"HONG KONG, ADD OIL!":
EXAMINING THE PERSUASIVE FUNCTIONS OF TEXT AND IMAGES ON THE LENNON WALLS IN HONG KONG'S ANTI-ELAB MOVEMENT OF 2019

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Key implications

- This research examines the content of post-it-notes and images on the wall and explored how the persuasive functions of movements have been distributed across text and image.
- This research provides a more robust analysis of how Lennon Walls serves as a site of contention bound by its own specific contentious repertoire which demonstrates the spatial practice of framing and counterframing.
- This research contributes contemporary empirical data to the discussion on social movement messaging and mobilization.

Background

In June 2019, millions poured onto the streets of Hong Kong to protest the proposed Extradition Bill. Citizens and organizations argued that the purpose of the law is to provide a legal way for Chinese government to extradite dissidents to mainland China for trial. Police used increasing levels of force (tear gas, water cannon) to quell the protestors. The perceived police brutality, however, further added fuel to the movement (Purbrick 2019).

In addition to physical confrontations between the police and protesters on the streets, Lennon Walls were also erected. The "Lennon Wall" has its origins in Prague where a wall was covered in graffiti inspired by the lyrics of John Lennon's songs to express political grievances. This idea was first appropriated in Hong Kong during the 2014 Occupy Central movement as an everyday resistance strategy. In 2019, the Lennon Wall evolved and existed on a larger scale exceeding the spatial confines of its origins in down town Hong Kong, where it had been within the so-called occupied zone. Colorful mosaics of posters and post-it-notes including written messages, lyrics and epigrams, expressing support and solidarity with the movement began to emerge in skywalks, subway stations, and shopping malls not only in outlying suburbs such as Taipo, Tuen Mun and Tung Chung but in other countries such as Taiwan and Australia.

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Figure 1. Photographs of Lennon Wall Sites in Shatin and Taipo

Focus of study

A. At the descriptive level, this article sets out to articulate how Benford and Snow's (2000) persuasive functions of movements may be dispersed across text and image. I give form to the discursive interactions in claimant-object pairings, and outline moral thresholds as presented in the discourse that appeared on the wall.

B. On the conceptual level, I engage in conversation with Tilly's conceptualization of contentious repertoire by demonstrating that the Lennon Wall simultaneously operates as a strategy within the contentious repertoire that exists between the people and the government, and as a site of contention with its own array of performances that exist between movement supporters and detractors

Research methods

This study is based on data drawn from around 2,500 photographs taken of the Lennon Walls across every district of Hong Kong between June 2019 and April 2020. I took photos of each Lennon Wall site in a grid pattern to systematically capture the posted content as best we could. Given the desire to analyze the content of text and images posted to the walls, I also took close up photos of images posted to the walls to make the coding process easier. For the textual data, each photo contains between 20 to 50 post-it-notes. For the image-based data, each photo contains at least one computer-printed, photo-copied poster or hand-drawn image. I coded 10,000 hand-written notes and 2,076 images based on the matrix designed.

In the matrix I examined four broad categories: language use, image producer and production method, image subject and sentiment, and image target audience and purpose. I also focused on the "intended meanings" of images by coding their symbols (Austin 1973; Doerr et al. 2013; Philipps 2012), paying specific attention to the repertoire of socio-political meanings.

Significance of findings for practice and policy

Table 1 below confirms that discourse participants perceive the key figures within this contentious episode to be Hong Kongers, protesters, the police, HKSAR government as represented by Carrie Lam, and China.

Table 1. Key Figures Appeared in Text and Image

Figure	Text (based on 10,000 entries)	Image (based on 1,460 entries)
Hong Kong	23.58%	56.99%
Hong Konger	14.66%	30.42%
Police/Bad cops	11.68%	27.26%
Carrie Lam	9.75%	11.42%
Liberty/Freedom	6.98%	2.79%
Protester	4.1%	54.55%
Democracy	3.1%	2.36%
Junius Ho	1.89%	3.18%
China	1.51%	22.42%
Communism	0.12%	3.08%
Chairman Mao	0.11%	2.07%
Xi Jinping	0.03%	2.75%

Table 2 below presents the most common text-based messages contained in both the post-it notes and printed across the images.

