be applied across a range of texts, because it integrates ways of speaking about human motives in fields such as sociology, psychology, and philosophy. Exploring how humans communicate, Burke was able to show the centrality of understanding motive when analyzing speech and writing. In utilizing Burke's approach to rhetorical criticism, audiences do not limit themselves to studying the speech, the speaker, or the occasion (Bass, 1974, p. 7). Instead, an audience can determine the connections between language and motivations. Burke calls humans "the symbol-using animal" and, of all the symbols that humans use, language is the most important in Burke's thought (West & Turner, p. 326). In order to attempt to understand the situation and act accordingly, man employs symbols and language. These symbols and language are significant acts in response to (and constructive of) situations from which motives can be derived (Brock, 1972). Modern tweets do make use of symbols and language, just as traditional texts do, so can easily be studied using this approach to understand the complexity of the situations in which they circulate and become meaningful.

Many rhetorical approaches allow one to analyze the language choices to reveal the primary argument or main idea presented by a given text. These approaches can benefit from a dramatistic approach to gain additional insight into an audience's motivations, and how experiences in one's life shape the speaker and the audience to act the way they do. In other words, dramatistic analysis allows us to consider the frame of reference of those involved in the

communicative act. According to Burke, motivation is a link between the actor and the audience in terms of reception (West & Turner, 2017). The theory of dramatism attempts to account for motivational discourse and its influence on human action. It seeks to understand how people create identities and personas, choose language and evidence, and make use of discursive tools that they feel will be effective with specific audiences (West & Turner, 2017). And since it considers a range of multimodal symbols used in such exchanges, dramatism allows a critic to determine connections between language and motivations regardless of the medium, making it useful for studying things like social media.

To apply the theory of dramatism, Burke (1945) created a heuristic called the *pentad*. *Pentadic analysis* considers people's actions using five interrelated motivational and explanatory terms to help determine why a speaker selects a particular rhetorical strategy for an audience.

The pentad consists of five elements:

- the Agent (the person who performs the Act),
- the Act (names what took place in thought or deed by a person),
- the Agency (what means the actor used to accomplish the act),
- the Scene (the background of the Act), and
- the Purpose (the goal that person had in mind for the act).

This system is similar to the five W's—Who, What, When, Where, and Why—which are often called the reporter's questions. The reporter's questions are designed to elicit the basic facts, but Burke focuses on the motives behind the use of facts rather than just the facts. The dramatic pentad is designed to help the audiences think about what motivates human actions, which is what guides the choice of symbolic strategies. According to West and Turner, Burke teaches us that "any verbal act is considered symbolic action. Words are symbolic of something,

representative of a social trend" (2017, p. 325). Thus, we have to look beyond the words themselves to understand the social setting in which these symbols operate, and the consequences they produce.

### **Burke's Pentad in Relation to Social Media**

How, then, do all of the pentad's elements apply to social media during a pandemic? Below, I provide a brief overview of each element and discuss pentadic analysis connected to social media surrounding the pandemic. The first step in pentadic analysis is identifying the five elements from the perspective of the rhetor. Identification of the Agent involves naming the person or group who is the main character of the situation presented by the rhetor (West & Turner, 2017, p. 331). The Agent could also be the rhetors themselves (Kuypers, 2009). An examination of the Agent should attempt to ascertain such things as the factors that caused him to act as he or she did. It is not uncommon in rhetorical theory to spend a reasonable amount of time analyzing the person speaking. The idea of *ethos*—the persona or character of the speaker—has been considered one of the key elements of rhetoric since the time of Aristotle. Aristotle is also famous for defining *rhetoric* as "the ability to see, in any given situation, the available means of persuasion." While this definition of rhetoric is often remarked upon as being a more neutral definition than previous characterizations (by Socrates and Plato) of rhetoric as manipulation or flattery, I also want to draw attention to the importance of the concept of "available means" as a bridge between the traditional definition of rhetoric, and Burke's dramatic approach. Referring to the individual (or group) as an agent certainly places it in Burke's dramatic conversation. However, the Agent also draws attention to the degree to which how an individual acts in a given situation is closely connected to the tools available to them through which to act. In other words, Burke helps us see how the "available means" are just

as important to the practice of rhetoric as the identity of the agents involved and to the purposes they bring to that scene.

The Act is the rhetor's presentation of the person or agent's major action (Kuypers, 2009, p. 459). It refers most likely to the text or speech itself. In this study, as a critic who is studying the tweets of President Donald Trump and the other users, I may find that the Act is the effort to spread the information about the virus and pandemic, with the users serving as the agents.

The Agency refers to all the means used by the Agent to perform the act or the instrument used to accomplish the act (West & Turner, 2017, p. 332). These can include the words or concepts used, technologies employed, or strategies embodied. A strategy can be the pattern or plans the prosumers follow in trying to achieve their ends. People develop strategies to explain situations they may encounter and indicate their strategies by using language. You might think of the various means that actors have to communicate with audiences. Much can be communicated with simple body movements, for example, while at other times, speech, music, lighting, or other forms of symbolic action may be the best choice to communicate something. As language and symbols are meaningful acts in response to situations from which motives can be derived, the readers should discover a writer's rhetorical strategies by examining the language used in the texts. In a tweet about blaming China for hiding facts about the virus, for example, a user or a writer might depict the Agency as a political issue, conspiracy theories on COVID-19 origin, or conspiracy theories of the government in China.

The Scene is "the background of the act" or "the situation in which it occurred" (West & Turner, 2017, p. 331). This element includes physical conditions, social and cultural influences, or historical causes (Kuypers, 2009, p. 459). In looking at Trump's use of "Chinese Virus," for example, that term might emerge within a scene of discrimination, hatred, or racism among

Americans. The scene shows that elements of the pentad are not merely static elements but are constantly interacting to shape ongoing rhetorical dramas. Without attempting to make a strict claim of causation, one can still use dramatism to begin to understand how things such as anti-Asian sentiment and the views of the press can be connected within the same Scene to Trump's situation as President and specific tweets he makes. These tweets become factors that led to the use of hashtags in the #StopAsianHate campaign or #ChinaLiedPeopleDied activism.

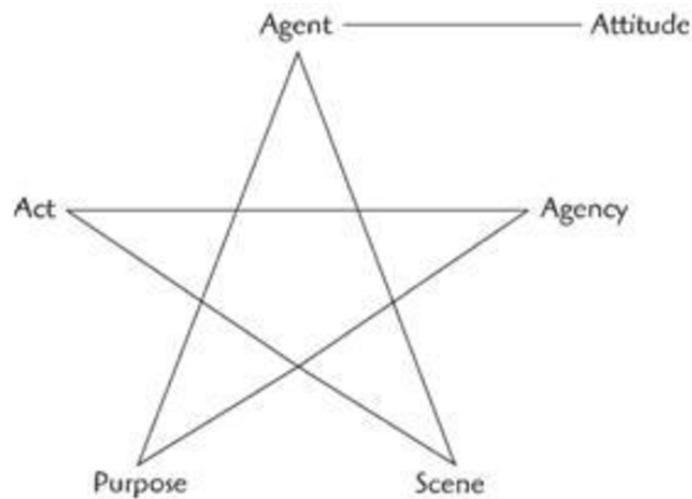
The Purpose is what the rhetor suggests the agent intends to accomplish by performing the act (Kuypers, 2009, p.459). It is the rhetor's account of the agent's intentions, feelings, and values. In order to determine the purpose in a given text, the readers try to find such things as what the text was designed to do. The purpose of using hashtag #Chinesevirus in the individual's tweet, for example, might be to spread misinformation and make the readers repeatedly encounter the idea that the virus is from China.

Another way to use these five elements to analyze a symbolic interaction is to use what Burke called *dramatistic ratios*. A ratio is a pairing of two of the elements among the five elements to discover the relationship between the two and the effect that each has on the other. In other words, each component between five elements of the pentad is interrelated. For example, when people write or speak something, they do it either because of their own personal nature (Agent-Act relation) or their Purpose (Purpose-Act relation). There are twenty other combinations to form these ratios: Scene-Act, Scene-Agent, Scene-Agency, Scene-Purpose, Act-Agent, Act-Agency, Act-Scene, Act-Purpose, Purpose-Act, Purpose-Scene, Purpose-Act, Purpose-agent, and Purpose-Agency, etc. Sometimes, "attitude" is included as a sixth element that helps set the stage for the upcoming action (see figure 1 below). By focusing one's attention on these multiple aspects of human behavior, analysis based on a dramatistic understanding of

the people, places, and purposes that shape action can provide insight into both a speaker's motivations and an audience's response, and how the choices and are related to the dramatic elements available to participants.

### Figure 1

#### *Burke's Pentad*



*Note.* Sourced from West & Turner (2018, p. 331)

Various scholars have published articles developing the theory of dramatisitic ratios. In Mike Allen's (2018) edited collection on communication research methods, he provides an entry on "Rhetorical and Dramatism Analysis" where it explains the applications of dramatism using the pentad—one of its most recognized features—as the foundation. An example of a dramatisitic analysis using the pentad that Allen provides is Brian Ott and Eric Aoki's analysis of the press treatments of the Matthew Shepherd murder. They argue that media stories of the Shepherd murder used rhetorical scapegoating—the method of purging guilt by blaming a cultural ill on another—to alleviate the American public's guilt over anti-gay hate crimes. However, the scapegoating ultimately made the case more difficult to pass legislation that would prevent anti-gay violence from happening in the future. Allen explains if Ott and Aoki's analysis is

considered in terms of the dramatic pentad, the *Act* is the anti-gay sentiment in the popular press about the Shepherd murder; the *Agent* is the press outlets; the *scene* is the circulation of these sentiments; the *Agency* is the technique of scapegoating an imagined cultural problem; and the *Purpose* is to alleviate the public's guilt over anti-gay hate crime because the murderers were blamed rather than systemic cultural homophobia. Thus, the pentad has been found useful in helping to analyze the media's involvement in shaping public discourse—not just what the media said, but why they said it, and why the audience responded to it. Nowadays, as prosumers, we all have the opportunity to weigh in and shape online discourse around current events, although some will always have a greater impact due to their position in a situation (in a drama-based lexicon, perhaps some are “main characters,” while others are “supporting” or “minor” characters). But the viral spread of misinformation, much like the spread of the virus itself, relies on individual contacts between the infected; Trump may be a “super-spreader” of misinformation, but these conspiracies and lies can only take hold within a susceptible population. Critical literacy in a post-truth era can help inoculate us against such “infections,” but such programs must first start with understanding the infection itself.

