Hashtag activism in the advancement of social change: An examination of the #metoo movement and its techno-social implications

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Abstract

In 2017, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” (Lindgren, 2019) The response to this tweet became the viral hashtag activist movement #metoo across social platforms. As an exemplar of digital activism, the #metoo movement offers scholars an opportunity to explore how social media alters the activism landscape, stitching feminism and technology together for the social advancement of gendered protesting. Simultaneously allowing the technical architectures of Twitter and affordances of the categorically enabled hashtag allowed for a worldwide debate on gender, violence, and power (Lindgren, 2019).

The research synthesized in this report examines key literature on digital activism, rhetoric, and social media, using the case of the #metoo movement to clarify this activism’s expressions. *The research presented in this report examines how digital rhetoric, intertextuality, and advances in techno-social connectivity have advanced communication in social networking. In particular, the report will examine key literature on online social movements, the communicative affordances of digital connectivity, and hashtag activism.* The research presented analyzes several aspects of digital communication, with a particular focus on affordances that encourage hashtag activism. The report situates the #metoo movement as an exemplar of hashtag activism that supports the advancement of social change. First, this report will evaluate the role of hashtag categorization in social platforms using the viral #metoo movement as a vehicle for modern protesting without the constraints of space and time (Kurniawan et al., 2020). Then, it will evaluate scholarly literature on the rhetorical implications of digital texts (Eyman, 2015) and the intertextual possibilities of digital activism. Lastly, the report will evaluate key aspects of technofeminist theory, which Wajcman (2010) and others have argued as potentially emancipatory. The report offers a synthetic contribution to the continued study of gender discourse and highlights the power of visceral shared experiences within the digital sphere.

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“Women belong in all places where decisions are being made.”

Ruth Bader Ginsberg, 1933-2020

1. Chapter 1 – The Role of Media in Social Change

1.1 Introduction

The catchphrase “me too” is used in the feminist movement centered around preventing sexual assault. The #metoo movement began with social justice activist Tarana Burke in 2006 to empower women and assault survivors (Burke, 2021). The catchphrase then went viral in 2017 following a tweet from famous actress Alyssa Milano, saying: “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote “Me too” as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” (Lindgren, 2019, p. 420). Alyssa Milano’s tweet (Appendix A) thus began a user-mobilized movement with an influx of users worldwide sharing their experiences, grievances, support of survivors, and visceral experiences of sexual assault on social media platforms.

Sexual violence across the world is a significant issue that disproportionately affects women. In a 2018 survey of 1,000 women-identifying respondents above the age of 18 (including several that identified as transgender), Kearl (2018) found that 27% “survived sexual assault” (p.7). In this same survey of female-identifying respondents, 51% had been “sexually touched in an unwelcome way” (p.7). Another survey conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center found that “approximately 1 in 5 (21.3% or an estimated 25.5 million) women in the U.S. reported completed or attempted rape at some point in their lifetime” (Smith et al., 2015). Rape, sexual coercion, and any other form of unwanted sexual contact are recognized as sexual violence (Smith et al., 2015, p.1). #metoo is a movement that afforded survivors of sexual violence to come together and express their accounts or support of others using the connective properties of hashtags on social media platforms.

Hashtagging is a form of microblogging (Bernard, Pakis, & Ross, 2019) that relates to ongoing current events in user-generated content (Zappavigna, 2015) and is part of the scholarly conversation regarding social activism in its newest form. The implications of viral hashtags are exemplified in the #metoo movement, though started in 2006 and launched in 2017 (Lindgren, 2019), is ongoing and has been labeled a trend of "hashtag activism" and an "example of successful mobilization and awareness-raising" (Lindgren, 2019, p.419) in the digital sphere. User contributions to the movement are considered "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009, p.85) and helped #mtoo succeed by flooding the hashtag with user-generated microblogged content concerning sexual violence. With the world as both the audience and the contributors, Twitter users collectivized in a timely, concentrated way using the technical architectures of Twitter. Architectures include hashtag categorization, retweeting, and mentions of other users. These affordances of Twitter support widespread communication processes, increasing the possibility for viral content, rapid dissemination of sentiment, and interconnection of personal grievances (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). In turn, these affordances may motivate users to join the #metoo public for social change.

