

**#DETKUHAVÆRETMIG:  
HOW TWITTER ENABLED THE EXPRESSION AND  
PROPAGATION OF SOLIDARITY AMONG HEALTHCARE  
PROFESSIONALS**

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# BACKGROUND: THE SVENDBORG CASE

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- Svendborg, Denmark, 2013: a young doctor attended to a patient with stomach pains. Patient had diabetes, doctor said she orally instructed a nurse to measure his blood sugar. This did not happen. 3 weeks later, he died of another illness.
  - The doctor was charged with not writing down the instruction and for not following up (not with the death of the patient)
    - District court, Svendborg, April 2017: doctor acquitted
    - Eastern High Court, August 2017: doctor convicted of malpractice and recklessness
- Healthcare professionals took to Twitter using the hashtag #detkuhaværetmig (“It could have been me”): <https://bit.ly/2KZBCwX>

(On 28th March 2018, the Supreme Court acquitted the doctor).

# LITERATURE REVIEW: HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS ON TWITTER

Research focus so far – healthcare professionals use of Twitter for:

- scientific dialogue (Chaudhry et al., 2012)
- branding professional identity, e.g. sharing new research, connecting with colleagues, managing online personas or developing relationships with patients (Alpert & Womble, 2016).
- educational purposes (Gagnon, 2015)

# RESEARCH GAP

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- Interestingly for our study, a recent news article (Damsgaard, 2019) highlighted a shortage of solidarity amongst doctors in the Danish context, which Prof. Allan Holmgren, who was interviewed in the article, attributed to highly individualizing institutional cultures. This seemed at odds with #detkuhaværetmig [“it could have been me”] – we wished to explore professional solidarity further in relation to #detkuhaværetmig data
- While hashtags (e.g. de Cock and Pizarro Pedraza, 2018) and emotional Twitter content (e.g. Margolin & Liao, 2018) have previously been explored in relation to the expression of solidarity, there was a lack of methods relating to the many other functionalities of Twitter
- In order to create a method that was sensitive to identifying solidarity in Twitter data, we consulted theoretical literature on solidarity

# SOLIDARITY 1

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## Distinguishing between solidarity and other related concepts:

- **Solidarity** (justice internal to a community) vs. **justice** (universal morality/justice) (Habermas, 1989)
- **Solidarity** (we-thinking) vs. **altruism** (thou-centrism) (Laitinin & Pessi, 2015)
- **Solidarity** (principle) vs. **loyalty** (contingent on an existing relationship) (Kolers, 2016)
- Solidarity is shown through actions and can involve personal sacrifice
- Kolers (2016): "In justifiable solidarity, we do not join with others because they are right, but because they are wronged"

# SOLIDARITY 2

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## Twitter and solidarity:

- Alternative news medium reporting on events can generate solidarity
- Hashtags can promote causes and convey solidarity, e.g. #jesuischarlie (De Cock & Pizarro Pedraza, 2018)
- Hashtags provide "metadata" – a theme that can galvanise networked publics, facilitating solidarity (De Cock & Pizarro Pedraza, 2018)
- Twitter facilitates the expression of emotion which can promote solidarity (Margolin & Liao, 2018)

**Professional solidarity:** 19th century France; Poland in the 1980s

Studies of professional solidarity on Twitter are scarce

# RESEARCH QUESTION

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*How did the functionalities of Twitter, as evident in the tweets using the hashtag #detkuhaværetmig, facilitate the expression and propagation of professional solidarity?*

# WHAT IS TWITTER? AND TWITTER FUNCTIONALITIES

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- Launched in 2006, a microblogging service
- “Tweets” of maximum 280 characters (before 2018, only 140 characters), fully public
- Other users can re-tweet the tweet, like it, reply to it or send a direct message to the original tweeter
- Other functions include mentions (@) and hashtags
- Hashtags have a social function as they provide “an easy means of grouping tweets, and in turn, creating ad hoc social groups or sub-communities” (Zappavigna, 2011, p. 801).
- Hashtags have been said to facilitate “a new kind of sociality where microbloggers engage in ambient affiliation. The affiliation is ambient in the sense that the users may not have interacted directly and likely do not know each other, and may not interact again” (Zappavigna, 2011, p. 801).



# METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

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Mixed methods research design – quantitative and qualitative data included to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research question.

We set up a Twitter crawler to harvest all tweets that included #detkuhaværetmig or alternative orthographic variants #detkuhaveværetmig, #detkunnehaveværetmig, #detkunnehaværetmig, #detkuhaveværetmig from 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014 to 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

All tweets and metadata were harvested directly into DMI-TCAT (Borra & Rieder, 2014).