### **COVID-19 Misinformation and Conspiracies about Asian-Americans on Social Media**

In order to understand the impact of human actions on social media using dramatism theory, the critics and readers need to understand the fuller dramatic situation. Communication has consequences, both immediate and long-term. In this case, the COVID-19 outbreak is the context surrounding the actions represented by the tweets collected for this thesis. Analyzing these tweets and their rhetorical situation, I believe the most important agency that facilitates the spread of misinformation is the hashtag. Yulin Hswen (2021), an assistant professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at UCSF, examines and analyzes the content of the tweets to

claim that hashtags have been shown to act as a predictor of the formation of hate groups and the occurrence of hate crimes. In her research, Hswen found that the number of anti-Asian hashtags associated with #ChineseVirus grew much faster after Trump's first use of the term in his tweet, which said, "The United States will be powerfully, supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!" (Trump, 2020). Hswen (2021) argues the great of using neutral language when naming disease and other threats to public health, especially since viral spreading of ideas and terminology is a normal feature of social media and a disturbing part of the infodemic we are still experiencing.

In a week after Trump tweeted about "Chinese virus," the number of coronavirus-related tweets with anti-Asian hashtags rose precipitously (Kurtzman, 2021). In the era of post-truth and digital media, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are hotspots for prosumers to spread such terms and fuel xenophobic violence. After CNN reported, following the guidance from the WHO, that the "Chinese virus" term was both inaccurate and stigmatizing (Klein, 2020), Trump defended his frequent practice of calling the coronavirus the "Chinese virus." Rogers et al. (2020) reported that Trump told reporters that he was attaching "China" to the name of the virus to combat a disinformation campaign promoted by Beijing officials that the U.S. military was the source of the virus. If nothing else, this shows how the assignment of a (nefarious) Purpose is a common move within public communication, which makes being able to dramatize a potentially useful tool in combating misinformation.

The term "Chinese virus" can be considered as misinformation even if its users claim to simply be trying to be "accurate." Although the first coronavirus case was reported in China, the WHO employs the name COVID-19 in order to neither stigmatize any ethnic group or nationality nor give rise to harmful stereotypes (Macguire, 2020). In the report to the European



Council, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) found that any content that is false, fabricated, impersonated, misled to frame an issue or individual can be defined as misinformation. For example, on March 18, 2020, Republican Senator John Cornyn falsely claimed China was the source of “swine flu.” He blamed the outbreak on coronavirus outbreak by saying, “China is to blame because the culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that. These viruses are transmitted from the animal to the people, and that’s why China has been the source of a lot of these viruses like SARS, like MERS, the swine flu, and now the coronavirus” (The Hill, 2020).

This misinformation not only encourages racist harassment of people perceived to be linked to disease, it also gives some people a false sense that they are safe if they are not part of the group in question, putting people’s health at risk. As Kim Yi Dionne, a professor of political science at the University of California-Riverside, states, “Research shows that when ordinary citizens see a disease threat as foreign, it can lead those ordinary citizens to not take action. So, if someone sees this as a ‘Chinese-virus,’ they might not be as likely to take up important hygiene behaviors like handwashing or social distancing” (as cited in Little, 2020). Changes in simple behaviors is just one way that choices by agents on Twitter can have consequences for others. Also, Nayan Shah, a professor at the University of Southern California-Dornsife, sees it as interesting that Trump and his administrations escalate calling COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” at a moment when the disease becomes a global pandemic unconfined to any one region (Little, 2020). Such acts redirect attention away from some sites and toward others, leading to changes in the value placed on, for instance, preventative measures or legal restrictions placed against various countries. Such attention-directing acts may justify a travel ban, for instance, unevenly placed against one country, making some people feel safer, or bolstering an administration’s

claims to effective response, despite other locations being equally likely to be sites of virus transmission.

The effects on people's lives of spreading misinformation can be significant. While it may be satisfying to identify the "super spreader" sources of misinformation, attention should be focused on individuals' roles as readers and writers (and sharers) of social media content. One question to ask is whether those sharing misinformation are even aware of its lack of credibility. The Stanford History Education Group (Wineburg et al., 2016) recently conducted a study to evaluate "the ability to judge the credibility of information that floods people's smartphones, tablets, and computers." Researchers categorized the results as bleak. The participants in each group could not complete tasks such as distinguishing ads from news stories, determining whether to trust photographs uploaded to photo sharing sites, and investigating tweeted claims. While the authors acknowledged that accessing and using credible information is necessary for informed decision-making, they also recognized that there are no easy solutions for enabling or motivating individuals to do this necessary work. What we do know is that content from tweets to hashtags have the potential to demonstrate changes in attitudes that lead to the formation of mass public opinions, including hate toward specific groups. This phenomenon is considered a "media effect" that includes "changes in cognitions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior that result from media use" (Valkenburg et al., 2016, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2020). These theories of media effects suggest that using stigmatizing terms such as "Chinese virus" can and do negatively influence public attitudes toward groups such as Asian Americans.

Earlier, it was mentioned that "blaming" was one of the purposes that was evident in the tweets collected following the emergence of the "Chinese virus" hashtag. Foreigners have historically been blamed for a host of social ills, so fear of contact with them is not an

uncommon message to be found from those trying to place blame on them (Darling-Hammond, 2020). When these changes take place on a large scale through the reach of modern media, Lawrence Grossberg (1992), the author of “Ideology and Affective Epidemics,” describes this phenomenon as an “affective epidemic” (p. 281). Grossberg (1992) explains that what “matters” to people is shaped by their desire to belong to the dominant group, and discourse works by making people fearful that they will lose their place in the dominant group (p. 284). This constant state of fear is fed constantly, making it difficult to change people’s minds or inject new information that might change people’s understanding of their discourse community, as the “concerns and investments of real social history become the ruins of a displaced, perhaps even misplaced, paranoia” (Grossberg, 1992, p.284). It seems entirely possible that the normal fear of infection in a pandemic is being exploited to fuel the affective epidemic needed to maintain the dominant group’s position in a discriminatory social system.

The main agency through which this fear is circulated during the pandemic is, I believe, the hashtag movements such as #ChineseVirus and #ChinaLiedPeopleDied. But to discuss the rhetorical functions and impact of using hashtags, I need first to consider the role of social media platforms such as Twitter during emergency situations. Scholars in the fields of public health, communications, advertising, and computer science have documented ways in which Twitter has been used effectively to inform people about emergencies and to mobilize support efforts to help people suffering in desperate circumstances (Bowdon, 2014). The nature of Twitter, a microblogging tool that allows an immediate and wide distribution of small chunks of information, makes it relatively easy for an individual to promote its message. Further, this social media platform has made a significant impact on how individuals around the world communicate. Articles in popular periodicals such as *Time* and the *New York Times* has

proclaimed that Twitter is changing the way we live among the aspects of our lives (Johnson, 2009) and that this platform will endure in a world of frequent technological change despite the vapid contents of posts by the users (Carr, 2010). Twitter makes people produce and consume content easily and rapidly on a wide scale. However, at the same time, it makes people make a harmful, misleading, or potentially damaging public misstep, forsaking critical literacy in favor of partisan support for stances embodied in texts such as former president Donald J. Trump's tweets about the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies of the relation between social media, rhetoric, and racism thus caution researchers against not taking these sites of composing seriously.

### **Methods**

In order to understand the role of social media in spreading misinformation about the pandemic, this thesis attempts to apply various aspects of Burke's dramatism to a small selection of social media content. Since there are many forms of social media emerging from many platforms, and many types of social media users, and it would be unreasonable to look closely at them all, choices had to be made about what content and users to look at. The goal is not to catalog all possible approaches or variations to spreading misinformation, but to display the usefulness of the dramatisitic approach in focusing one's attention to the diverse discursive strategies that contribute to the impact of these communications and may represent broader patterns across different media and events. Effort will be made to understand the affordances of the platforms themselves and how they shape users' participation, as well as the contents of social media posts.

Early on, I realized that one of the distinguishing features of social media for the circulation of content is the hashtag, since it serves not only to help organize online content but can be used to link together disparate individuals and groups to form social movements. With the

exclusion of physical rhetoric that occurs in face-to-face conversations, like body language and gestures that can allow individuals to better understand another's message, the types of discrimination people face online may rely mostly on the written word and often involve users contributing personal narratives to clarify and justify a position within a larger conversation (Everett, 2018). Hashtags allow users to connect these individual stories with broader patterns and themes, building support based on shared positioning even when the details of these experiences are not identical.

The online space where my questions about rhetorical action and discrimination most closely intersect is on the social media platform of Twitter. As I began to use this platform to explore my concern about current events, I could see the affordances and constraints of this digitally mediated space. And because of my interest in the connection between racism and rhetoric, I wanted to learn how to use my voice to resist misinformation and conspiracies that are part of the current anti-Asian movement.