The following report examines social media platforms as vehicles for user mobilization and activism. Architecturally created for users to build profiles and create connections (boyd & Ellison, 2007), platforms like Twitter are shaping the social ramifications of a technologically advancing world. Twitter has unique capacities which allow for increased user connectivity and social support in content creation and mobilization. A better view of social mobilization is described as connective action by Bennett and Segerberg (2012). They argue that "taking public action or contributing to a common good becomes an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships" (16). On social

media, users seeking out connectivity may choose to engage in personalize content creation, share individualized ideas, with the summation of technologically organized processes in structures like Twitter and beyond. These structures allow for instantaneous user mobilization, movement participation, and personal connection by providing the digital framework necessary to promote the transcendence of individual content creation and increase connection.

1.2 Overview

The following report synthesizes extant literature in Communication Studies and related disciplines to examine social platforms as vehicles for user mobilization and activism. In this report, I examine scholarly literature regarding intertextuality, connective action, hashtag activism, and technofeminism. This interdisciplinary literature comprises scholarship in digital rhetoric and social media disciplines. My primary focus is on technofeminist theory, considered the intersection of feminism and technology (Wajcman, 2010). Technofeminist theory draws upon a wide range of interdisciplinary literature, including digital feminism, cyberfeminism, and digital rhetoric. Technofeminist theory prioritizes socio-technical discussions of power, making it an ideal lens to discuss social change. Because social media platforms are communication tools that can aid social change, I evaluate the literature from a socio-technical, rhetorical perspective. I use the example of the #metoo movement because it exemplifies how hashtag activism furthers social change and digital advancement.

In the remainder of this report, I plan to provide an overview of the literature on techno-social advancement in combination with self-disclosure and its application to the advancing virality in hashtags like #metoo. The report will begin with algorithms, technical affordances of social platforms, and their role in digital social movements. The research provided then looks at

how the boundaries of social media platforms lift the constraints of space and time to allow for virality and active participation for users across the world, exemplified in the #metoo movement. Finally, it will situate the landscape of modern protesting within digital rhetoric and text as it advances activism and virality. I plan to supplement my argumentative literature review with additions to the movement on Twitter and the value individual activism brings to social change. Because this is a report regarding an ongoing social movement, the public-facing application will apply the principles of self-disclosure and intertextuality to marketing in the face of sexual violence with a visually appealing and encouraging advertisement campaign for girls ages 23-29 to engage with and for survivors to feel empowered. The campaign will be comprised of example Twitter posts that add to the #metoo movement, creating engagement within audiences of the #metoo movement itself and functionally increasing the use of the hashtag allowing for visibility and encouraging activism.

1.3 Key Features of Social Media

Defined as bounded systems that allow users to build profiles and engage with the connections made within them (boyd & Ellison, 2007), social media platforms like Twitter are shaping the social ramifications of a technologically advancing world. Social media platforms have unique capacities that have increased user connectivity and social support in recent years. Platforms are increasingly affording mass amounts of content creation and user mobilization. Connective action in the mass-social mobilization of users is defined by Bennett and Segerberg (2012), as personalized actions, individualized contributions, and technologically organized processes in user-to-user structures. These structures transcend individual content creation, afford instantaneous user mobilization, user participation in movements, and interpersonal

connection building. Structures of social media platforms afford connective action by providing the digital framework necessary.

Social networking platforms have created a new standard for self-disclosure (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012), perceived social support (Derlega, Metts & Petronio, 1993), and contemporary protesting previously unreachable in the digital sphere. Technical architectures provide a framework for user mobilization and collective action. Platforms encourage virality by categorizing hashtags and retweets for users to view and steer social movements like the #metoo movement of 2017 (Lindgren, 2019). This movement is an example of activism as it demands social change for survivors of sexual violence, uses the digital sphere to call on toxic masculinity as an issue in society, and promotes the further teaching of consent and recovery for survivors (Afzal & Wallace, 2019). At the intersection of self-disclosure and user mobilization, hashtag activism has afforded digital movements and structured collective action in a display of technological protest.