# DATA

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Our data consist of:

- time of tweet
- tweeter (both Twitter name and real name if provided by user)
- user description (e.g. “OB/GYN interested MD, currently twitter-noob but improving every day”)
- co-hashtags (e.g. “#sundpol”)
- mentions (e.g. @EllenTraneNorby)
- re-tweet count (the number of times each tweet is retweeted by others)
- favourite count (the number of times each tweet is liked by others)
- tweeted statements, i.e. tweet texts
- photos

# DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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Functionality	Analysis method
Hashtag	Pragmatic theory – analysis of #detkuhaværetmig
Tweet texts	Computational (sentiment analysis of content of tweet texts)
Photos	Categorisation of photos

Table 1. Twitter functionalities for the expression of solidarity.

Functionality	Analysis method
Retweets and likes	Computational (when tweets were most retweeted and liked)
@mentions	Categorisation of the most frequent @mentions
Co-hashtags	Categorisation of the most frequent co-hashtags

Table 2. Twitter functionalities for the propagation of solidarity.

# WHY THESE FUNCTIONALITIES?

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- We investigated the **hashtag** itself as they are known to express solidarity (Ince et al., 2017; Margolin & Liao, 2018).
- We included **photos** in our analysis as solidarity relies on identification with a group, and it was relevant to see what kinds of photos were included.
- **@mentions** with more than 20 occurrences were extracted to see which main voices were summoned to be included in the solidarity discussion.
- **Co-hashtags** were included in the analysis in order to investigate how tweeters framed their tweets, i.e. we analysed which topics were included in the conversation, and whether these topics related to solidarity.

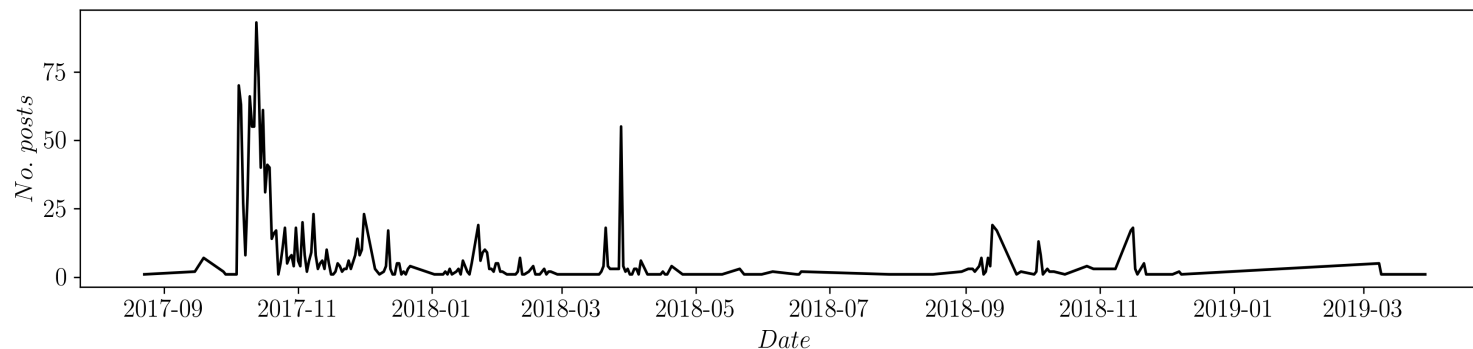
# CHARACTERISTICS OF RESULTS

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- 1,634 tweets that included the hashtag or variants were posted.
- The first tweet relating to the Svendborg case was posted 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017; the last tweet with hashtag #detkuhaværetmig in our data set was posted on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019.
- The number of distinct users was 472.
- **Tweeters:** Majority of tweeters were healthcare professionals (234)
- Also **politicians** (35) and **professional associations** (29) tweeted about #detkuhaværetmig indicating the political nature of the hashtag.
- **News media** tweeters (29) illustrate that the issue was viewed as newsworthy
- The **mixed** category (29) implies that the topic caught interest outside the medical community, and a more general desire to express solidarity
- (The rest: unknown background and bots)

# HASHTAG TIMELINE

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Two main spikes in the frequency of the tweets (associated with specific events in the Svendborg case):

1. First concentrated period of Twitter activity took place during October 2017; the highest spike during that period involved 93 tweets on the 13th October. The Eastern High Court charging on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2017 (there was a period of latency between the event and posting about it)
2. Second spike on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018 where 55 tweets with #detkuhaværetmig were posted. The Supreme Court acquitted the doctor on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

This shows how hashtag activity unfolded over time, and that the expression of professional solidarity was linked to real-life events.