I created the collections of tweets that became my datasets (see Appendices A and B) by first filtering Twitter content that contained the hashtag #ChineseVirus within a certain period (03-16-20 to 03-23-30). Because Twitter permanently suspended Trump's Twitter account on January 8th, 2021, I utilized a website called [thetrumparchive.com](http://thetrumparchive.com) to collect the tweets where Trump mentions "Chinese Virus." To identify the desired tweets by non-suspended Twitter users, I used Twitter's "advanced search" feature, and was able to store the contents of my search for future analysis using a service provided by Twitter called TweetDeck. Appendix A consists of the tweets that were published by former President Trump during the prescribed time using the phrase "Chinese Virus," and Appendix B consists of the tweets from verified account holders

using the #ChineseVirus during this time period. The specific filters and operators used in Twitter’s advanced search are shown in the table below:

**Table 1**

*Filters and Operators Used to Refine Twitter Advanced Search Results*

<b>Search Category</b>	<b>Operator</b>	<b>Find Tweets...</b>
Tweet content	#chinesevirus	A hashtag
Users	Filter: verified	From verified users
Tweet info	Since:2020-03-16	On or after a specified date
	Until:2020-03-23	On or before a specified date. Combine with the “since” operator for dates between

Twitter’s advanced search and TweetDeck allowed me to customize the results further by adding advanced search queries and efficiently managing the lists in one centralized place. Then I embedded all the collected tweets on a separate website: [publish.twitter.com](https://publish.twitter.com). Not all tweets are discussed in the analysis section of this thesis, as I found that some tweets are not related to the purpose of my study despite containing the #ChineseVirus hashtag.

I had researched other software tools for identifying and organizing social media data, including such tools as Zotero, reference management software, and the network visualization tool, Netlyic. However, they are not specific to Twitter but can include data from other social media platforms and various news websites. They and another program called Topsy are also designed more for the purposes of implementing marketing and advertising across social media platforms. While they may be better at identifying information about users, they were less appropriate for gathering and filtering their online compositions. After researching these various options, I concluded that the best way to collect and organize data was using Twitter’s advanced search feature and TwitterDeck. These features allowed me to customize the results further by adding advanced search queries and efficiently managing the lists in one centralized place. For

other projects interested in social media across platforms, other tools might be more appropriate. The “#ChineseVirus” hashtag was chosen as the primary filtering mechanism due to its social prominence and due to the way it called attention to the pandemic in a way that was different than “COVID-19,” which emphasized the virus’ scientific and temporal qualities (since COVID identifies the type of virus, and “19” refers to the year of its identification, 2019). Limiting my study to verified account holders (identified publicly by a blue check-mark badge next to the username) made the analysis manageable, as well as filtering out some of the “noise” created by “bot squads” that amplify political propaganda on Twitter (Caldarelli et al., 2020). The blue verified badge on Twitter lets people know that an account is authentic. To become verified, applicants must meet high standards to get confirmation of qualifying affiliation such as featured references and the follower count in the top .05% of active accounts located in the same geographic region (Twitter). The use of hashtags by this group is also more significant. Hashtags gain more attention following their use by public figures or verified and authentic accounts on Twitter, and a higher number of followers are able to be connected to each other via the hashtag. Because of the ever-constant renewal of content and taking into consideration the fact that the #ChineseVirus and phrase grew in popularity within a matter of hours of Trump’s initial tweet on March 16, 2020, I found using Twitter’s general search feature difficult. With Twitter’s advanced search feature, however, I could input exact dates into fields to further refine my data and populate search lists of tweets using #ChineseVirus each day from March 16 to March 23, 2020. Focusing on this short span of time allowed me to keep my research manageable and focus on specific impacts from the circulation of social media content by key figures.

Other researchers make similar choices, even when using more sophisticated tools. The authors of a study that searched Twitter for COVID-19-related tweets and provided a COVID-19

Twitter data repository for the research community obtained their data set by searching with Twitter’s streaming Application Programming Interface (API) (Chen et al., 2020). Instead of following verified account holders, however, they followed a trending set of accounts. Since they were looking at an overlapping time period with my own study, their findings helped corroborate that the term “Chinese virus” grew in popularity in the mid-and end of March.

**Figure 2**

*A Sample of the Keywords in Twitter Collection*

Tracked since	Keyword
1/21/2020	Coronavirus; Corona; CDC; Ncov; Wuhan; Outbreak; China
1/22/2020	Koronavirus; WuhanCoronavirus; Wuhanlockdown; N95; Kungflu; Epidemic; Sinophobia
2/16/2020	Covid-19
3/2/2020	Corona virus
3/6/2020	Covid19; Sars-cov-2
3/8/2020	COVID-19
3/12/2020	COVD; Pandemic
3/13/2020	Coronapocalypse; CancelEverything; Coronials; SocialDistancing
3/14/2020	Panic buying; DuringMy14DayQuarantine; Panic shopping; InMyQuarantineSurvivalKit
3/16/2020	chinese virus; stayhomechallenge; DontBeASpreader; lockdown
3/18/2020	shelteringinplace; staysafestayhome; trumpPandemic; flatten the curve
3/19/2020	PPEshortage; saferathome; stayathome
3/21/2020	GetMePPE
3/26/2020	covidiot
3/28/2020	epitwitter
3/31/2020	Pandemie

*Note.* A sample of the keywords that Chen et al. tracked in their Twitter collection showing the appearance of “Chinese virus” as a tracked term starting on 3-16-2020. Retrieved from “Tracking Social Media Discourse about the COVID-19 pandemic: Development of a public coronavirus Twitter data set,” by Chen et al., 2020, *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*, 6(2), p. 3.

Rather than just focusing on the keyword being used, I want to add a more rhetorical view to such studies by acknowledging the fuller dramatic situation. Because pentadic analysis provides a means to understand the way in which a rhetor responds to a situation through rhetoric—t through the selection and highlighting of particular terms—it is particularly useful for



answering questions about rhetor’s motives or their attempts to structure audiences’ perceptions of situations. The units of analysis offered in the pentadic analysis are the five elements in the pentad: Agent, Act, Agency, Scene, and Purpose. Table 2 displays the definitions of the elements provided by West and Turner (p. 331).

**Table 2**

*Definitions of the Five Elements in Pentad*

<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Act	explores what is done by a person
Agent	is the person or persons performing the act
Agency	involves the means used by the agent to accomplish the act
Scene	examines the context surrounding the act
Purpose	asks what is the goal that the agent had in mind for the act or why the agent performed the act

*Note.* Definitions are retrieved from West and Turner’s *Introducing Communication Theory*.

Burke’s theory of dramatism provides us with a method that is well suited to address the act of communication between a text and the audience for the text, as well as the inner action of the text (West & Turner, p. 325). In this case, tweets are the text, those who may read the tweet are the audience, and the actions of interest are both the inner actions of the text and those of the audience. As will be shown in the analysis section, assigning motives to action is an important part of assigning meaning to and responding to others’ social media posts. In other words, when Twitter users encounter the #ChineseVirus, users assign a motive to the tweet. The pentadic method allows us to understand how these motives are embodied in tweets, and what agencies enable users to shape discourse and achieve their purposes.

In using the pentad to analyze an individual tweet, I determine the elements of the pentad

and identify what occurred in a particular act, and then explore the relations of these elements relative to each other. As I applied pentadic analysis to my data, I noticed that the pentadic analysis helps me discover how language choices in social media posts function as a mode of action that can misinform and target certain groups for bias and discrimination. Furthermore, I found that pentadic criticism kept me alert to ambiguity and to attempts to reduce the uncertainty active in social discourse. Tweets spent a good amount of time, for instance, attempting to discount potential interpretations of their past actions. The main features of my data, following a Burkean emphasis of dramatism, will be acts and purposes, but I am also interested in the consequences of these acts. Therefore, my analysis initially focuses on what the tweets are doing, or rather, what is being enacted and focuses specifically on verbs. But part of my analysis is also attempting to draw connections between individual choices in tweets and the broader patterns of action that they are connected to.

All of the tweets collected below can be read collectively as a text. However, I decided to separate them based on their purposes and treat each category separately. Based on my analysis of their purpose, I organized the tweets into four categories of purpose related to their use of #ChineseVirus: *criticizing* others for using the term #ChineseVirus, *justifying* one's own use of #ChineseVirus, *blaming* of a group associated with #ChineseVirus, and *moderation* of others using #ChineseVirus. Following this categorization process, I completed a cluster analysis of the tweets. To do this, I determined the key terms that are frequently used in the tweets. In this process, the frequency and intensity of certain words or phrases can be highlighted as selected key terms (Everett, 2018). This process is influenced by Annabelle Everett's (2018) work who applied dramatism via cluster analysis. The term "cluster" describes how keywords and symbols often used together relate to each other as words and symbols. In other words, the cluster terms

identify words used in proximity or in relation to other keywords (Blakesley, 2002, p. 104). As critics evaluate the word choice, symbolism, and other communicative devices in artifacts, they can identify broader patterns through individual choices. My resulting analysis reveals the collective argument presented by the collection, and support the claim that language choices in tweets function as a mode of action that can misinform other users and serve to target a certain group for bias. By showing how tweets accomplish these purposes, this thesis shows how hashtags can be used as rhetorical agencies for digital action.

### Results

The following sections display the categorized tweets (tables 3, 5, 7, and 9), listing a selection of the Twitter users from Appendix B that reacted to Trump's original tweets, along with its contents. Keywords are bolded within the tweets, and the cluster terms are italicized to give the readers a visual indication. The remaining tables (tables 4, 6, 8, and 10) present each category's key terms and clusters. Analysis section displays a sample size of the analysis that is enough to be representative. To see the entire chart of the analysis, see Appendices A and B.