1.4 Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms are digital communities shaped by users (Bossetta, 2018) that allow for public and semi-public profile construction (boyd & Ellison, 2007) through text, photo, and video sharing. These digital affordances are associated with higher levels of social capital (Lu & Hampton, 2017), meaning more personal connections. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and more, have a high level of interactive potential, open channels of "reciprocal communication between agencies" (Shahin & Dai, 2019, p.1685), and information circulation potential from user interconnectivity (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Social media platforms were created to afford mutual interactions and connection-building

between users (Papacharissi, 2016). Differences in platforms engage audiences in distinct ways. Platforms like Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr, for instance, promote the use of visual imagery over text-based and hyperlinked information (Quan-Haase et al., 2021, p.1703), affording various end-goals for user representation in movements. Pittman and Reich (2016), argue that social media platforms (such as Instagram) that emphasize visual imagery are argued to "facilitate human connection" (p.157) more intimately. Further, text-based platforms like Facebook and Twitter are typically used to watch or share news (p.157). While social media platforms "generally serve to fulfill users' needs for social interaction" (p.156) the functionality of each one impacts user decision-making on the platform users choose to use.

Social media platforms have unique connective functionalities; however, their overall objectives are typically very similar. According to boyd and Ellison (2007) social platforms have three key functions: "(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). The connections created by users act as a network and provide the content that users interact with on various profiles. Each social media platform has different affordances and capabilities for digital interaction and the environment that offers users space to achieve performative goals (Gibson, 1977). McGrenere and Ho (2000) define affordance as "an action possibility available in the environment to an individual, independent of the individual's ability to perceive this possibility" (p.1). Represented by user connectivity and digital engagement, social affordances are referred to by Wellman (2001) as "the possibilities that technological changes afford for social relations and social structure" (p.228). Furthermore, key features of network construction and mobilization stem from the already placed societal structures that transcend into the digital

sphere, continued then by algorithms. Wellman (2001) argues that interactions in digital spaces and the continued personalization of developing technology also affect the user experience in physical (non-digital) environments. The result is fluidity within interpersonal relationship development, simultaneously being technologically built and physically enabled. Further, Wellman (2001) contends that communities "have transformed cyberspace into cyberplaces, as people connect online with kindred spirits, engage in supportive and sociable relationships with them, and imbue their activity online with meaning, belonging, and identity" (Wellman, 2001, p.229).

The publics focused on in this report present a space for the collective identity formation of a group of individuals who recognize sexual violence as a problem and organize digitally to address it. Some scholars suggest that campaigns such as the #metoo movement encourage users to "co-create meaning with salient publics" (Xiong, Cho, & Boatwright, 2019, p.11), the sum of actions by user contributions to a social movement. Creating shared meaning also encourages collective identity, as studied in a semantic analysis from the same authors. Xiong et al. (2019) further contend that the theoretical framework of a "co-creational approach" (p.19) uses publics for social movements and continues participation while using pertinent words or phrases that encourage reframing of issues. Stating, "by examining the feminism-centered network, the study revealed that SMOs and publics co-created the salience of issues by using words, such as *women*, *sexual harassment*, *survivor*, *movement*, and *story* with greater prominence in the online discussion" (Xiong et al., 2019, p.19). The study also found themes from contributors' tweets that created the overall structure of the #metoo movement. Prominent themes included users pointing out oppressive structures of society (p.11), gender inequities, the current state of rape culture (p.16), and constraining forces on women's rights. Examples included the treatment

of women in the workplace, the gender pay gap, or possible actions to take, such as joining other movements in support of women (Xiong et al., 2019). Grunig and Hunt (1984), expand further on how digital media enables and generates public group formations by influencing an overall perception of the issue at hand. The #metoo movement centers around the expression of co-created themes surrounding inequal, gender-based rights. In response, users connected and collectivized to form the #mtoo public, subsequently, the #metoo movement. We use the collectivization of users to demonstrate how Twitter functions as a public space for user content generation.

