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Enjoy your snags Australia ... oh and the voting thing too #ausvotes #auspol: Iconisation and affiliation in electoral microblogging

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Abstract

During elections, alongside more serious political comment, members of the public will use microblogging services such as Twitter to express their feelings about being a voter. This paper explores forms of ambient solidarity that are enacted by such metadiscourse about voting. In particular I focus on the role of iconisation in this discourse – in other words, the discursive processes by which micro-bloggers align around shared values materialised as ‘bonding icons’ (Martin & Stenglin, 2007; Martin, 2007). The texts considered are a corpus of tweets containing the hashtags #ausvotes and #auspol posted to Twitter during the 2013 Australian federal election. A salient icon in this corpus is the ‘sausage sizzle’ (a form of outdoor barbeque), employed as a humorous symbol of camaraderie in the context of communal complaints about the voting experience.

1. Election day sausage sizzles in Australia

“ Congratulations Australia. Today, we made the word sausage peak on twitter
#auspol #ausvotes ”

Social media is widely used by the general public during elections to express opinion and sentiment, and to commune through shared celebration or complaint. Running parallel, and at times intersecting with, serious political comment by microbloggers, is metadiscourse about the experience of being a voter. The latter has a predominately interpersonal function, characterised by displays of solidarity with an ‘ambient’¹ community of voters. For example consider the following post to Twitter, a popular microblogging service:

“ Wow. The people of Wentworth like their democracy nice and early. Long queues
at every polling station. And every BBQ stand. #ausvotes ”

Microblogging posts of this kind are extremely common during elections, often taking the form of humorous observations and light-hearted complaint about voting and the habitual processes that go along with it. These include fighting traffic to get to a polling booth, finding a parking spot, queuing and, the focus of the present paper, having an election day sausage from a locally run ‘sausage sizzle’, a barbeque usually staffed by volunteers.

These barbeques are commonplace at Australian polling stations and are typically designed to raise money for the local community, often the school hosting the polling. They are widely seen as a kind of grassroots national ‘tradition’, as the following tweet announces:

“ Look forward to #sausagesizzle every Election Day. It’s **tradition!!!** #ausvotes.
”

Sausage sizzles are also associated with national ideals of camaraderie and ‘mateship’, and the general ethos of ‘lending a hand’ through fundraising or community work. Barbequing a ‘snag’², (colloquialism for sausage), is popularly invoked in many different contexts as a symbol of national identity, just as the English sausage, the US hotdog, and various types of European sausages and salamis hold particular cultural significance in other countries. As a national ‘tradition’ sausage sizzles are often presented as existing at a level above partisan political opinion, and hence, as something that invites the possibility of widespread secular communion notwithstanding political viewpoint:

“ Sausage sizzle at the polling booth today. Whoever wins government I Love Australia #YouDecide9 #ausvotes ”

In other words, sausage sizzles have been *iconised*.

The 2013 Australian Federal election saw a large volume of people using Twitter to express their political views and to comment more generally on their voting experiences. This paper draws on a corpus of these posts collected over the voting period. As I will detail in the next section, the corpus contained more than expected references to sausages, compared with a corpus of general posts, warranting exploration of what was going on. Some posts also contained images, often a close up shot of the sausage to be consumed (for example Figure 1), and featured links to a website, SnagVotes created to enable voters to locate their nearest ‘sausage sizzle, cake stall, arts and crafts stand or other fundraiser’ on a map on election day. This website’s description of its sausage sizzle-locating functionality foregrounds the kinds of values (enjoyment, community spirit, democracy etc.) that we might expect to be associated with sausage sizzles in the #ausvotes corpus:

“ While there is some fun and a bit of silliness in the Snagvotes idea, the underlying objective is clearly to celebrate our democracy, encourage participation in the democratic process and offer support for the community groups and volunteers that run sausage sizzles and stalls on election day, as it is an important means of fundraising for them. The message is “Get together with your community and enjoy a sausage on election day – a great Australian tradition” ”