**Table 3**

*Examples of Tweets from Appendix B Engaging in Criticizing using #ChineseVirus*

User Handle	Tweet Content
@eddiejmauro	“Mr. <b>Trump</b> - stop calling it the #ChineseVirus... It's <i>wrong</i> . It's <i>racist</i> . You are <i>not representing</i> Americans...”
@rweingarten	“How dare <b>Trump</b> keep <i>slurring</i> Chinese by calling this the #ChineseVirus - it’s called #coronavirus or #COVID19”
@adamkokesh	“While <b>Trump</b> is <i>calling</i> this the #ChineseVirus, he is <i>selling out</i> this country to China & losing his disastrous trade war. " <b>They</b> " are <i>outmaneuvering</i> "us" & will come out ahead because <b>Trump</b> <i>shut down</i> the economy needlessly. He's a criminal co-conspirator or a useful idiot.”

User Handle	Tweet Content
@IAmSophiaNelson	“He said it again the #ChineseVirus he doubles down. It works for his base. <b>I</b> know people who love the guy--and they love when he pushes those code words. It makes them feel powerful. This is just bullshit. <b>I</b> am <i>no China defender</i> . <b>They</b> are <i>communists</i> . But this is not appropriate.”

**Table 4**

*Key Term Clusters in Tweets Engaging in Criticism*

Key Term	Cluster
They	Outmaneuvering, Communists
I	Think, Call, Know, Not a defender of China
Trump (President)	Slur, Call, Sell out, Shut down, Not representing, Racist, Wrong

Table 3 displays tweets condemning others for using the phrase #ChineseVirus, revealing the key terms: **Trump**, **I**, and **They**. The keyword, **Trump**, is clustered with some verbs referring to naming or labeling, such as *slur* and *call*. These clusters are associated with the key terms related to politics and economics, such as *sell out* and *shut down*. They reveal Trump's influence on the world, whether negatively or positively. **Trump** is also associated with racist and wrong, arguing that he sets the tone for how the virus originated and stigmatizes a certain ethnic group as the virus. The pairing of these clusters reveals a controversial claim: that calling the Chinese virus is not only wrong and racist, but it also serves a division between those who accept the term Chinese virus and those who think the term gives derogatory labels. Table 3 lists these tweets discussing the division between the people in America and China, associated with **they** and **I**. **They** is linked to *communists* and *outmaneuvering*, referencing the Chinese political party and the threat the Americans feel while the keyword **I** is clustered with *think*, *know*, and *not defending*. This group of tweets reveals a clear description of the division that **Trump** fueled.

**Table 5***Examples of Tweets from Appendix B Engaging in Justifying using #ChineseVirus*

User Handle	Tweet Content
@GrahamAllen_1	“BREAKING: The Chinese Virus is called that because <b>it comes from</b> China... The End! If that offends you during this time you are the problem... RT! #ChinaLiedPeopleDied #ChineseVirus”
@SandipGhose	Chinese propaganda machinery comparing #Covid_19 pandemic with 9/11 is an admission that <b>it</b> is a <i>man-made tragedy</i> . So, entirely <i>justified</i> to call <b>it</b> #ChineseVirus, #ChinaVirus or even #ChinaWuhanVirus. Let’s not be shy of <i>naming or labelling it</i> @palkisu @WIONews
@HeyTammyBruce	“Joining @seanhannity at about 915p ET w #ChineseVirus & political updates. See you at @FoxNews”
@yesnicksearcy	“Everyone, please stop calling the stuff you get at @PandaExpress ‘Chinese <b>food.</b> ’ That is <i>racist</i> . #ChineseVirus”
@MatthewBetley	“Love <b>it!</b> @realDonaldTrump starts by <i>calling it</i> the #ChineseVirus - GOOD!”
@WayneDupreeShow	“I find <b>it</b> weird that non-Asian liberals have their feelings <i>hurt</i> because some people the term #ChineseVirus Or #ChineseWuhanVirus ( <i>originated</i> in China) The same people tell black Americans what's racist. What world that we live in.”
@NickAdamsinUSA	“- Secure <b>our</b> borders. - Bring <b>our</b> businesses home. - Buy American. - Hire American. - Become less dependent on other nations. Even before the #ChineseVirus, Trump had the right ideas! He still does! He will lead the greatest comeback in history. THE BEST IS YET TO COME!”

**Table 6***Key Term Clusters in Tweets Engaging in Justification*

Key Term	Cluster
It	Come from, Originated, Naming, Labelling, Justified, Man-made tragedy
Food	Racist

The tweets classified in Table 5 involve the users justifying a specific situation in which they encounter the term “Chinese Virus.” There are two keywords present: **It** and **food**. **It** functions as a keyword directly referring to the virus since the rhetor of this specific tweet is positioning the virus to identify the Chinese virus. This keyword is associated with the verbs referring to the origin, such as *come from* and *be originated*. A common rationale for calling it the Chinese virus is that the first reported virus cases were in Wuhan, China. Following this rationale, *naming* the virus with a geographic location or an ethnic group is often justified. The keyword, **It**, is also associated with a cluster, *man-made tragedy*. The rhetor interprets the virus as a man-made tragedy within a given situation that Chinese propaganda machinery has compared the virus with 9/11. This clustered word *man-made tragedy* further reinforces the conspiracy theories that may have raised the prospect that China deliberately caused the outbreak. The association of the *man-made tragedy* references a fundamental justification for using the term Chinese virus.

This group of tweets also reveals the keyword **food** along with *racist*. One tweet makes a sarcastic remark by implying that if calling coronavirus the Chinese virus is racist, then calling food from Panda Express (fast food restaurant chain that serves American Chinese cuisine) as Chinese food is also racist. In this way, the use of keywords to engage in arguments based on analogy can reveal the strategies used by prosumers to achieve their purpose.

**Table 7**

*Examples of Tweets from Appendix B Engaging in Blaming a Group by Using #ChineseVirus*

User Handle	Tweet Content
@rakibehsan	“Some appear to be more outraged by <b>Trump's use</b> of <b>#ChineseVirus</b> , than <b>China's</b> role in <i>bringing</i> on this global pandemic. <b>China silenced</b> its own doctors who issued warnings. <b>China</b> has been anything but transparent at the global level. <b>#ChinaLiedPeopleDied</b> #coronavirus #COVID19”
@AndrewPollackFL	Where did the <b>Chinese</b> virus <i>originate</i> ? <b>China</b> Who <i>silenced</i> whistleblowers? <b>China</b> Who <i>tried to cover it up</i> ? <b>China</b> Who <i>lied</i> to the world about the outbreak? <b>China</b> Who <i>refused help</i> to contain the virus? <b>China</b> Who <i>infected</i> the world? <b>China</b> #ChineseVirus
@rohitjswl01	Call me anything I dont care, hardcore reality is that whatever is happening today it’s because of <b>#China</b> , not blaming their normal citizens, but the <b>government</b> tried their level best to <i>hide</i> this thing and as a result this is leading to MASS MURDER all over the world <b>#ChineseVirus</b>
@sumitsaurabh	History will remember, how <b>Chinese</b> <i>killed</i> so many of us. Why? Just because few <i>idiots</i> love to eat bats in their soups and sandwiches! #corona <b>#ChineseVirus</b>
@DeanObeidallah	“ <b>We</b> are going into a war with a deadly virus led by a <b>President</b> who is <i>serial liar</i> and <i>bigot</i> who calls COVID-19 the ‘ <b>#ChineseVirus</b> ’ to give red meat to his base and whose only concern his entire life has been what is good for him personally. What could go wrong?!”

**Table 8**

*Key Term Clusters in Tweets Engaging in Blaming*

Key Term	Cluster
Trump (President)	Serial liar, Bigot
Chinese and China	Onslaught, Unleash, Kill, Infect, Lie, Silence, Refuse, Report, Bring
We	Fight, Prepare
Government	Hide

The tweets within Table 7 display the broader perspectives of people, particularly regarding the condemnation of certain people or a group. Keywords, including **Chinese (China)**, **We**, **Government**, and **Trump**, reference an underlying target to be blamed. Determining **China** to be equated with **Chinese**, they are treated as keywords that justify discriminatory behavior against the place and associated ethnic groups. The cluster terms for this keyword are *unleash*, *kill*, *infect*, *lie*, *silence*, *refuse*, *repay*, *bring*, *onslaught* and *idiots*. These clustered terms imply that **Chinese** people and **China** worsened the outbreak by lying, bringing the virus, and refusing to report the cases in their area. The key terms **Chinese** and **China** reveal a portrayal of aggressors that hoax the world into believing the virus is negligible. Here, the key term **Chinese** is associated with *lie* and *silence*, while **we** are associated with fighting and preparing. These connotations indicate that lies and silence are the actions experienced by **we** and employed by **the Chinese** and **China**. One of the tweets also reveals the keyword **government** along with *hide*. This particular cluster reveals the conspiracy theories toward the government in China. In other words, the rhetor indicates the assumption that the government in China may have hidden information about the virus. The association is made clear by the main idea expressed in this tweet: that people blame China for the virus because the Chinese and China worsen the outbreak across the globe by hiding the truth.

These underlying messages of #ChineseVirus further reinforced another hashtag movement such as #ChinaLiedPeopleDied. These ideas express the rhetor's worldview through the verb forms associated with the key terms. The artifacts target the Chinese with a cluster such as *infect* and *kill*. Allyson Chiu (2020) reported that Charissa Cheah, who is leading a study examining coronavirus-related discrimination against Chinese Americans criticizes Trump by claiming that he is “essentially throwing his American citizens or residents of Chinese and Asian



descent ‘under the bus’ by ignoring the consequences of the language he uses” (Chiu, 2020)

Creating clusters of such negative terms is not just blaming a group of people who have a higher risk of infecting others, but is generalizing a group of people as dangerous and deserving of exclusion. In contrast, the key term **Trump** along with *serial liar* and *bigot*, there is a clear contrast between the perspectives toward the target of blaming. This clear contrast reveals that labeling the virus that way will only ratchet up tensions between the two countries, while resulting in the kind of xenophobia that American leaders should discourage.

