

## Analyzing Social Media's Role in the #MeToo Movement

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### **Abstract**

As more survivors come forward with their stories of sexual harassment, social media sites became an important platform for amplifying these narratives. The intention of this analysis is on the #MeToo movement that has unfolded on social media, specifically Twitter and Facebook. Its genesis is traced, both as a coined term and the hashtag first used by an actress. It is also considered how the discussion has evolved over time, as well as how the callout responses to high-profile accused predators have evolved. Although social media sites empower marginalized voices and experiences of sexual harassment and assault, their capacity for facilitating collective action and tangible justice has not been fully realized. Instead, the ability of these platforms to address and scrutinize the movement and individuals has been the focus of much attention. Two recent case studies are analyzed, one demonstrating the feminist potentiality of a backlash movement and the other more positively examining the long-term positive effects of a movement. A potential future trajectory for the #MeToo movement as it pertains to social media is also discussed. The birth of the #MeToo movement is analyzed, for example, documenting the first 24 hours of this phrase via Twitter. The aim is from that point forward, how many individuals share “first-person revelations of sexual assault/abuse” on social media. Over time, the conversation of the movement turns from first-person testimonials to other discussions of sexism, as is documented with feminist and sexist term analysis on Twitter. The modern movement is intertwined, not starting in the wake of Hollywood celebrities accused of abuse but on a call for better treatment of abuse survivors.

Keywords #MeToo movement, social media, sexual harassment, Twitter, Facebook, collective action, feminist discourse, case studies

## 2. Introduction

Tarana Burke first laid the groundwork for a grassroots movement breaking through the silence of sexual harassment and assault by women of color in 2006 (Hassan et al., 2019). By October 2017, actress Alyssa Milano renewed this movement with her Twitter post following high-profile sexual abuse accusations against Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein. It aimed to empower less privileged groups of women by providing a platform, on which they can raise their voice through storytelling concerning sexual harassment that they have experienced. It can be observed that many posts in the form of text, picture, video, and link have not only highlighted the voices of assault victims, but they have also been aimed at punishing perpetrators of them. As a result, the movement has caused notable consequences, such as lawsuits, job losses, and imprisonments of abusers (Mueller et al., 2020). This study examined word usage, sentiment distribution, demographical representation, and spatial features of posts containing hashtag MeToo on Twitter. To analyze those, a scraper was built in order to collect approximately 200,000 posts retweeted from more than thousands of users. Word cloud, sentiment classification, LDA topic modeling, and Kernel density estimation were subsequently performed on text content, while demographic profiles of users were also obtained by gender and origin. In the end, patterns of ex-posts were analyzed by using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and National Human Trafficking Hotline databases. Women continue to suffer from gender inequality and are discriminated against in social, economic, and political terms, even in modern society. MeToo phenomenon has revealed the extent and scope of this discrimination in a dramatic fashion over the course of recent months. Harassment, rape, violence, and abuse are still commonplace incidents against women. Therefore, an emphasis has been put on social networks to monitor abuse rates and help women in dangerous situations. Considering this urgency, it is aimed to investigate how women have utilized the digital MeToo campaign, what types of posts they have shared, who they have targeted, who

has participated in this campaign, and what kinds of topics have been effective in the frame of the mentioned campaign (Mueller et al., 2020).

### **3. The #MeToo Movement: Origins and Impact**

The #MeToo movement, which focuses on the issue of widespread sexual harassment and assault, has taken national spotlight across multiple media channels. This movement was actually started more than a decade ago. Me Too is a phrase developed in 2006. As a young woman of color growing up in the Bronx, Burke built Me Too from the farthest connective tissue of the experience of both sexual abuse and the silence or community among advocates and allies. The grassroots campaign of Me Too entered the scene ten full years before it became a trending hashtag, providing essential resources and ways of coping to those at the center of the crisis before it spread on the internet.