<http://www.electionsausagesizzle.com.au/>

This paper explores the kind of iconisation construed when someone publishes a post about their election day sausage. The interest in iconography arises out of social semiotic studies of the role of symbolic icons in forging attitudinal alignments (Martin & Stenglin, 2007; Martin, 2007) and construing national identities (Tann, 2013). This type of perspective on iconisation is derived from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), a theory of language originating from the ‘functional tradition’ of Firthian systemics (Firth, 1957) and influenced by the Prague school of linguistics (Jakobson, 1971). In particular, the concept of interpersonal meaning, that is, how opinions and emotions are construed in discourse, is employed. This a notion is drawn from Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal framework also developed within the SFL tradition. In particular I will consider the function of symbolic icons in supporting ‘ambient affiliation’ – that is, the process whereby micro-bloggers enact social bonds realized as shared interpersonal values in discourse (Zappavigna, 2011).

2. Electoral microblogging



Figure 1. Linked image for the post “Waited 3 years for this ... #sausageofdemocracy #ausvotes”

Since the advent of what is now a broad interdisciplinary body of scholarly work on microblogging spanning domains such as linguistics, elections have been a research focus, with studies of electoral microblogging across many countries (e.g. Ampofo, Anstead, & O’Loughlin, 2011; Fink, Bos, Perrone, Liu, & Kopecky, 2013; Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff, & van’t Haar, 2013; Larsson & Moe, 2012; Moe & Larsson, 2013; Vaccari et al., 2013). One of the most prominent case studies to be repeatedly investigated is the 2008 and 2012 US presidential elections, particularly in terms of sentiment analysis (e.g. Wang, Can, Kazemzadeh, Bar, & Narayanan, 2012; Zappavigna, 2011). There has also been extensive interest in whether or not Twitter data can be used to predict election outcomes (Gayo-Avello, 2012, 2013; Jungherr, Jürgens, & Schoen, 2012; Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, & Welpe, 2010) or forecast stock market behavior (Bollen, Mao, & Zeng, 2011). Most of these studies have a computational focus. Work that deals more explicitly with Australian electoral microblogging, has included a project applying quantitative, topic-based methods for tracking and visualising Twitter activity and the formation of ‘*ad hoc* issue publics’ (Bruns & Burgess, 2011).

3. Iconisation

An icon is formed when the everyday meaning of an activity or an object recedes and instead members of a community focus on its emotional importance as something that unifies them (Martin, 2004). In other words, the activity or object (e.g. eating an election day sausage) functions as a ‘bonding icon’ (Martin, 2007). Iconisation is perhaps most recognizable in images. For example, the manifestation of values as images is readily visible in national emblems and corporate logos. Image-based icons are the focus of ‘iconography’ and ‘iconology’, domains which apply cultural and historical analysis to valued visual images (Müller, 2011). These approaches consider ‘the context in which the image is produced and circulates, and ... how and why cultural meanings and their visual expressions come about historically’ (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). Values may also be distilled as objects (e.g. the statue of liberty) and practices (e.g. ritual and ceremony). For instance symbolic icons such as flags and memorabilia can function to ‘rally visitors around communal ideals’ within museum exhibitions (Martin, 2007, p. 216), as can artefacts such as academic gowns and testamurs at a graduation (Stenglin, 2012).

Martin and Zappavigna (2013) suggest that iconisation is also a process recognisable in language if we consider how interpersonal meanings are realised in idiomatic and metaphorical language. For instance, if we call someone a ‘*sausage*’, as in the following tweet, we are lightly critiquing their character or behavior rather than suggesting that either has turned them into barbeque meat:

“ when people favourite your tweet instead of retweet it, i want it retweeted not favoured you sausage -_- ”

The above is ellipsis of the idiom, *silly sausage*, a light-hearted appraisal of competence, the origins of which may be in British forms of address, especially to children (Oxford Dictionary, 2014). In essence, iconisation occurs when interpersonal meaning is foregrounded and the icon works to concentrate accumulated values (both ethical and aesthetic). This process fortifies social alignments by solidifying shared evaluative paradigms, including shared feelings of mass unity such as those invoked by the Olympic torch, the peace symbol and other well-known ‘transcendent icons’ (Stenglin, 2012).