**Table 9**

*Examples of Tweets from Appendix B Moderating the use of #ChineseVirus*

User Handle	Tweet Content
@BrianZahnd	“During a pandemic Satan wants you to <i>scapegoat</i> a <b>people</b> group. Jesus doesn’t. Choose wisely. #ChineseVirus”
@CarmineSabia	“It is a #ChineseVirus. It is the Chinese government that is the issue. It is their government that hid the facts from the world. It is not the <i>Chinese people</i> . If you are attacking <i>random Chinese people</i> you are a dangerous moron.”
@AbdulElSayed	“To my <b>Chinese-American friends</b> , I’m so sorry that as our country reels under #COVID19, <b>ppl</b> responsible are trying to <i>scapegoat</i> the place your family came from by calling this a #ChineseVirus. I have a small sense of what it’s like. Nobody should face that. #WithYouToday”
@melissawatsonfl	It’s not technical reasons that make Trump calling COVID-19 “#ChineseVirus” wrong. It’s the clear race-baiting implications, incitement of xenophobia, & <i>fueling</i> of <b>racism</b> . My heart breaks for our <b>Asian American</b> community who have been <i>unfairly targeted</i> by <b>racist</b> attacks #COVID19
@davidmweissman	"If you’re an <b>Asian American</b> and is going through an <i>escalation</i> of <b>racism</b> of any kind because of @realDonaldTrump <b>racist</b> rhetoric calling the #CoronaVirus a #ChineseVirus, share your <i>story</i> here so we can let him know this needs to stop.”
@eddiejmauro	“Mr. Trump - stop calling it the #ChineseVirus... It's wrong. It's <b>racist</b> . You are not representing Americans...”

**Table 10**

*Key Term Clusters in Tweets Engaging in Moderation*

Key Terms	Clusters
People	Scapegoat, Chinese, Random, Responsible
Asian American	Unfairly targeted, Racism, Friends
Racist	Fueling, Escalation

Table 9 displays the tweets that involve users expressing negative responses toward the spreading of hateful rhetoric. **People**, referring to the *Chinese* group, appeared alongside the cluster words *scapegoat* and *random*. Associating *scapegoat* with this particular keyword implies that the rhetor believes Chinese people were made the *scapegoat* for the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the *random* citizens. The inclusion of *scapegoat* as an associative cluster word signifies that Chinese people may experience being blamed and assaulted. **Chinese American** is equated with **Asian-American**, associating *unfairly targeted*, *racism*, and *friends*. The rhetor reveals the effects of racism, alongside the Asian-Americans *targeted* since the coronavirus began to spread and eventually *escalated* and *fueling* the **racism**. It is evident that the use of #Chinesevirus exerts an impact on people living in China and indeed communities across China. Helping to support these ideas are news reports that refer to fake news and xenophobia, question social media trends, such as #ChinaLiePeopleDied, and draw attention to the implications of discrimination and hatred. These reasons alone should prompt social media users to be cautious with their language choices.

### **Analysis**

An analysis of this particular collection of tweets from the #ChineseVirus movement indicates the rhetors' motives for calling coronavirus the "Chinese virus." Upon analyzing the

tweets, I could identify a purpose of each tweet and discovered several key terms and resulting clusters that reveal the fuller social discourse surrounding this term and indicate the rhetors' collective motivation to use the hashtag.

In my analysis, I add elements of Kenneth Burke's dramaturgical criticism. For the first section, I applied five elements in the pentadic analysis to each tweet to understand the fuller dramaturgical situation and how the rhetor relates to the situation. I argue that the pentadic analysis may play a significant role in exploring the impact of language use in Tweets, particularly via the hashtag. Throughout the text, the rhetors use language that communicates a controversy surrounding the pandemic, further reinforcing the a worldview that favors hatred, bias, and division between society. These tweets indicate different perspectives with different purposes: to criticize people who use the term Chinese virus with a hashtag #ChineseVirus; to justify those who use the term; to blame and condemn a certain group by using the term; to moderate the frequency of using the term. Based on the pentadic analysis, I ultimately determined some keywords based on the frequency and intensity of the terms and some clustered terms to describe how they are clustered in proximity or relation to the keywords. Although the tweets vary in the specific content, these tweets deliver their messages to their audiences: the growing concern about the surge of racial discrimination and hatred against people of the Asian community and the condemnation of government, society, or a group of people for the pandemic outbreak. I discovered that the tweets could be used as a part of a movement to either defend or disparage people. The use of the #ChineseVirus hashtag provided a space for these users to present a problem, raise a question, and share concerns as acknowledgments of the issues and reinforce related movements such as #ChinaLiedPeopleDied or #StopAsianHate.

The Scene, one of the components in the pentad, is both the background out of which the act or speech grows and the circumstances in which it happened. Burke states that "the scene should be a fit container for the act" (as cited in Blakesley, 2002, p. 24). Trump's tweets, which constituted his act of justification in branding the coronavirus as the "Chinese Virus," were shaped by the events when Trump invoked the controversial term in the Twitter posts. This tweet eventually provided support for anti-Asian sentiment and hate crimes, which are themselves part of the Scene out of which the hashtags grew. The rhetoric of #ChineseVirus began as a rhetorical response to the ambiguous and complex of Trump's language use. In narrowing the scenic circumference, the circumstances surrounding each tweet must be examined. Such things as the anti-Asian sentiment, hate crime, misinformation or conspiracy theories, the social media platform's handling of the fake news or false claims, and the hashtags campaign spreading the awareness of hate crime all exerted an influence upon the meaning and impact of Trump's tweets. Understanding the scene of these tweets means paying attention to the social media platforms, the language used, and the actions of prosumers spreading (mis)information and responding to it as well.

Consider Table 11, which presents one of the examples from Appendix B of tweets that used #ChineseVirus. In this tweet, it is being used to challenge the Chinese government's supposed suppression of factual information related to the origin of COVID-19.

**Table 11**

*Pentadic description of Tweet using #ChineseVirus while criticizing the Chinese government*

User Handle	Tweet Content	Pentadic Description
@rohitjswl01	“Call me anything I don’t care, hardcore reality is that whatever is happening today it’s because of #China, not blaming their normal citizens, but the <b>government</b> tried their level best to <i>hide</i> this thing and as a result this is leading to MASS MURDER all over the world #ChineseVirus” (Jaiswal, 2020)	<b>Agent:</b> @rohitjswl01 <b>Act:</b> tweet; drawing attention <b>Agency:</b> hashtags; capitalization, bolding; truth-telling ethos; Twitter <b>Scene:</b> March 20th; Chinese political situation <b>Purpose:</b> To blame the government in China for hiding facts about the virus, leading to deaths

Noting the purpose as is done above is key to moving analysis beyond merely the content of these tweets. In this practice, one could consider the rhetor's actions from all of the perspectives from five interrelated elements. In this example, the user who posted the tweet can be identified as the Agent, though they might also be acting as a representative of a collective group. The Act might be considered the tweet itself, though a characterization of this act such as “drawing attention” can help to more deeply understand how that act might be looked at. One important point about pentadic analysis is that it functions as a heuristic that generates insights; it is not simply enough to fill each slot with one idea or word, but to explore how these perspectives draw our attention to multiple aspects of this communicative drama. The Agency used in such a tweet is also multiple. One might think of the agency as Twitter itself, but it is possible to identify any number of “moves” being made use of that help the rhetor accomplish their purpose. The use of capitalization, bolding, or hashtags can be agencies, just as other choices such as the use of statistics, stories, or emojis are also part of the affordances available to Twitter users. The Scene is both the immediate location of the tweet and its readers, but also the greater social discourse background that it emerged from and will be a part of going forward. This approach helped me

gain a deeper insight into the purpose, but I could also determine the keyword and clustered terms based on the findings. This tweet uses the keyword **government** along with *hide*. The cluster analysis plays a significant role in this tweet that revealed the conspiracy theories toward the government in China. These language choices matter whether or not the rhetor has racist intentions or hatred toward the Chinese government, because the individual's intent is a minor issue compared to the consequences of language choices. Even as Trump fueled hatred and violence with his use of #ChineseVirus by stigmatizing a certain ethnic group or geographic location, the #ChineseVirus also became a means for open discussion of the various communities impacted by acts such as discrimination, condemnation, or the spreading of conspiracies. Such campaigns began as a counter-testimony to Trump's language choices.

In addition, I found the social media activities, such as using the discriminatory hashtag #ChineseVirus, may bring the results of the inattentive to perceiving misinformation and conspiracy theories. Within the chosen artifact of study, the hashtag communicates to the audience the specific issues addressed by the rhetors: racism and hatred are rising among society due to choices related to the virus; a division between people has been generated. Tweets that resist such division are examples of “hashtag activism” or using a social platform to target a specific issue. The use of social media platforms such as Twitter, and the inclusion of a simple and attention-grabbing hashtag allows prosumers to consume and produce the target specific issues surrounding the pandemic in each tweet.