It was the strength of social media and viral buzz feeds, however, that thrust Me Too into the pop culture and national dialogue. Recent recipients of this movement have called for a change in understanding regarding how sexual harassment is viewed. Associate harassment with rape, the satellite lands of the physical unwanted touch, pushes away from its gravity. In new light, where it becomes connected to daily assertiveness over one's own body, the normal ambit of daily life is transformed to a network of unsparing trenches. In this respect, Me Too has changed the way many adults do business, and how credibility is formed and trusted in the titans of the industry. Similarly, it has sparked a local political policy on the federal and state side to remote changes in the protections as an employee, to include restriction on NDAs and the presence of a co-signer, or even more fundamental shifts in professional development. (Nicholls, 2021)

### **4. Social Media Platforms and Their Role in #MeToo**

In 2006, Tarana Burke founded the Me Too movement as a response to claims of sexual violence specifically against women of color. In October 2017, after many high-profile women came forward with their sexual abuse experiences against Harvey Weinstein, over 100 women merged on Twitter using the #MeToo hashtag at actress Alyssa

Milano's suggestion (Mueller et al., 2020). After that, women (cis and trans) around the globe merged on Twitter and other social media platforms, and later, in offline locations, to express their stories of sexual assault or harassment. On social media, current victims and survivors of abuse were usually brought out of shadowed by default. In the digital age, modern communication technology platforms were therefore crucial for this movement.

There are some fact-checking websites to recognize the validity of social media news. Despite this, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become informational sources for exposure to news, personal appeals, and ideas. After that, spreading and globalizing has become easier for any account and draft to post on digital media. As more and more such stories are informed there, the public, big family feels the same solidarity on the event, a feeling of assistance that never looks to occur before. Granted the situation utilizes the hashtag to tell their experiences in this direction, they help others to spread more effectually and truthfully, and to empathize the events. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are extensions of each other as leading platforms in the expansion of the Me Too movement. Twitter is common for sharing thoughts, insights, debate, and news reports and to have something to say; it becomes convincing. PartialView, a list of various electronic media platforms that carry messages, is what is happening. Me Too, which started in an area in Philadelphia, has now become famous globally after a number of digital media accounts; a safe area to say #MeToo is no limit now. At the crossroads of making local news global, these various digital facilities, as far as needed, were used by the accusers. Twitter, the center of the Me Too movement, has become a platform open for discussion and sharing for the instant with its wording style. On the sharing partners of reported cases of sexual harassment and abuse, even so, Facebook uses more language that mentions group-oriented events, facilities, and uses the formal language; it appears more useful for promotional reasons. On the subject of spreading the same instant, due to some structures, Instagram plays a better role for the viral spread of common experiential events. Instagram is an effective

platform for sharing information and acquiring visible concepts, which results in paying more attention to congruity and aesthetic outcomes. (Antonakaki et al.2021)

### **5. Challenges and Criticisms of #MeToo on Social Media**

The past few years have shone a light on the pervasiveness of sexual assault and harassment across a range of industries. The Me Too movement has had a tremendous impact on awareness and discussion. The movement has clearly benefited from amplification from the mainstream media (Modrek & Chakalov, 2019). Yet, the Me Too movement existed before mainstream recognition and continued after the fervor of coverage waned. Particularly, Twitter has been a major platform for Me Too, serving as an echo chamber, a forum for community-building, and a space for direct activism. Me Too has produced significant discussion around ideas of consent, power, and victimhood. However, much criticism of Me Too, when it comes to social media, is fundamentally critical of Me Too on Twitter. This is not to ignore concerns about false accusations or trial by public opinion, these are legitimate issues and entirely worthy of consideration. However, criticisms of the #MeToo movement often center on its existence within the digital landscape, on social media platforms. There is also a significant amount of criticism that, fairly or unfairly, is aligned against the movement due to perceived gender-political biases. This article, then, will address the play of (often simultaneous) discourse and critique. Social media platforms, notably Twitter, are where many narratives are first heard now. Digital media enables rapid exchange of information and stories. This on one hand is positive: social activism can spread quickly and generate change. However, it also means that there is a massive flood of stories and data, not all of it true. In the case of Me Too, as well, many distinct (and sometimes contradictory) accounts emerged of what connoted “me too” within relationships. There is a risk here, too, that narratives (from both sides) can be manipulated or misrepresented. Moreover, there is a sense in which the “currency” of social media is outrage or hysteria. There is a strong emphasis, perhaps an inevitable one, on the invective and aggressive language used both within the metoo stories themselves and in the responses to them. This can create a feeding frenzy of negativity. In this environment, the possibility naturally