Values may also be construed discursively as opinion and emotion. According to the Appraisal framework, evaluative meanings may be realised in discourse through the systems of attitude: affect (expressing emotion), judgement (assessing behaviour) and appreciation (estimating value) (Martin & White, 2005). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this model of evaluative language in detail, examples of each of these discursive choices realised in microblogging discourse are provided below. For example, affect involves the construal of emotion, for example positive nationalistic sentiment (affect shown in bold):

“ I **love** that I live in a country that celebrates a federal election with sausage sizzles at polling booths. God bless Australia. 😊 #ausvotes ”

Judgement, however, is about construing a moral stance about something, for instance the following humorous self-censure:

“ Totally didn’t have a sausage at the polling both. Does that make me a **bad** person? #ausvotes ”

On the other hand appreciation involves making an aesthetic assessment, for instance, about the quality of food.

“ Sampled the #democracysausage at St Catherine’s, pretty **good!** Thankful for the optional mustard! #ausvotes ”

Indeed food is a prominent site of iconisation since cuisine is a means of asserting cultural distinctiveness and national identity. A foodstuff that has received a lot of attention in terms of its status as an Australian national icon is Vegemite, a salty spread made from leftover brewers’ yeast extract (Renne, 1993; Richardson, 2003; Rozin & Siegal, 2003). The phrase ‘*happy little vegemite*’, which arose out of the branding of Vegemite, is an example of commercial iconisation, where the values instantiated in the icon are the projected values of a brand (in this case happiness; beauty and desirability are other common examples). An example from the Ausvotes corpus of the Vegemite icon used in electoral discourse is the following post referring to a *Vegemite sanger* (a sandwich spread with Vegemite and commonly eaten by Australian school children for lunch):

“ Ten bucks to the first school-kid that chucks a Vegemite sanger at the new PM. #auspol #ausvotes ”

Here the icon functions to deepen the criticism of the newly elected prime minister by implying that throwing a sandwich at him would be such a patriotic thing to do, it is an act performed by one whose Australian-ness cannot be critiqued (a school kid with a Vegemite sandwich).

Elections are clearly also situations where iconography is used to impel voters toward particular partisan attitudinal dispositions. For instance logos and catchphrases in particular play persuasive rhetorical roles in campaigns. Even less partisan icons are used rhetorically, for instance the image of a hand inserting a paper into a ballot box, often seen within educational material about voting, materializes ideals relating to democracy. For example, the Twitter feed of the Australian Electoral Commission uses a stylised representation of the outline of Australia (as it would appear on a map), against a background image of a female voter smiling while posting her ballot (figure 2). The association of the two icons (the representation of Australia and the hand inserting the voting slip into the ballot box) with the smiling face is used to invoke positive, shared emotion regarding national unity, interpersonally fused with the act of voting. The iconisation works to distil a syndrome of positive meanings about being an Australian who votes through the association of the icons.



Figure 2. The Twitter feed of the Australian Electoral Commission.

Within political contexts, existing national icons are often co-opted in the service of particular ideological positions. An example of a national icon used in this way during the 2013 election is a form of swimwear that was used to mock Tony Abbott, the Liberal party candidate. This tight-fitting style of male swimwear is popularly known as ‘speedos’ (referencing a popular brand) and also by the slang term, ‘budgie-smuggler’, that invokes the visual similarity of a man wearing snug swimwear and a smuggler concealing a budgerigar in his underwear. Tony Abbott had a history of being photographed in this form of beachwear due to his frequent outdoor training sessions. A quick look at concordance lines for budgie smuggler in the Ausvotes corpus shows how this icon was used to ridicule Abbott and rally anti-Abbott voters through a form of ‘condemning affiliation’ (Knight, 2008, 2010), that is, alignment forged through criticism of a shared target:

“ #ausvotes I recommend alcohol for medicinal purposes to anaesthetise oneself against the onslaught of bigotry, misogyny & **budgie smugglers** ”

“ Stop the boats? Stop the people smugglers? No. Just stop the **budgie smugglers!** ”

“ **Budgie smugglers** more threat to Australia than people smugglers ”

“ Don’t want Abbott to win, **budgie smugglers** are not acceptable! #YouDecide9 #ausvotes ”

This example is interesting as it shows the evaluative *resonance* of icons: it appears that they are likely to occur amongst co-text that is saturated with evaluative meaning or alternatively invoke interpersonal meaning where else none is explicitly encoded. In the examples above the interpersonal charge of ‘budgie smuggler’, as a well-established national bonding icon, appears to strengthen negative appraisal of Abbot in the co-text. The icon both lends legitimacy to, and increases the intensity of, the critique, and also, in the case of an inherently ridiculous icon such as this, invokes the interpersonal power of humour at fashioning alignment.