1.5 Twitter

Although the #metoo movement was ubiquitously seen across social media platforms, the affordances and technical architectures of Twitter afforded the co-created public surrounding cyberfeminism. Twitter is a social media platform that affords the sharing and receiving of content created and re-posted by individuals (Gleason, 2013). Considered a “microblogging” service and communication-based community (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011, p.1294), Twitter users can cultivate their timeline by following others without necessarily following back. Gruzd et al. (2011) argue the asymmetrical imbalance afforded by Twitter affects the overall allowances for user interactions (p.1302) and virality. Each microblog post (referred to as a tweet) is limited to 280-characters (Stevens et al., 2021, p.2143), and can include geographic tagging, inter-user tagging, retweeting, “liking” and sharing tweets through other platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or text messaging. The tweets themselves can include pictures, videos, emojis, text, and gifs with 280-character messages (Gleason, 2013; Stevens et al., 2021), a unique affordance of the platform's digital and technical architectures. Defined as “the technical protocols that enable, constrain, and shape user behavior in a virtual space” (Bossetta, 2018,

p.473), digital architectures are influenced by algorithms and give users access to network structures or ways to create social connections in mediated spaces. The "asymmetrical" (Gruzd et al., 2011, p.1294) form of Twitter architectures afford one-way connectivity between users. Based on the asymmetry of Twitter, users can choose to follow each other in mutual, two-way communication, or one-way communication with only a sender and receiver. The asymmetry uses hashtag categorization in this sense as an avenue for users to observe conversations without active participation. Gruzd et al. (2011) argue that connectivity between users forces some interactions to be limited or intermittent (p.1296) and sustained by the affordances of communication.

The character limit on tweets is advantageous in moments of communication, where succinct text may have more "rhetorical velocity" (Penney & Dadas, 2014 p.85; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2009) that ultimately encourages users to share or retweet digital communication. Rhetorical velocity considers the composition of texts and their influence on message circulation (Sheridan, Ridolfo, & Michel, 2012, p.79). Influenced by a peer-to-peer architecture of information flow, Penney and Dadas (2014) argue that the horizontal structure of Twitter keeps brevity at the forefront of understanding how and why tweets circulate at different speeds (p.76). Peer-to-peer networks and mass amounts of tweets for users to sort through means attention-grabbing communication is necessary for mass circulation. Character length constraints then prioritize text composition for circulation possibilities (Sheridan et al., 2012) and may even act like news headlines (Penney & Dadas, 2014, p.81), designed to capture audience attention. Penney and Dadas (2014) further that the structure of Twitter thus "privileges brevity over length, timeliness over reflectiveness, and an overall focus on piquancy in the service of grabbing the attention of a decentralized network" (p.86). Gleason (2013) substantiates this

argument, arguing that brevity and succinctness of tweets are also advantageous for user learning, where users can follow hyperlinked content outside of Twitter to articles or other informative webpages. Thus intertextually increasing the intake of information on any given topic for users.

In contrast to other social media platforms, the technical architectures of Twitter present opportunities and constraints (Davis, 2020) with how users interact and present themselves. Scholars claim that Twitter, originally designed to facilitate communication and inform audiences, has created space for mass user mobilization in times of social unrest (Gleason, 2013) and can afford collective action. Mass collective action functions using "mobilizing information and news not available in other media, facilitating the coordination of demonstrations, allowing users to join political causes, and creating opportunities to exchange opinions with other people" (Valenzuela, 2013, p.921). Recognized by the rapid circulation of information in digital movements, Dadas (2017) argues that users hold opportunities for virality and mobilization by retweeting an already curated message into user networks (p.19) if they feel compelled to do so.

The technical aspect of Twitter does not necessarily account for user behavior. Scholars report overarching affordances on platforms that motivate users "are shared among several types of social media: visibility, editability, persistence and association" (Zheng & Yu, 2016, p.291). The prominence of these affordances is ubiquitous on social media platforms in user behavior while socializing. However, affordances are solely seen as "action possibilities" for users to engage in but do not compel any action from participants (Oltmann, Cooper, & Proferes, 2020, p.3). boyd (2010) agrees, stating: "affordances do not dictate participants' behavior, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants' engagement" (p.39). Built on technical architectures and affordances, Twitter's structural capabilities afford action possibilities

for users to engage. The research will detail the most prominent technical components of Twitter and how each of these computational logics functions to support collective action.