# SELECTED RESULTS – HASHTAG ITSELF

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”Detkuhaværetmig” [it could have been me] sends a powerful message of solidarity:

- The hashtag implicates that anyone in a similar position could have been in the situation of the accused doctor, thus dispersing blame.
- According to Hougaard (2018), “it could have been me” shows empathy and identification as well as a high degree of randomness.
- Significantly, the hashtag’s underdetermination – reflected in the exophoric use of “it” referring to something outside the tweet, implies a shared narrative (Hougaard, 2018) that is known by a select few, thus projecting solidarity that is limited to the group that is “in the know” about the narrative.

# PHOTOS

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- 212 photos included in the data set
  - Photos fell into three categories: one person in the photo (86), more than one person in the photo (73), and no person in the photo (53).
1. One-person: mainly selfies. Individual wearing a doctor's coat or surgical wear, included stethoscopes and name tags, clearly at work, evident by hospital or medical equipment in the background, or at the hospital helipad
  2. Groups: large groups of people representing a hospital department or a mosaic of selfies. These group photos illustrate “we thinking”, standing together to show support.
  3. No person: mainly pictures of newspaper articles, social media posts or other correspondences related to the Svendborg case. A way to illustrate the magnitude of the case and the hashtag by showing photos of the use of the hashtag in other media.



# RESULTS - @MENTIONS

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3 main categories of @mentions:

1. **Politicians and government agencies:** (“Blixt22”, “smbrix”), the former minister of health (“EllenTraneNorby”) was the most mentioned. The government agency, the Danish Patient Safety Authority, (“STPS\_DK”) as well as their director (“VangstedMarie”) and section leader (“bech\_karsten”)
2. **Professional associations:** The Danish Medical Association (“laegeforeningen”) as well as their president (“rudkjoebing”), and the Association of Junior Doctors (“YngreLaeger”) as well as their president at the time (“Camilla\_Rathcke”)
3. **News media** (“DagensMedicinDK” “dkmedier”, “Radio24syv”).

These mentions paint a clear picture of the people and organisations tweeters wanted to include in their conversation. Shows an activist element in the #detkuhaværetmig communication, as noted by Hougaard (2018), with tweeters urging politicians and government agencies to take action. The mentions of news media showed the wish to propagate the message.

# RESULTS - CO-HASHTAGS

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The most frequent co-hashtags included: “sundpol” (677; health politics), “dkpol” (209; Danish politics), “dkmedier” (122; Danish media), “patientsikkerhed” (116; patient safety), “dksund” (76; Danish health), “svendborgsagen” (34; the Svendborg case), “utryglæge” (29; unsafe doctor), “nomoresilence” (23; already in English), and “dksundpol” (21; Danish health politics).

These co-hashtags add meaning to the original hashtag, helping to nuance it. Co-hashtags link back to the original issue, the Svendborg case, as well as link #detkuhaværetmig to more general issues such as “Danish health” and “patient safety”. The “unsafe doctor” and “nomoresilence” hashtags can be seen as signs of solidarity with the accused doctor and as potentially a call to action. The co-hashtags “Danish politics” and “health politics” also make it clear that it is a political issue. Finally, the “Danish media” co-hashtag can be seen as reflecting a desire to propagate the message in the media.

# DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION 1

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## Empirical findings

All functionalities we investigated helped to express solidarity: the wording of the hashtag itself, photos/selfies and propagate it: amplifying the message by reaching audiences through @mentions, adding co-hashtags to link to other causes.

Given these functionalities, Twitter seems a very good medium for expressing and amplifying messages of professional solidarity. Its participative qualities enhanced these effects.

In facilitating expressions of solidarity with a fellow HCP, Twitter became at the same time a means of communicating a resonant message about their working conditions.

# DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION 2

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## Methodological contribution

In the absence of an existing method for investigating professional solidarity on Twitter, we devised and implemented an analytical approach that combined what is known about solidarity (theoretically) with the functionalities of Twitter that might facilitate the expression and propagation of professional solidarity. We hope that future studies will use, adapt and refine our approach.

## Further studies:

- Could use multimodality theory to analyse how the interplay of the various functionalities supported messages of solidarity
- Could explore the #detkuhaværetmig hashtag in its broader social media context
- Could further explore activism in relation to the #detkuhaværetmig hashtag

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