4. The communicative features of microblogging and the #ausvotes corpus

“ Wait I WAS on twitter for last election. Def more sausage talk now than there was then. Is there a worm for sausage popularity? #ausvotes ”

As well as providing details of the Ausvotes corpus, this section will describe some of the main communicative conventions used in tweets, necessary for understanding the analyses that follow. The Ausvotes corpus was created by sampling a temporal slice, or ‘Twitter snapshot’ (Popescu & Pennacchiotti, 2010) of the discourse that occurred via Twitter during the final days of the 2013 federal election in Australia. This involved using the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) to create a corpus of posts that contained one or more of the hashtags #auspol and #ausvotes (two hashtags commonly used during Australian elections) posted during the period in which polling booths were open, resulting in a corpus of 142249 posts. The #auspol hashtag is the more general of the two tags and is typically employed in posts that refer to some dimension of Australian politics, whereas the #ausvotes tag is generally reserved for use during an active election and has a more limited scope in this sense. It should be noted that the data available via the public API is a small random sample (as defined by Twitter’s algorithm) of the larger stream of complete.

Table 1. 10 most frequent words in the #ausvotes corpus

N	Word	Freq
1	#ausvotes	137817
2	@username	102466
3	the	71556
4	#auspol	65121
6	RT	58849
7	to	43402

8	HTTP://weblink	40287
9	a	34555

The word frequency list for the corpus contains a range of terms that are likely to occur within the semantic field of elections and Australian politics more generally (e.g. *Abbott, voting, Australia, election, party* etc.) (see Table 1 for the ten most frequent words). The first term in the word frequency list that is clearly outside this political semantic field is *sausage* (Freq. = 2588) which instead originates from a much more domestic field. This term is also key³ if we compare its frequency with HERMES2013, a 100 million-word reference corpus of tweets collected in 2013 in which *sausage* occurred 1015 times. In other words, *sausage* is not a term we would expect to see this frequently in a large random sample of discourse, suggesting that it is associated with some marked kind of meaning-making in the smaller corpus. Since sausages were not an election issue at the time, the strong ‘keyness’ of a term clearly from a very different semantic field would seem to warrant further exploration.

As the shading in the word frequency list indicates, the most frequent words included three types of features specific to online Twitter discourse: hashtags (a form of social metadata marked with a # symbol), mentions (direct address or reference to another user indicated with the @ symbol), and retweets (republishing of a post by another user, indicated by the initialism RT). The first feature, the hashtag, is a form of social tagging in which a label is added to a post as a form of visible metadata (in contrast to traditional metadata which is usually separated from the content delivered to the reader). Hashtags allow forms of ‘metadiscourse’ to be embedded in social media communication; in other words, they support communication that reflexively points back at itself (and is ‘meta’ in this sense) (Zappavigna, Under review). Like traditional metadata, hashtags afford abstraction, enabling information at higher or more complex orders of experience to be appended to the main content of a post. They are a novel form of metadata because, rather than simply operating in the service of information management via marking ‘about-ness’ of a social media text (Kehoe & Gee, 2011), they also operate in the service of interpersonal meaning by dynamically forming communities (Yang, Sun, Zhang, & ei, 2012) or coordinating “on-going conversation” (Lin, Margolin, Keegan, Baronchelli, & Lazer, 2013, pp. 1-2) and supporting social processes of visibility and participation (Page, 2012).