1.6 Algorithms

Algorithms have a profound effect on user connection, the curating of user feeds within social media platforms, and the affordances of social movements in digital spaces. Algorithms are defined by Saurwein and Spencer-Smith (2021): "On the Internet, algorithms are abstract procedures implemented in software programmes that transform input through specified computational procedures (throughput) into output. Many of these programmes are developed to handle the massive data and information available online (input). They, therefore, screen and assign relevance to data, select information, and put it into order (throughput)" (p.223). In other words, algorithms are formulas created to "reduce complexity brought about by information and interaction overload in social media" (Coretti & Pica, 2018, p.73). Further explained by Coretti & Pica (2018) is the role of algorithms in digital spaces, stating: "algorithmic selection builds the techno-functional core of several internet applications in a broad range of fields and for diverse functions, such as search (e.g., search engines)," and "recommendation (e.g., music platforms)" (p.223). The term "algorithmic selection" is used to describe the process of assigning relevance to content to maximize engagement and views using a statistical assessment (Latzer, Hollnbuchner, Just, & Saurwein, 2016, p.2). Algorithms can be problematic because of errors, such as "overblocking" (Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021, p.223), a concept that occurs when user content is flagged or removed by algorithmic error. Content moderation such as this happens because of the inability of algorithms to understand the context behind the content. One example of this is identifying keywords in speech as hate speech (Gorwa, Binns, & Katzenbach, 2020) or nudity in the art that is flagged as pornography (Gillespie, 2018). This is an example of

the role algorithms play in underlying social media functionality, some scholars contending that they can "reconfigure the relation between users and their tools" (Lange, Lenglet & Seyfert, 2019, p.605).

In application to the functionality of social media platforms, algorithms are useful in personalizing individual news feeds, helping users identify trending topics or viral information, advertising to specific targets, and filtering unwanted content (Saurwein & Spencer-Smith, 2021). Some scholars suggest social media platforms rely too heavily on algorithms, where users upload content at a high rate and algorithms recommend to individuals the most relevant content to view. Algorithms for social media applications, such as Twitter, also predict and recommend content from similar users to other users. This recommendation system is called "discoverability," or the design of an algorithm to predict and display types of content that will increase overall user engagement on social media platforms (Cobbe & Singh, 2019, p.31). These scholars contend that discoverability uses audience size to predict and display content unique to an individual's typical interests. Basing content on the average viewing patterns of users finds and exploits similarities to other user viewing patterns can be harmful. Some scholars contend that the discoverability of recommendations alters the user experience and possibilities for virality (McKelvey & Hunt, 2019, p.2). Hashtags also have a role in the algorithmic affordances of collective action. The active recommendation of a conversation created using an applied hashtag enables access to information that may ultimately lead to the collectivization of users (Etter & Albu, 2021, p.69). These actions, made possible using algorithms, interlink users and establish further connections with trending topics.

1.7 Hashtags

Hashtags afford user mobilization on social media platforms because of the searchable, categorical properties and unique adaptability to user interests. The hashtag is defined as a string of characters combined with a # (pound or hash symbol). Originally introduced on Twitter in 2007, hashtags were designed to "listen" to other conversations or have a “better eavesdropping experience” (Strutt & Dewey, 2015, p.57). The original tweet stated “how do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp?” by an internet activist, Chris Messina (Bernard et al., 2019). The purpose of a pound sign, clarified by Messina after the original tweet, is that hashtags help improve “contextualization, content filtering, and exploratory serendipity within Twitter” (Bernard et al., 2019, p.9). Created for content coordination and categorization (Bruns & Burgess, 2015), the hashtag has evolved to advance social and political messages and “enable metadiscourse to be embedded in social media communication” (Zappavigna, 2015, p.278), while simultaneously affording all users to connect in ways that platforms did not support beforehand (Messina, 2007).