Though applying dramatic pentad and cluster analysis is not yet a common method for investigating tweets, it helped analyze the collection of tweets to reveal how participation in the movement allowed spreading misinformation or spreading awareness. These tweets reinforce the movement's overall message, allowing them to raise awareness of the purpose and consequences

of (in)action. One important takeaway from these collections of tweets is how often motive is directly referenced by rhetors. For instance, though it justified its own actions by offering pure motives for its own choices, the Trump administration often evoked more malicious motives in order to criticize others. The Trump administration's responses to criticism often took the approach of identifying the motives of the criticism as merely "fake" news, as attempting to attack Trump himself, or as attempting to create division among Americans. For instance, in a tweet on March 18, 2020 (one in the same time period of other tweets analyzed here, and responding to criticism of its use of #ChineseVirus, but not directly using the #ChineseVirus hashtag, but a variant of it), the Trump administration responded to criticism of its use of the "Chinese virus" phrase by identifying the purposes of the news media as being something other than stopping discrimination: "Spanish Flu. West Nile Virus. Zika. Ebola. All named for places. Before the media's fake outrage, even CNN called it "Chinese Coronavirus." Those trying to divide us must stop rooting for America to fail and give Americans real into they need to get through the crisis" (The White House 45 Archived, 2020). This defense attempts to justify the use of the "Chinese virus" phrase but does so without reference to future consequences of this action, or to past motives for these other phrases having been created. For instance, this response ignores the history of motives that allowed for the naming of these viruses in reference to geographic location, some of which may have been prompted by discriminatory beliefs. In other words, to some readers who are aware of past motives for choosing these names, this tweet will merely sound as if the Trump administration is arguing that "past administrations have been discriminatory, so we can be too." It also ignores the fact that not all geographic references are tied closely to ethnic or cultural groups (such as "West Nile"). More importantly, this tweet attempts to disparage the motives of the news media and others for rejecting this choice, by

characterizing this criticism as hypocritical, intentional false, and divisive. It can also be argued that this tweet gestures towards the consequences of the choices of news media to focus on this topic, since seemingly it will prevent them from reporting the “real info” that will help Americans survive the pandemic. All of this shows that debates and conjectures about motives are always already deeply rooted in social media exchanges but are often limited to disparaging the motives of others while presenting one’s own motive as virtuous or straightforward. These warring groups emerge as virtual communities within social media platforms and can be built around specific hashtags, the meaning of which is fought over publicly even as the consequences are felt by the affected parties.

Identifying social media platforms as virtual communities that influence each other allows me to argue that hashtags are public arguments. Moreover, the public arguments formed by hashtags are elevated to writing as social action (Heilig, 2015). When positioning hashtags as a mode of action, awareness is a critical advantage developed through writing practices within virtual communities. As the purpose of the hashtag has evolved from a symbolic search tool to a marker of a social movement (Heilig, 2015), the implementation of the hashtag becomes a direct result of social exigencies, such as its use to report and promote awareness (Heilig, 2015). In its use, the hashtag is an active method of redirecting social exigency through promoting awareness of the subject in the virtual community (Heilig, 2015). Because they are easily digestible, hashtags can draw attention with catchy slogans or briefly articulated commentary on social content. For example, standing in contrast to #ChineseVirus, some hashtag campaigns spread positive influence, such as #StayAtHomeChallege, #StayHome, and #AloneTogether exploded on social media platforms in 2020 during the pandemic.



### Figure 3

*#StayHome. Alone Together Campaign Graphic*



*Note.* Retrieved from “The Ad Council and Google push ‘#StayHome. Save lives’ industry-wide movement,” by Imogen Watson, 2020, April 8, *The Drum*.

<https://www.thedrum.com/news/2020/04/08/the-ad-council-and-google-push-stayhome-save-lives-industry-wide-movement>

### Figure 4

*#StayHome. Save Lives Campaign Graphic*



The formation of the content that earns attention is facilitated not just by the individual user but also by the user's community, which supports and enhances the content being distributed.

Therefore, the role of community takes on a far more nuanced role than the audience in virtual communication.

In *The Economics of Attention*, Richard Lanham (2007) argues that the information economy in the 20th century is dedicated to capturing the viewers' attention rather than

conveying an intrinsic meaning or substantive content. To some degree, this is necessary due to attention being a limited resource, combined with the large number of media messages that we are faced with on a daily basis, all of which recognize that attention being given to one can mean less attention given to another. In order to be responsible prosumers, however, individuals must ask themselves to strive to be more than "masters of attention" (Lanham, 2007, p. 257). They must ask themselves to evaluate carefully the digital content they wish to share with others and their motivations for sharing. By asking the users to develop models for analyzing utterances and rhetorical functions to individual tweets and hashtags, this study can help them to see how social media interactions function and what they convey about what they represent. However, there is a distinction between attention and awareness (Heilig, 2015). According to Heilig (2015), attention is:

. . . a far more obtainable goal when constructing hashtags to reach an audience, achieved with something as simple as attaching important to a post. Attention is the initial appeal of the content, and therefore both receiving an adequate amount of attention from users within social media. Awareness is the cultivation of attention to achieve social justice or critique; therefore, awareness is a far more demanding goal than just winning attention. It necessitates a call to action to its users. (p. 48)

The popularity of a hashtag can gain even more attention following its use by public figures or celebrities (i.e., former President Trump). Such public figures have more influence on social media platforms than average users due to the number of followers and retweets and due to repetition of their posts in other news media. By having prominent public figures contributing to the hashtags, the attention garnered from users transformed into political awareness on a more massive scale. Individuals such as the President of the United States or any celebrity willing to

share a political message with their followers can effectively use hashtags. One might even argue that it is more effective when the celebrity is not a politician, as their communications are more likely to reach an audience not already being reached with that same message or who already agree with that political viewpoint. In other words, social media platforms are best as attention-builders when they reach those not already familiar with the message being shared. At the least, this means that savvy rhetoricians must constantly seek new venues and spokespeople to gain attention and raise awareness.

Rhetorically, becoming an effective social movement that fulfills motives through action is a matter of whether or not attention transitions into awareness (and then perhaps whether awareness transitions into action). Although such discussion is an area of contention among social media, the ultimate goal of using hashtags is gathering attention and turning that attention into awareness on a global scale, creating social exigency where none existed before (Heilig, 2015, p. 51). Furthermore, by helping users and audiences become more conscious of their natural capacities for taking actions through language and through consciousness, prosumers can see themselves as activists shaping public discourse, and view the hashtag as a potential agency for gaining attention and raising awareness. Teachers as well may find that a social media-based pedagogy can successfully result in helping students better understand the affordances of social media platforms, and to practice perfecting those capacities (Kneupper, 2009). This would be a natural fit for any composition class focused on making arguments, as the hashtag is a form of public argument.

In 2007, Twitter users began using a sign (#) as a standard form of a tag for a particular word signaled to audiences to be findable by people who searched for it. The use of hashtag symbol (#) has facilitated sorting, finding, labeling, and clicking. Therefore, hashtags allow users

to communicate about a common event or topic if they use hashtags. Because of the hashtags, users can search for a particular word or phrase, and all the posted tweets using that hashtag will appear. The traditional use of tags was for making information more findable (Daer et al., 2014). However, as social media is expanding, the strategic use of hashtags increases as well. For example, people utilize hashtags to their advantage through comprehensive hashtag research and a strong content marketing campaign that identifies the existing hashtags and potential hashtags that can serve to achieve the rhetor's goals. In claiming that hashtags have the potential to be public arguments, it is significant to discuss and relate it to Burke's theory and make the distinction between Agency and Act. In conveying information within a virtual community such as Twitter, hashtags are more accurately positioned as the Agency. These tags serve to connect disparate authors and tweets, allowing for connections and relationships to form that might not otherwise exist. In the most basic sense, hashtags are closely tied to their content. Adding "#covid19" to a post means the post itself contains information about coronavirus and is intended to be found by people searching for that specific term. In a similar vein, using #ChineseVirus associated with the virus means the rhetor intends to spread the term or hopes to get attention from those who have a similar interest.

The discussion on the shifts of the hashtag and the eventual claim about the rhetorical functions of hashtags operate within the theoretical framework of Kenneth Burke's dramatism. As we know, Burke developed the dramatism theory as a method for analyzing human relationships and their addressing of motives through language. As a method, Burke's dramatism theory addresses how individuals explain their actions to others, what the cultural and social structural influences on these explanations might be, and what effect relationships among the terms might have on these explanations. Also, dramatism attempts to account for the

motivational or explanatory terms and their influence on human action and particular sociological terms when explaining human action. Burke is dealing with the influence of explanatory language on the social scientific explanation of human action. In this sense, the most fundamental point of Burke's object of study is *motive* (Overington, 1977).

It is essential to establish the foundation that hashtags are a form of writing style, but what is most interesting about them is their purposefulness. Hashtags serve appropriately as artifacts in Burke's dramatism by emphasizing the active component to the writing process because they embody people's motives, both by embodying the author's purpose for writing, but in also encapsulating how we understand the parallel motives of readers, like when we note that a certain hashtag is "trending." The tracking contributes to our understanding, for example, of how social media campaigns sometimes gain momentum and lose it just as quickly. This function of hashtags then operates on a process similar to Burke's pentad theory, with hashtags achieving a popular enough sharing or retweets on social media platforms to represent significant patterns in the scene of communication. By investigating hashtags as an artifact of writing and then examining the artifact within virtual spaces, this section will establish how hashtags may rhetorically function in the capacity of misinformation and conspiracy theories within the communities formed by social media platforms.

With Burke's theory, the appropriate lenses to evaluate and categorize hashtags as an artifact of writing are found in applying the pentad. When situating hashtags as a rhetorical agency, the question people should have been where it relates in the frame of Burke's pentad. In his book, *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke (1945) explained that "any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what has done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how the agent did it (agency), and why (purpose)"

(p. xv). The pentad thus consists of tools established by Burke to understand both motive and action in any given dramatic and rhetorical situation, and it "is a strategic method for analyzing discourse by focusing on how it attributes human motivation to action" (Blakesley, 2002, p. 32).