For example the tag, *#auspol*, indicates that a post is related to ongoing conversation about ‘Australian politics’ and is one instance of a more complex discursive situation. The meaning of a hashtag may be relatively opaque to those who fall outside its community of use since they typically involve forms of abbreviation or concatenation (Posch, Wagner, Singer, & Strohmaier, 2013). For instance, ‘*Auspol*’ is not a transparent term and requires some knowledge of the particular context in which it is being deployed to interpret it. The ten most frequent hashtags in the Ausvotes corpus (*#ausvotes, #auspol, #youdecide9, #auspoll, #election2013, #australiavotes, #AFL, #NRL, #Abbott, #NBN*) are all directly related to the election, aside from *#AFL* and *#NRL* which reference sporting events that was on at the same time (often affording humorous comparison with the election itself). The three most frequent sausage-sizzle related hashtags were *#sausagesizzle* (freq.=393), *#democracysausage* (freq.=184), and *#sausage* (freq.=114). As we will see, these tags deploy the sausage as a key symbol of solidarity potentially shared by others using the same tag, and in this way, perform an interpersonal function beyond use as a ‘topic’ marker.

Direct address and references to other Twitter users were also very frequent in the corpus ($n=2$, Table 1), suggesting that the discourse is interactive and collaborative. These were realized by @mentions, where the @ symbol is employed as a deictic marker, indicating the user to whom the post is directed. For example, the following post is directed at User1.

“ @User1 Maaate! Party pies and sausage rolls for all!! #ausvotes ”

In this way the @mention functions in a similar fashion to a vocative in spoken conversation. It usually occupies initial position in a clause, though it also can occur in medial or final position. When not in initial position, it is more likely to indicate a reference to a user rather than to explicitly inscribe an address. For example:

“ Is @TonyAbbottMHR cut cut CUTTING the #sausages as well? asked my 8yr old son this morning? #auspol #ausvotes #aidcuts #healthcuts ”

The @mention in this tweet is a reference to @TonyAbbottMHR rather than a direct address to the then leader of

the Opposition.

Closer inspection of these @mentions reveals that the vast majority (98%) of them are in fact retweets, the third type of Twitter feature highlighted in grey in Table 1. These are posts that republish another tweet or part thereof, sometimes with appended comment by the re-poster. The initialism *RT* is used to indicate the post is a retweet and in most instances *RT* will be followed by the @ character to attribute the retweeted text to its original author. The following tweet uses this structure to indicate that @User2 is the source:

“ RT @User2: BREAKING: no sausages left at #wefo primary #sausage #auspol #ausvotes ”

In this way retweeting ‘allows members to relay or forward a tweet through their network’ (Nagarajan, Purohit, & Sheth, 2010, p. 295), marking the quoted post as notable and effectively recommending it to their audience of Twitter followers. Retweets were also likely to contain links to websites, for example the following widely retweeted post featuring a link to the SnagVotes website introduced earlier:

“ RT @User: Did you get your democracy sausage today? #ausvotes ”

The prevalence of retweets in the Ausvotes corpus is suggestive of a discourse in which sharing material plays a significant social role. As we will see in the following sections, what is shared is often humorous commentary, presumable retweeted by those who were sufficiently amused.

5. Democracy sausages

The most obvious clues to the iconicity of sausages in the Ausvotes corpus are posts that present this icon and its attendant values as interchangeable, for instance the following where the icon acts to humorously stand for an ideological position:

“ Didn’t see the Sausage Party on the Senate ballot paper, I’d vote for a bit of sausage any day over the LNP 😊 #abcnews24 #auspol #ausvotes ”

These types of post tend to play with the relation between the literal and the metaphorical, with materiality and metaphor, often featuring the sausage icon actually physically becoming values such as *democracy* and *freedom*. For example the people barbequing in Figure 3 are literally ‘*cooking democracy*’, as designated in the accompanying post. Further examples of this kind of pattern visibly materialize freedom as the taste and smell of sausages:

“ **freedom** tastes like sausage and coffee, apparently #ausvotes ”

“ hat waft of **freedom** and sausage sizzles on the wind must mean it’s election day #ausvotes ”

“ the air smells like sausages and **freedom** #ausvotes ”

“ Guys. GUYS. I think the real issue of the election is solved! #auspol #ausvotes #**freedom**sausage ”