Table 2. Slogans that Appeared Most Frequently across the Text and Images

	Mobilization frame	Slogan	Text (based on 10,000 entries)	Image (based on 2,076 entries)
Pro-movement	Support	"Hong Kong(ers), add-oil!" (Go Hong Kong(ers)!)	22%	7.46%
		Supporting/praying for democracy/freedom	9.74%	4.96%
		Never give up	6.66%	0.92%
		Free Hong Kong, revolution now!	1.88%	7.27%
		Go young people!	1.63%	0.38%
	Counterframing	No rioters, only tyranny	11%	2.46%
	Solidarity	We go together, and we leave together'	4.69%	1.02%
	Movement aims	Five demands, not one less	4.16%	3.08%
		No withdraw, no retreat!/ Withdraw the bad law!	14.78%	3.24%
		Carrie Lam resign!	8.56%	2.55%
	Calls for action	Hong Kong(ers), resist!	0.3%	1.64%
		People of [XX] district, stand up and fight!	1.01%	0.48%
Pro-government	Support	Support police/government	0.2%	0.14%
		"Policemen, add-oil!" (Go Hong Kong police!),	0.1%	0%
		Well done, Carrie!	0.1%	0%
	Aims	Against rioter violence	0.26%	0.09%
	Insults and criticism	Mercenary dogs of the US	0.14%	0%
		Go to hell!	0.3%	0.1%
		Shame on you!	0.1%	0.24%

I also compared the content before and after some major events (such as the call for general strike on 5 August 2019) and found the text-based messages remained consistent. Participants in the text and image-based discourses echo each other in what they perceive to be important events within the Anti-ELAB Movement "cycles of contention" or "protest cycle/wave" as della Porta and Tarrow (2005) define it.

Table 3. Events that Appeared in the Text and Image-based Discourses

Date	Event	Text Shown as a % of 10 000 messages coded	Image Shown as % of 1,460 images coded
09 June 2019	March	0.69%	1.14%
15 June 2019	Lam suspends the Bill	0.01%	0.75%
16 June 2019	March	0.72%	1.34%
01 July 2019	Storming of the Legislative Council Complex	0.16%	4.4%
21 July 2019	Masked men attack protesters in Yuen Long*	2.79%	42.07%
27 July 2019	March in Yuen Long in response to the attacks of the previous week	2.65%	7.65%
26 July 2019	Occupation of airport	0.12%	2.87%
11 August 2019	Medic shot in eye with bean-bag round**	0.28%	12.62%
23 August 2019	Police alleged to have sexually harassed protesters in holding cells at San Uk Ling holding cells	0.15%	7.84%
23 August 2019	Human chain "Hong Kong way"	0%	2.87%
25 August 2019	First live round released. Water cannons used.	0.41%	10.33%
31 August 2019	Police are alleged to have attacked and killed protesters in Prince Edward Station	0.7%	15.29%
22 September 2019	A female student found dead in the water	0%	1.72%
29 September 2019	Global anti-totalitarian march	0.23%	2.68%
1 October 2019	China National Day protest	0%	4.78%
1 October 2019	A middle school student was shot and wounded by police***	0.32%	4.59%
04 October 2019	Lam invokes colonial era emergency powers to ban face masks.	0.01%	4.78%
23 October 2019	Extradition Bill is formally withdrawn	0%	1.99%
04 November 2019	University student falls from parking lot and dies four days later.	0%	0.57%
11-15 November 2019	Siege of the Chinese University of Hong Kong	0%	1.02%
13-29 November 2019	Siege of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University	0%	1.15%
19 January 2020	"Karma to Commies, Universal Siege on Communists" rally	0.37%	1.15%

* There was a later instance in which white shirted men attacked protesters in Northpoint on 5 August 2019 however the images did not draw significant distinction between the events so they were coded against the date of first possible appearance on the wall.
** There was a later instance in which another individual (an Indonesian news reporter) was shot in the eye by police. Again, most images did not make obvious distinction between the events so they were coded against the date of first possible appearance on the wall.
***There were two later instances in which protesters were wounded by police shooting - 4 October 2019 and 11 November 2019.

Significance for findings

This study provides the first systematic analysis of the text and image-based discourses on the 2019 Lennon Walls across Hong Kong. The findings contribute contemporary empirical data to the discussion on social movement messaging and mobilization, and identify the specific, distinct but symbiotic roles text and images have played in the framing of the relationship between members of the Anti-ELAB Movement and their targets. The findings also shed light on the mobilization strategies utilized by movement activists.