Initially, it may seem challenging to place hashtags into any clear role within the pentad. Hashtags can easily fit within the position of the Act. However, hashtag creation and distribution can just as well serve the function of rhetorical Agency, as hashtags are the avenue through which content is delivered to a massive audience. Finally, the assessment of hashtags within the pentad method of analysis is whether or not users fulfill the Agent's role. Moreover, social media platforms complicate the traditional distinction between author and audience. Users operate as agents in creating the hashtag's message. However, they also perform as agents when passing the message along when they tag new content with the same hashtag or perpetuate the original content through retweeting. Trying to conceptualize the performance of hashtags in Burke's pentad allows us to see that the pentad, rather than being a strictly coded system where elements can only fit into particular slots, is a much more flexible system that can be used to draw attention to the multiple functions of communication practices within any specific ecology.

### **Conclusion: Encouraging Critical Prosumers in a Post-truth Era**

Those interested in preparing prosumers for the possibilities and responsibilities of ethical participation in social media can look to the strategies discussed here as providing insight into how individual language choices matter in terms of the connections they make between ideas and action. By drawing attention to the role that social media can play during times of crisis, where bad actors exploit our fear of losing our place in social hierarchies, dramatisitic analysis drawing on hashtags and clusters of terms can help lay bare the role that language choices play in identifying achieving motives. At the least, acknowledging how bias is reproduced in social

media can make us better prosumers who are prepared to look past the personal impact of any piece of information to better understand how choices in these platforms affect our ability to manage attention and awareness around specific issues. While activists may embrace the possibilities of these platforms, they must also be aware of how their choices may play into existing biases. Misinformation that evokes user biases can lead to unethical behavior online and offline, and intentional misinformation about the pandemic is just the latest example of arguments that can have weighty impacts on public discourse and public health.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity to understand the impact of social media on public health and private action. Recently, educator and researcher Petar Jandrić (2020) writes the following: “It is crucial that academic researchers working in the humanities and social sciences immediately join the struggle against the pandemic” (p. 236). The outbreak is already connected with many existing theories and discussions in rhetoric, writing, and technical communication, such as post-truth rhetoric (McComiskey, 2017). Addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates the attention of digital communication and writing scholars, and this ongoing struggle will play out in classrooms and social media platforms with an ever-changing cast of actors playing their parts.

Future work in this area might provide insights into how to combat misinformation, how to break through resistance to facts and expertise, or how to make rhetorical actors more accountable for their online discourse. Doing so could make it easier and safer for people to gather news online from sources without having to worry that they are being presented with data that does not serve the public interest or meet their individual needs. Expecting individuals to do the work to separate fact from fiction online, and researching the intentions and claims of every

tweet, may be expecting too much from individuals, however. Even those dedicated to doing so can find it hard to navigate these systems, or to find the time to do so effectively.

What Burke shows us is that such acts are related to the greater ecologies in which they operate, and that one can influence these ecologies by making changes in a number of small ways. Each actor with more social awareness, each improved technological agency, and each increasingly virtuous motive, sets the scene for more equitable and honest discourse. Ultimately, what we want is prosumers willing to make good choices as they navigate social media spaces. Rhetorical agencies like Burke's dramatism might be useful tools for those trying to influence prosumer behavior. As a director who has done the necessary work to prepare her team of script writers, actors, set builders, and prop makers for this moment might say once all has been made ready. . . action!



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## Appendix A

### *Collection of Trump's Tweets Using the Phrase "Chinese Virus" between 3-16-20 and 3-23-20*

Date	Tweet Content
Mar 16 <sup>th</sup> 2020	"The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!"
Mar 17 <sup>th</sup> 2020	"Cuomo wants 'all states to be treated the same.' But all states aren't the same. Some are being hit hard by the Chinese Virus, some are being hit practically not at all. New York is a very big "hotspot", West Virginia has, thus far, zero cases. Andrew, keep politics out of it..."
Mar 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2020 6:41:14 AM EST	"For the people that are now out of work because of the important and necessary containment policies, for instance the shutting down of hotels, bars and restaurants, money will soon be coming to you. The onslaught of the Chinese Virus is not your fault! Will be stronger than ever!"
Mar 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2020 7:12:45 AM EST	"I will be having a news conference today to discuss very important news from the FDA concerning the Chinese Virus!"
Mar 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2020 7:46:33 AM EST	"I always treated the Chinese Virus very seriously and have done a very good job from the beginning, including my very early decision to close the "borders" from China – against the wishes of almost all. Many lives were saved. The Fake News new narrative is disgraceful and false!"
Mar 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2020 5:37:27 PM EST	"I only signed the Defense Production Act to combat the Chinese Virus should we need to invoke it in a worst-case scenario in the future. Hopefully there will be no need, but we are all in this TOGETHER!"
Mar 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2020 10:53:27 PM EST	"CHINESE VIRUS FACT CHECK <a href="https://t.co/qJugCylvE2">https://t.co/qJugCylvE2</a> "
Mar 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020 9:20:08 PM EST	"My friend (always there when I've needed him!), Senator @RandPaul, was just tested "positive" from the Chinese Virus. That is not good! He is strong and will get better. Just spoke to him and he was in good spirits."


## Appendix B

*Collection of Verified Twitter Users' Tweets Using the Hashtag "#ChineseVirus" between 3-16-20 and 3-23-20*

Date	User Handle	Tweet Content
Mar 16 2020	@johnpavlovitz	"If we're going to call COVID19 the #ChineseVirus because it came from there, then we should call @realDonaldTrump's administration the #RussianPresidency."
Mar 17, 2020	@yesnicksearcy	"Everyone, please stop calling the stuff you get at @PandaExpress "Chinese food." That is racist." #ChineseVirus
	@BrianZahnd	"During a pandemic Satan wants you to scapegoat a people group. Jesus doesn't. Choose wisely." #ChineseVirus
	@RepGosar	"Good answer by @realDonaldTrump on using #ChineseVirus. China has falsely claimed the U.S. military created and spread the Wuhan #Coronavirus. The reality is China's crackdown on free speech aided the spread of this deadly virus around the globe."
	@AlanaKStewart	"Have we gotten so PC that we can be intimidated into not saying that this virus came from China? What about the Ebola virus or West Nile Virus? Or Spanish flu? We can acknowledge its origin without blaming the people there. #coronavirus #ChineseVirus"
	@CarmineSabia	"It is a #ChineseVirus. It is the Chinese government that is the issue. It is their government that hid the facts from the world. It is not the Chinese people. If you are attacking random Chinese people you are a dangerous moron."  "Twitter is banned in China and somehow my tweets are inundated with responses from China. They are spreading Chinese propaganda and Twitter and @Jack should take action against it. It is the Chinese. #ChineseVirus"
	@RMConservative	"I kid you not. Jared is pushing expanding EB-5 visas to bring in more Chinese nationals to further buy up America in the very package supposedly designed as #ChineseVirus response!"

	@MarshaBlackburn	“From tanks in Tiananmen Square, to Bird flu and SARS, the Chinese coronavirus is another example of a culture of suppression and censorship that kills thousands of people. ChineseVirus #COVID19”
	@AbdulElSayed	“To my Chinese American friends, I’m so sorry that as our country reels under #COVID19, ppl responsible are trying to scapegoat the place your family came from by calling this a #ChineseVirus. I have a small sense of what it’s like. Nobody should face that. #WithYouToday”
	@melissawatsonfl	“It’s not technical reasons that make Trump calling COVID-19 “#ChineseVirus” wrong. It’s the clear race-baiting implications, incitement of xenophobia, & fueling of racism. My heart breaks for our Asian American community who have been unfairly targeted by racist attacks #COVID19”
	@JennLi123	“Checked to see why #ChineseVirus was trending, immediately regretted it. Guess #YellowPeril is back in style, guys. Also, kinda glad that we’re doing #ShelterInPlace in the Bay Area so I have an excuse to stay home and not get attacked by racists 🙄”
	@DeanObeidallah	“We are going into a war with a deadly virus led by a President who is serial liar and bigot who calls COVID-19 the “#ChineseVirus” to give red meat to his base and whose only concern his entire life has been what is good for him personally. What could go wrong?!”
Mar 18, 2020	@davidmweissman	"If you’re an Asian American and is going through an escalation of racism of any kind because of @realDonaldTrump racist rhetoric calling the #CoronaVirus a #ChineseVirus, share your story here so we can let him know this needs to stop.”
	@CollinsforGA	“The virus came from China. China tried to cover it up and blame our military. President @realdonaldtrump is 100% correct in calling it the #ChineseVirus!”
	@DanMacPherson	“Calling the #COVID2019 virus the #ChineseVirus is the simplest way for the President* to maintain division in his country while he stands up and calls for ‘Unity’. Days after calling it a ‘hoax’. It’s his only power - division & unrest.”
	@HeyTammyBruce	“Joining @seanhannity at about 915p ET w #ChineseVirus & political updates. See you at @FoxNews”



@ManMundra	<p>“China is at war with the world!!! China is a Rogue Nation. Open your eyes and work / plan for India to be the best destination for International Manufacturing Hub. <u>#China</u> <u>#ChineseVirus</u> <u>#coronavirus</u>”</p> <p>“<u>#China</u> is the Problem! World forces have to join hands, sanction China. Block all the raw materials going into China. Impose heavy duties or even ban all imports from China. While we are fighting this <u>#ChineseVirus</u> prepare the World for Manufacturing Shift from China. <u>#ChinaLies</u>”</p>
@Rossputin	<p>“Is there anything more stupid than snowflakes complaining about the <u>#coronavirus</u> being called the <u>#WuhanVirus</u> or <u>#ChineseVirus</u>? If it's as stupid as I think it is, then it's also a waste of time arguing with those complainers. There are MUCH bigger issues than the name.”</p>
@susantran	<p>“A serious question, I’ve been following <u>#coronavirus</u> details since January but did China at one point blame the virus on US soldiers?! This is so odd. I never read, saw, or heard this detail. <u>#POTUS</u> says it’s why he calls it the <u>#ChineseVirus</u>. <u>#COVID19</u>”</p>
@Hazem_F	<p>“If <u>@POTUS</u> called it a <u>#ChineseVirus</u>, I’m calling it a Chinese Virus. Fake News media is so out of control &amp; think they won the 2016 elections. The Chinese communist government in <u>#ChinaLiedPeopleDied</u>. The label ‘racist’ means nothing anymore. To fake news, stating fact is racist.”</p>
@sumitsaurabh	<p>“History will remember, how Chinese killed so many of us. Why? Just because few idiots love to eat bats  in their soups and sandwiches! <u>#corona</u> <u>#ChineseVirus</u>”</p>
@SudarshanEMA	<p>“China has to pay for the global mayhem they’ve unleashed. <u>#ChineseVirus</u>”</p>
@TheUSASingers	<p>“Trump is insisting on calling it the “Chinese Virus”, so clearly it was made right here in America. Amirite? <u>#FakeNews#BioWeapon</u> <u>#ChineseVirus</u> <u>#TrumpVirus</u>”</p>
@GrahamAllen_1	<p>“BREAKING: The Chinese Virus is called that because it comes from China... The End!</p>