“ I asked my Nanna if she had a **democracy** sausage today. No, but I would like to bash most people over the head with a large one! #ausvotes ”

Some posts also play with the absurdity of elevating a foodstuff to the status of an electoral candidate, presenting the sausage as literally a runner in the election via humorous reference to the fact that sausage was a trending term on Twitter at the time:

“ #**democracy**sausage beating #ausvotes. Straya, you guys. Still hoping for late swing to #**democracy**sausage by the way #YouDecide9 ”



Figure 3. Linked image for the post “Cooking democracy #ausvotes



Figure 4. @User Tastes like democracy. #AusPol #ausvotes

In addition to literally becoming the values of democracy and freedom, the sausage icon could be conflated with the value, for instance references to ‘*democracy sausage*’ where the value acts as a classifier defining the ‘type’ of sausage (further examples in Table 2):

“ One **democracy** sausage with **freedom** tomato sauce and **liberty** mustard, please. #auspol #ausvotes ”

Indeed ‘democracy’ is the seventh most frequent collocate of ‘sausage’ in the corpus. The frequency of ‘democracy sausage’ suggests its increased interpersonal charge, likely arising from the humour of the collocation. The juxtaposition of sausages as a ‘trivial’ domestic object (often involved in phallic humour) and the ‘serious’ communal ideal of democracy, enacts humorous incongruity.

Table 2. Concordance lines for ‘democracy sausage’ from the #Ausvotes corpus

1	There was no	democracy sausage	when I submitted my postal vote in SanFrancisco #ausvotes
2	I got gyped, no	democracy sausage	at my polling booth! (Democracy mini cupcakes instead – not the same!) #ausvotes
3	Vote for the	democracy sausage,	cakes, lamingtons and more here ... #auspol #ausvotes

4	Time for my	democracy sausage	#ausvotes
5	@User Nooo! Say it ain't so. I'm just heading to OPH to vote and I demand my birthright of a good	democracy sausage!	#ausvotes
6	Exercised my democratic rights, got my	democracy sausage	#ausvotes #sausagesizzle
7	I demand my	democracy sausage!	#ausvotes
8	My	democracy sausage	sizzle tasted like disappointment. #ausvotes
9	I won't tell you how to vote, but I will unfollow anyone who had barbecue sauce on their	democracy sausage.	Unaustralian. #ausvotes
10	One	democracy sausage	with freedom tomato sauce and liberty mustard, please. #auspol #ausvotes

Most posts, however, invoke (suggest or evoke), rather than explicitly designate, a relationship between the icon and its attendant values. In these instances, evaluative patterns appear to resonate from the icon. Adopting Martin and White's (2005) categorization of evaluative language into affect⁴ (emotion), judgment (moral opinion) and appreciation (aesthetic opinion), we can observe a concentration of affect and appreciation around this icon. For example, there are many instances of shared positive appreciation about the quality of the sausage sizzle (shown in bold):

“ **Best** sausage sizzle ive ever tasted @ #oonoonbass #townsville #auspol #ausvotes. Thanks to the polite young lass who served me #sausagevotes ”

“ Voting (then a **yummy** sausage) ”

“ Want to know the **best** place to get a **good** sausage on Election Day? I can help!
#ausvotes #auspol #KitchenCabinet ”

“ **Mmmm** #sausagesizzle. The cornerstone of a great democracy! Thanks for
brekkie @[primary school]. #ausvotes ”

And also co-occurring instances of affect:

“ RT @User: In related news, if you **love** sausage more than voting, check out the
#snagvotes map. #ausvotes ”

“ “@theheraldsun: Hey Australia! We hit a worldwide @Twitter peak for use of the
word sausage #ausvotes” I’m Aussie & I **love** sausage 😊 ”

“ I’m pretty sure every Australian is most **excited about** getting a sausage or cake
than the changing future of our nation. #auspol #ausvotes ”

“ Can’t wait for the sausage sizzle today. #ausvotes #auspol ”

In addition, as the following sections will explore, there were particular interpersonally-charged rhetorical motifs in the corpus that persistently leveraged sausage sizzle iconicity.