emerges for some stories to be given pride of place over others. For example, a number of high-profile Me Too allegations were later proved to be false or exaggerated, subsequently downgraded in the public discourse. However, the damage was already done, these individuals' careers destroyed. There is an extreme and troubling schadenfreude in seeing wealth or adulation stripped from the famous. Further, the wider public display can be a cruel crucible for the often (understandably) rambling and unclear accounts given by victims after a year or decades, creating clear and easy points for adversaries to oppose. From the start it is vital to address the very fair point that the social media can enable a public "trial" without judicial process. It is a foundational principle of Western society that all accused deserve to have their case tried by a jury of their peers. It is all too easy with the #MeToo movement to forget that there are always two sides to every story. Mere accusation should not be enough to convict a man for the rest of time. Women can, and do, lie (Jain, 2019). A fair and impartial investigation needs to occur to determine the truth. Instead, the online space quickly becomes a witch-hunt. Different allegations of varying seriousness accumulate en masse against usually relatively anonymous individuals, with invariably career-destroying impacts. In some of the more high-profile examples, employers make irrational decisions and fire individuals with all the due process of a Stalinist show trial. Politicians join the feeding frenzy, often without bothering with the details of the individual allegations, their only cries being to accept a general imputation of wrongdoing. Indeed, the suggestion is often made that a failure to believe all accusations en masse and unilaterally is immediate evidence of support for the violator. Turning to the originators of the thankfully moribund #MeToo movement, as with many well-meaning initiatives, it began with the best of intentions. Tarana Burke has an incredibly sympathetic origin story. It is impossible to listen to her talk of the creation of Me Too without feeling enormous sympathy for the marginalized. Nevertheless, it is unhelpful hypocrisy to ignore that when wealthier individuals became the face of the movement, many of the original aims were lost. Some narratives of trauma are more attractive than others in

the market of public relations, thereby leading to the suppression of divergent experiences (Mueller et al., 2020).

#### **6. Case Studies: Successful and Unsuccessful #MeToo Campaigns**

While the internet and social media platforms have faced numerous criticisms, they have ultimately given a voice and power to those previously unable to access such a platform and has been an enabler of social change. Thus, a new age of advocacy has appeared, one embodied through social media-anchored movements. One of the most high profile social media movements began with the allegations that arose against Harvey Weinstein in October of 2017. Alyssa Milano introduced the hashtag #MeToo, an initiative of solidarity with Media against sexual aggression that quickly gained momentum. Social media was instrumental in the rapid dissemination of these allegations and allowed for a safe place for these women to share their stories, demonstrating the power of the platform as a news and advocacy conduit. We examine the upshots campaigns have on policy, public awareness, and the number of materialized changes by evaluating various social media campaigns, success, and failures, related to the movement. A campaign's timeline, set up and different key events, such as posts or criticisms, are examined in order to address whether the strategies behind the campaigns influenced the timeline or an event. Campaigns are particularly successful due to this effect attribute itself to the narrative employed, often capitalizing on collective storytelling (Mueller et al., 2020), community support, and a momentous event. A campaign particularly unsuccessful due to the narrative the campaign was met with, victim-blaming backlash, involving incidents prior to the movement gaining large scale attention. This analysis demonstrates how the success or failure of a movement or campaign can be hinged on the chosen narrative and the timing and context of that narrative (L. Siuta et al., 2023). It's crucial that organizers understand the impact of critical reactions so campaigns are strategically ready to anticipate, thwart, or mitigate backlash.



