

“Wen hassen wir? #dasperfektedinner” Conceptualization and categorization of in-group and out-group belonging on Twitter

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We define ourselves in terms of social groupings and quickly decide who is part of a group and who is not. This is not only the case in face-to-face interaction, but also on social media like Twitter. Often Twitter users are seen as a large homogenous mass (cf. Macskassy 2012), but that ignores smaller groups and especially in-group, out-group and inter-group behavior. Human cognition is to a large part based on identifying and categorizing things that belong together (Lakoff 1987) which also plays a role when we categorize ourselves in terms of group belonging (Tajfel/Turner 1978).

In our paper we look at tweets by German Twitter users who regularly live tweet during the broadcast of the reality television format *Das Perfekte Dinner*, using the hashtag #dasperfektedinner to understand how users conceptualize group belonging. Reality competition formats such as *Das Perfekte Dinner* invite evaluative comments from viewers, but in contrast to tweets sent while watching fictional content, those comments are often addressed at real people, i.e. the contestants. To the community of reality TV tweeters, commenting on the contestants' behavior, personality, and outward appearance is seen as fair game and classifies the contestants as part of the out-group.

- (1) Angela, du hast da was zwischen deinen Pferde­zähnen #dasperfektedinner
'Angela, you have something between your horse teeth'

These tweets either directly address the contestants (1) or comment more generally on aspects in the show (2), but mainly aim at criticizing the contestants, which is a significant part of the construction of group belonging.

- (2) Die Küche ist aber nicht schön #dasperfektedinner
'The kitchen is not exactly nice' #dasperfektedinner

On the opposite side we have the tweeters. They are considered to be an *ad-hoc* audience, only connected through the use of the same hashtag. It has been claimed that such a group is not stable beyond one episode (Bruns / Burgess 2011). However, our data shows that tweeters form an in-group that continues to exist beyond the interaction of one evening (3), sometimes even beyond one specific TV show.

- (3) Hey ihr Tweeties, bin jetzt auch da, was habe ich verpasst, wen hassen wir?
#dasperfektedinner
'Hey tweeties, I'm here now, what did I miss, whom do we hate?'

We argue that tweeters start to construct categories of group belonging as soon as they begin participating in the discourse. Our data furthermore suggests that these groups are stable beyond one single episode, which applies not only to the in-group but also the out-group with its ever-changing group members.

References

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