5.1 Sausages as an interpersonal panacea

The sausage sizzle as an interpersonal balm for the frustrated voter was a recurrent pattern in the corpus, offering humorous relief relating to the everyday irritations of voting in the election, for instance:

“ Thank goodness for the cakes & sausages. At least part of my voting experience
was satisfactory #ausvotes #snagvotes ”

“ Time to wait ages in line -.- The #sausagesizzle is the light at the end of the
tunnel! #ausvotes ”

“ Silver lining.. Atleast I’ll get a sausage.. #auspol #ausvotes #election2013 ”

Here, the bonding icon operates as a form of light relief, affording the opportunity of rallying around a more ‘palatable’ experience. These types of complaint lightly mock the importance of the voting process, and associate the bonding icon with invoked or inscribed negative appraisal of the election. The typical pattern is to tarnish the value of voting and burnish the value of the bonding icon. Such a tarnish/burnish pattern has elsewhere been identified in terms of evaluative language patterns in academic literacy (Hood, 2010; Humphrey, 2013). This pattern is repeated in the motifs explored in the following two sections.

5.2 Sausages as the real value of elections

Many posts position the bonding icon as the central reason for participating in the election with voting located as peripheral, tarnishing the value of the voting process, for instance:

“ Do I have to fill out a ballot or can I skip straight to the democracy sausage?
#auspol #ausvotes ”

Some of these posts include photos of sausages taken on mobile devices just after purchase. These images accompany verbiage suggesting that the sausage sizzle was the main event of the election or the only thing that made attending a polling booth worthwhile (Figure 5). Some posts ideationally reconstrue the act of voting itself as partaking in a sausage sizzle, appending the hashtag #shareasnag (Figure 6).

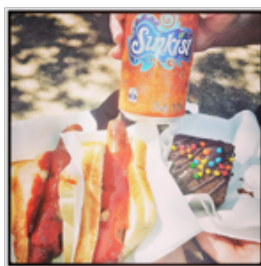


Figure 5: The only worthwhile reason for the walk to the polling booth. #snags #brownie #colddrink #ausvotes



Figure 6. An example of the image used in the #shareasnag hashtag meme [original image source unknown].

In general, these types of posts burnish the 'sausage' icon via appreciation (shown in bold below), at the humorous expense of the accompanying status of the 'election':

“ The only **sure** vote today will be for the sausage sizzle. #yummo #ausvotes ”

“ I think the **bigger** question today is how many sausages will be eaten nationwide? #auspol #ausvotes #haveadamnsnag ”

“ The only **worthwhile** reason for the walk to the polling booth. #snags #brownie #coldrink #ausvotes ”

“ The **main** thing bringing Aussies to the vote today is the sausage sizzle. #auspol #ausvotes ”

“ If you're not sure who to back tomorrow, tick no one & enjoy a sausage It's your democratic right & too **important** to mess about #ausvotes ”

“ RT @User⁵: Make your decision **count**. Go where the sausages are on #ausvotes day! #snagvotes ”

The estimation could also be invoked rather than directly mentioned in the post:

“ This. Oh, and democracy. #ausvotes #snagvotes #auspol ”

The humour of this pattern arises from inversion of the typical hierarchy at which sausages and elections are valued (with sausages being commonplace objects and elections highly valued social processes).

5.3 Faux-outrage at the absent sausage sizzle

Perhaps the most maximally burnishing position in terms of sausage sizzle iconicity is posts that tarnish the voting process by suggesting that without a sausage sizzle the process is not a valid election:

“ Where is the sausage sizzle at @ABCNews24? It's **not Australian democracy** without phallic meat. #ausvotes ”

“ It’s **not election day** without a sausage sizzle. Check out #WA polling stations at #snagvotes #auspol #ausvotes ”

The most frequent 3-gram ⁶ for *sausage* was ‘*no sausage sizzle*’, featuring posts humorously expressing faux-outrage about an absent sausage sizzle (further examples in Table 3):

“ I didn’t get a sausage. There was **no sausage sizzle**. Election day RUINED! Sad day for democracy. #auspol #ausvotes ”