Preceding hashtags in categorical patterns were keywords and hyperlinks. Originally used in a library for categorical selections, Bernard et al. (2019) define a keyword as a specific word that helps condense sentences or ideas by indexing (p.3). Eventually streamlined the process for categorically connecting ideas. Bernard et al. (2019) further contend when categorizing similar contents of books originally, a keyword was useful to those that used it out of necessity. The keyword was useful in locating or archiving larger sections in a retrieval system when looking for a specific document (p.2) Preceding the keyword was the hyperlink, an underlined word that provided users with broader connectivity options by linking one webpage to another (p.2). Once clicked on, the highlighted hyperlink would lead to another relevant webpage or website related

to the title of the link. Combined, the indexing possibilities of a keyword and application of the hyperlink are argued as revolutionizing the "digital organization of statements" (p.3) into social uses for users. On social media platforms, Bernard et al. (2019) finally argue that "the hashtag and the letters immediately following it thus have two functions: they are both a component of visible tweets or Instagram posts and a trigger for the invisible procedure that links them together" (Bernard et al., 2019, p.3). Because of the categorical linkages between content, users can search for and see content containing similar ideas digitally at any point in time.

Hashtags are a categorization tool to help locate and segment information within social media platforms by use of its "social tagging" (Zappavigna, 2015, p.288). A function of hashtags with users' social interactions is "central to the process of creating a critical awareness of our culture" (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p.1). Zappavigna (2015) contends that hashtags have become "a social semiotic resource supporting searchable talk and social processes of ambient affiliation" (p.276). Hashtags have key functions which allow for individuals to embed data and collaborative ideas into posts. Zappavigna (2015) further contends that by clicking on the linked hashtag, users can see other posts under the same category, making conversations between users a prominent function of the hashtag and considered "searchable talk" (p.289). Categorization of searchable talk segments user contributions in the process of posting and entering (or creating) conversations for others to view. Searchability in hashtags and categorization of tweets also allows for immediate updates on urgent news or current trends by category and emerging social and political events (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p.12). Hashtags in Twitter posts represent the textual application of user-to-user communication in smaller, textually concise ways.

Another function of a hashtag is its constitutive ability within the technological social framework. Shahin and Dai (2019) posit the placement of hashtags within social media allows

for the application of the "techno-social framework", a framework that "utilizes the technological affordances of an SNS like Twitter in inherently social ways- and with an eye on the larger objective of social change" (p.1685). Using this techno-social lens, these scholars argue that the reciprocal communication users engage in builds public engagement and constitutively progresses social change from user content.

A singular hashtagged phrase is a techno-social vehicle in connectivity between social media users that structures use user expressions in performative texts and posts (Rambukkana, 2015). In application, the larger ideological structure of nodes in social media movements can be seen and studied in so-called social media revolutions (Rambukkana, 2015) of techno-implicated acts. Bringing to light a larger comparison of online movements or hashtag activism in the dynamic nature of protesting, fluid in its physical and digital functionality. Dencik (2015) contends that the emergence of digital activism moves "activist communication and practices out of the radical 'ghettos' and into the mainstream" (p.203). Highlighting the role of activism on social media as having the ability to "provide a coherent and continuous narrative of recent uprisings" (Dencik, 2015, p.205). Further, categorization on social platforms thus allows users to mobilize with fewer resources (Dencik, 2015) than traditional in-person protesting, typically using trending ideologies. Trending hashtags are categorized areas of influential, current topics. Poddar (2020) defines trending hashtags as a "sudden burst on the usage of certain hashtags, representing specific topics" (p.1). She further argues that "for a hashtag to qualify as a trending topic, the Twitter trending algorithm is designed in such a way that the users will be shown the trending tweets based on their location, interests and the profiles they follow" (p.2). Trending topics can further organize groups on expansive networks like Twitter and potentially lead to conveying personal ideologies in the digital sphere.