## 7. The Future of #MeToo on Social Media

In 2017, a tweet from a highly influential public figure, including the hashtag #MeToo, sparked a trend that resulted in over 1.7 million mentions in the first four weeks. Often shared with personal narratives, the massive data collection process that ensued led to the leakage of other secretive information of abusers and allegations. In response to the allegations, ramifications ranged from immediate termination of contracts with longtime collaborators to the launching of criminal investigations (L. Siuta et al., 2023). This initial impetus has underlined the key role that social media platforms play in accelerating what eventually turned into a social movement. Since Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter were launched, every app in the world wanted its piece of the action. This was the first time that they played a major role despite being available since 2005, Facebook's forerunner, and since 2010 the foundation for TikTok was laid. Since then, the movement has seeped into everything possible. More importantly, and as seen with other major movements/challenges, it has resulted in a relentless spread into the realm of popular and mainstream culture, prompting public figures, be it celebrities or politicians, to take a stance.

The first-year anniversary marked a new chapter as the focus shifted to the future of the movement, especially when considering the likely effects that the major tech giants' participation could have. In fact, by that point, the movement had reached a peak in the number of mentions, many of which started questioning the long-term sustainability of the newly accrued relevance of the issue which might render other challenges less visible (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020). French journalist Sandra Muller, credited with starting the #balancetonporc (French equivalent of #MeToo), for an invalidation at the court demanded by Eric Brion, called for reframing, arguing that the movement has reached its goals, yet at the same time argued that #MeToo was targeting, to a certain extent unjustly, individuals with no criminal responsibility (e.g., Aziz Ansari). Actions against individuals, while arguably instrumental in holding sexual abuse to account, somewhat disregard the broader issue of the prevailing cultural norms of what is still perceived as the norm between the genders. And this initial success might be eroded,



either because granted it remains one-off, but also because just as ubiquitous it may trigger public compassion fatigue. Unfiltered noise is the main issue in a platform where anyone can speak to an audience of potentially billions, causing both valuable and relevant insights to be overlooked or deliberately discarded. In light of that, the deliberate focus will be on the hashtag itself across its main bearer, i.e., Twitter, and a particular angle will be investigated.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The #MeToo movement has changed the way society views sexual harassment and assault. It has become a global phenomenon that is impossible to ignore. It encourages individuals to share their stories and learn from others. Social media has transformed the movement by encouraging the world to listen to the voices of individuals and build a community of support that may not have been there prior. Despite the fact that social media has allowed for such widespread awareness, it does come with issues. The most significant concern that has been discussed is the safety and anonymity of speaking out online. Another criticism associated with the movement and social media as a whole is the ability to remain focused on one topic and learn from others. However, while some of these further studies have shown that social media can promote meaningful discussion and foster an environment that encourages listening and learning. It was stated by the individuals who participated that they did genuinely care about these issues but did not know how to help. Transforming social media to allow more sharing of information and a wider reach of platforms will continue to help educate and expand the movement for future protests and events (Mueller et al., 2020). In conclusion, social media has the capability to help improve the world with the help of the #MeToo movement. Social media has played a major role in the #MeToo movement, but it also is defined by the movement itself. It is a movement that encourages people to share their stories, listen to those of others, and amplify the voices of those who have remained silent. If advocates, social media platforms, and pans can outweigh these criticisms with actions and improvements on their practices, the #MeToo movement can continue to strive towards its goal of making lasting changes. While the embrace of this value is

encouraged, it is also important to cultivate a sense of how conceptual frameworks of accountability and consent will be used to maintain a discourse of cultural change with regards to the #MeToo movement and social media in general for the remainder of this essay and into the future in order to maintain progress and dialogue on these intricate topics.

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