These types of posts feature hyperbolic complaint realised largely by intensification (e.g. *RUINED* in caps font in the above). For instance example 3 in Table 3 construes this as the warning that a particular polling booth has failed to provide a sausage sizzle, appending the hashtag *#disappointed* to intensify the complaint. Metadiscourse of this kind is of course infinitely regressive, as seen in the following amusing post:

“ This entitlement culture must end. If there’s **no sausage sizzle** at your polling place, make one yourself. #ausvotes ”



Figure 6. Linked image for the post “WARNING: Beautiful election day here at St Mark’s Church but no sausage sizzle. #disappointed #ausvotes #auspol ”

Table 3. Concordance lines for ‘no sausage sizzle’

1	If there’s	no sausage sizzle	at my polling booth, I’m voting at Bunnings #snagvotes #ausvotes
2	You want to see a fking riot? If there’s	no sausage sizzle	where I vote, then you’ll see a Napoleon worthy rage #ausvotes
3	WARNING: Beautiful election day here at St Mark’s Church but	no sausage sizzle.	#disappointed #ausvotes #auspol
4	Disappointed there’s	no sausage sizzle	at #melbourne polling station! Call themselves Aussies... #ausvotes #auspol

5		no sausage sizzle	at Bellevue Hill polling station. Kids are very disillusioned with this democracy lark. #auspol #ausvotes
6	Central #Canberra polling station has	no sausage sizzle	or cake stall!! The outrage!! #ausvotes #auspol
7	The worst thing about tomorrow's election is that there's	no sausage sizzle	at my polling place. Who do I blame for this? #ausvotes

6. Conclusion

While electoral microblogging is a practice by which people can directly express their political opinions through comment on important electoral issues, it is also a communicative channel that allows people to relate more quotidian dimensions of their experiences. In this way it may be used to forge ambient alignments that are more to do with the commonality of routine life than particular a political disposition, though clearly the two are not mutually exclusive. While we may be more familiar with the role that ceremonial icons, such the carrying the flame during the Olympics, play in creating a sense of transcendent unity, more domestic icons also play an important role in the kinds of camaraderie we experience in daily life, and these often are used to characterize particular national identities. For instance the hills hoist washing line used in backyards throughout Australia was coopted as a symbol of a particular version of white suburban Australian identity in the last century. This paper has explored how the sausage sizzle, a 'grassroots' fund-raising activity during voting, functions as an icon during elections, distilling values relating to conviviality and working together.

However, rather than simply asserting that this icon acts as a focus for straightforward national rallying, I have suggested that a more complex pattern is enacted using humour. The examples explored in this paper suggest the iconicity of the sausage sizzle relies in part on the humorous incongruity of eating a sausage and the serious business of voting in an election. This humour supports forms of ambient affiliation about the everyday experience of voting at a polling booth. For example it affords the opportunity for communal complaint about banal dimensions of the voting experience such as queuing. This paper has explored how this affiliation is enacted in the language of these tweets, considering posts that burnish(positively appraise) the icon, at the same time as venting frustration by tarnishing(negatively appraising) the voting experience. Direct complaint without an attendant bonding icon, while frequently observed, did not appear to have the humorous 'memetic' edge seen in sausage-sizzle posts. In other words, posts that did not draw on iconicity did not seem to have the kind of viral impetus that forms the interpersonal basis of Internet memes⁷. Future work might compare quantitatively whether posts featuring a bonding icon of this kind are more diffuse within a social network.

Notes

1 'Ambient' is used to refer to the way in which other micro-bloggers are potentially present within the social network, not necessarily via direction connections between accounts or by direct conversations but by participation in mass practices such as social tagging (Zappavigna, 2011).

2 'Snag' is Australian slang for sausage which may have originated from a term in British dialect for 'small meal' (Macquarie Dictionary, 2014)

3 Words that are considered 'key' in corpus linguistics occur in the target corpus more frequently than would be expected when compared with a larger reference corpus.

4 Small caps are used to differentiate this technicality from the common sense equivalents of these terms.

5 Usernames have been disguised.

6 Three word cluster, that is, words that tended to occur together.

7 'Catchy' multimedia that self-propagates across a social media network.

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