		If that offends you during this time you are the problem... RT! <u>#ChinaLiedPeopleDied</u> <u>#ChineseVirus</u> ”
Mar 19, 2020	@rakibehsan	“Some appear to be more outraged by Trump's use of <u>#ChineseVirus</u> , than China's role in bringing on this global pandemic. China silenced its own doctors who issued warnings. China has been anything but transparent at the global level. <u>#ChinaLiedPeopleDied</u> <u>#coronavirus</u> <u>#COVID19</u> ”
	@MatthewBetley	“Love it! <u>@realDonaldTrump</u> starts by calling it the <u>#ChineseVirus</u> - GOOD!”
	@toddschnitt	““ <u>#China</u> reports zero new infections in <u>#Wuhan</u> area.' As if we should believe a f*cking thing the <u>#Chinese</u> government says? <u>#coronavirus</u> <u>#ChineseVirus</u> <u>#ChinaLiedPeopleDied</u> <u>#CoronavirusOutbreak</u> <u>#COVID19</u> <u>#covid</u> ”
	@rweingarten	“How dare Trump keep slurring Chines by calling this the <u>#ChineseVirus</u> - it’s called <u>#coronavirus</u> or <u>#COVID19</u> ”
	@AWKWORDrap	“ <u>#TrumpPandemic</u> : 1. Shut down pandemic response unit 2. Knew about <u>#coronavirus</u> in Jan 3. Called it "Democratic hoax" 4. Said cases would go from 15 to "close to zero" 5. Rejected WHO test kits 6. Helping family profit off test centers 7. Called it <u>#ChineseVirus</u> , <u>#KungFlu</u> ”
	@Harryslaststand	“It is counterproductive and racist to call it the <u>#ChineseVirus</u> but it is not wrong to say that unbridled capitalism caused <u>#COVID19</u> and that the fault lies for this pandemic with most neo liberal societies in the world.”
	@alok_bhatt	“Dear Prez <u>@realDonaldTrump</u> & all US MNCs, ur country’s greed is the single biggest reason for world facing a huge pandemic created by a rogue nation of commies- your insatiable fetish for cost cutting sent u in Chinese arms & now whole world is paying via <u>#ChineseVirus</u> ”
	@alok_bhatt	“It is a norm to impose curfew when unwanted and anti-social elements run amok- <u>#ChineseVirus</u> is baap of all antisocial elements and but natural that curfew must be imposed to deal with this. Hopefully it is coming”

	@alok_bhatt	“Drill this fact in ur heads that the group of people responsible for spread of <u>#ChineseVirus</u> in India are India’s rich and upper middle class- those who are called as burden on Indian taxpayers are in no ways responsible for spread of this pandemic.”
	@WayneDupreeShow	“I find it weird that non-Asian liberals have their feelings hurt because some people the term <u>#ChineseVirus</u> Or <u>#ChineseWuhanVirus</u> (originated in China) The same people tell black Americans what's racist. ..the world that we live in.”
Mar 20, 2020	@NickAdamsinUSA	“- Secure our borders. - Bring our businesses home. - Buy American. - Hire American. - Become less dependent on other nations. Even before the <u>#ChineseVirus</u> , Trump had the right ideas! He still does! He will lead the greatest comeback in history. THE BEST IS YET TO COME!”
	@LennyDykstra	“Which <u>#CoronaVirus/ #ChineseVirus</u> nickname do you prefer?”  58%Kung Flu  18%Hong Kong Fluey  12%General Tso’s Flu  12%Winnie The Flu
	@MSweetwood	“Thank you <u>@realDonaldTrump</u> for making sure we know that it's the Chinese that did this to the world. But a better term is <u>#ChinaVirus</u> not <u>#ChineseVirus</u> This way you can mete out punishment appropriately when we get through this. <u>#coronavirus #COVID19</u> ”
	@SandipGhose	“Chinese propaganda machinery comparing <u>#Covid 19</u> pandemic with 9/11 is an admission that it is a man-made tragedy. So, entirely justified to call it <u>#ChineseVirus</u> , <u>#ChinaVirus</u> or even <u>#ChinaWuhanVirus</u> . Let’s not be shy of naming or labelling it <u>@palkisu @WIONews</u> ”
	@hazechu	“See some leaders are still rolling words like <u>#ChineseVirus</u>

	Doesn't matter what you call it as long as you take it seriously. As reps our mandate is to the people, look after the vulnerable & support communities. Call it whatever you will but instill measures to <u>#FlattenTheCurve</u> ”
@ighaworth	<p>“Two things can be true at once.</p> <p><b>1</b> Calling <u>#Covid_19</u> a <u>#ChineseVirus</u> is not racist. It’s a statement of geographic fact.</p> <p><b>2</b> Discriminating against or attacking Asian Americans because of the <u>#coronavirus</u> is racist, ignorant, and morally abhorrent.<u>#CoronaVirusUpdate #China</u>”</p>
@Justin_Stangel	“This might be a dumb question- if President Trump keeps calling the <u>#Coronavirus</u> , <u>#ChineseVirus</u> and they develop a vaccine, what are the odds they choose not to share with us?”
@sadmonsters	“If Trump’s going to keep calling Covid-19 the <u>#ChineseVirus</u> , we need to call dementia-addled racism the <u>#TrumpDisease</u> ”
@alok_bhatt	“World is paying for not only ignoring but also facilitating the rise of China for way too long.....west cannot escape its culpability in their rise & sadly they are at the receiving end of their gift- <u>#ChineseVirus</u> or <u>#WuhanVirus</u> or <u>#WuFlu</u> -this is how they r repaying for trust!”
@jasonsjohnson	<p>“Death 🦠 in the US:</p> <p>A person dies approximately every 11.59 seconds</p> <p>Number of deaths per year: 2,720,200</p> <p>Number of deaths per day: 7,453</p> <p>Number of deaths per hour: 311</p> <p>Number of <u>#ChineseVirus</u> deaths in US: 195”</p>
@rohit_chahal	“Instead of <u>#CoronaVirus</u> better call it ~ <u>#ChineseVirus</u> ”
@MayraABC13	“I get that it started in China but to call it <u>#ChineseVirus</u> is that wise right now?”
@rohitjswl01	“Call me anything I don’t care, hardcore reality is that whatever is happening today it’s because of <u>#China</u> , not blaming their normal citizens, but the government tried their level best to hide this thing and as a result this is leading to MASS MURDER all over the world <u>#ChineseVirus</u> ”
@IAMSophiaNelson	“He said it again the <u>#ChineseVirus</u> he doubles down. It works for his base. I know people who love the guy--and they love when he pushes those code words. It makes them feel

		powerful. This is just bullshit. I am no China defender. They are communists. But this is not appropriate.”
	@AndrewPollackFL	“Where did the Chinese virus originate? China Who silenced whistleblowers? China Who tried to cover it up? China Who lied to the world about the outbreak? China Who refused help to contain the virus? China Who infected the world? China#ChineseVirus”
Mar 21, 2020	@eddiejmauro	“Mr. Trump - stop calling it the #ChineseVirus... It's wrong. It's racist. You are not representing Americans...”
	@michaelmalice	“You'd think something called the #ChineseVirus would be especially lethal to newborn girls #coronavirus”
	@KanchanGupta	“Important: From 21 March Govt has changed #Covid19 testing criteria. Any person exhibiting symptoms regardless of travel history or contact with a +ve case will be tested now on. #IndiaFightsCorona #CitizensWithGoI #ChineseVirus”
Mar 22 2020	@adamkokesh	“While Trump is calling this the #ChineseVirus, he is selling out this country to China & losing his disastrous trade war. "They" are outmaneuvering "us" & will come out ahead because Trump shut down the economy needlessly. He's a criminal co-conspirator or a useful idiot.”
	@beenasarwar	“What young woman? Where? Why doesn't he talk sense?? Now he's starting with #ChineseVirus again Grrrrr #TrumpLiesPeopleDie”
	@Sootradhar	“Breaking India suspends all Passenger Rail Services till March 31, 2020. Indian Railways is the fourth rail network in the world. #ChineseVirus #WuhanVirus #ChineseWuhanVirus #CoronavirusPandemic”
	@KanchanGupta	“After all passenger trains being cancelled, all Inter-State bus services across #India suspended till March 31 in view of coronavirus outbreak: MHA #Covid19 #ChineseVirus”
Mar 23, 2020	@MeenaDasNarayan	“Some people's tweets inspire you, others' tweets are a waste, especially during such dire times #ChineseVirus”
	@mskristinawong	““There seems like there could some nasty language towards the Asian Americans. -- SAYS THE TRUMPFUCKER WHO CAN'T STOP SAYING #ChineseVirus”