Poddar argues that a popular hashtagged topic "influenced a significant amount of people over a brief period" (p.4). Bennett & Segerberg (2012) contend that engaging in activism is typically seen in past user characteristics and the value one places "where action is organized on the basis of social group identity, membership, or ideology" (p.7). They further contend that self-disclosure and personal action displayed digitally are prompted from personal "engagement with politics as an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances" (p.6). The combination of intentional self-disclosure and online political engagement is recognized as "mass self-communication" by Castells (2009). Self-mass communication is multifaceted, stating: "the production of the message is self-generated, the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World Wide Web and electron communication networks is self-selected" (p.85). Self-mass communication is exemplified in the #metoo movement with a far-reaching effect and audience. Castells (2009) contends this form of communications is "historically novel, with considerable consequences for social organization and cultural change, is the articulation of all forms of communication into a composite, interactive, digital hypertext that includes, mixes and recombines *in their diversity* the whole range of cultural expressions conveyed by human interaction" (p.85). Represented in the intertextual properties and co-creation of narratives (Xiong et al., 2019), mass communication both generates and encourages movements like #metoo. Surrounding controversial social issues, digital environments afford interpersonal conversations intertextually (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015) and increase political engagement from users.

Kurniawan et al. (2020) contend the communicative value of hashtags resides in their presence in the searchable properties for users to find and engage with other users. Also arguing that social media platforms bring people together to socialize without the constraint of space and

time (Kurniawan et al., 2020) and allow for interactions using hashtags as "a semiotic resource" (Zappavigna, 2015, p.288) in communication. The hashtag itself has risen from an idea of viewing external conversations (Strutt & Dewey, 2015) to a functional route for individuals to become autonomous in social activism and their digital expression (Antonakis-Nashif, 2015). Scholars argue that sentiment in expression conveyed using hashtags can connect individuals using humor, sarcasm, and irony (Sykora, Elayan, & Jackson, 2020), as a way to express individuality. Regarding social movements, Rathnayake and Suthers (2018) posit that hashtags allow users to be emotional "momentarily connected to an issue" (p.4). Hashtags are vehicles for digital protesting, a simplified way for individuals to call attention to social injustices without limitations previously seen with in-person protests.

Hashtags are foundational for digital protests because they afford a connection, with scholars like Zappavigna (2015) arguing that they represent a "shift toward coordinating activity and commentary rather than simply categorizing artifacts" (p.278). Digital protests in feminism can inform audiences and encourage engagement with the power of a single, viral, hashtag. The digitized form of activism explored in this research is "conversational tagging" (Huang, Thornton, & Efthimiadis, 2010, p.173), which enables users to search social platforms connections of users who are not necessarily linked together. Conversational tagging is active for individual mobilization and political engagement across spatial and ideological differences, where a user who "observes the rise of a compelling trending topic micro-meme may be inclined to take the tag associated with the meme and compose his or her tweet on the subject" (Huang et al., 2010, p.173). Encounters with hashtags create or dissolve motivation for further engagement. From a techno-social perspective, hashtags provide access to any topical area of interest, including the progression of social movements.

1.8 Hashtag Publics

Publics created in social movements are important collectivizing facets of mobilization. Publics can be characterized as "a group of individuals who (a) face a common issue, (b) recognize the issue but have different ideas about addressing the situation, and (c) come together to discuss alternative resolutions" (Frederick & Neuwirth, 2008 p.516; Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Warner (2002) uses a multifaceted approach to define publics that are important for the digital sphere of social media. Warner (2002) contends that "a public is self-organized" and is "the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (p.420), that acts according to "the temporality of their circulation" (p.421). Using the above definitions, publics for the #metoo movement can be further recognized as temporally bound by active participation, a framework that will further understand collective identity formation.

The prioritization of text-based discourse is a central factor in the viral success of the #metoo movement and its public formation. Authors Khazraee and Novak (2018) argue that there are two formative ways in which social media platforms afford protesting and collective identity. The first is "affordances for discourse" (p.2), which creates a space for collectivization intertextually. Recognized in user contributions of personal accounts and experiences shared to their networks ultimately promotes like-minded user contributions "through sharing grievances and collectively negotiating meaning" (Khazraee & Novak, 2018, p.2). The authors argue that collective identities enable the public display of text-based visceral experiences and, in turn, users co-construct narratives. The second is "affordance for performance" (p.2), defined as "enactments of protest through creating and sharing transgressive photobiographies publicly" (p.2). Individual performances from mass user content creation ultimately convey the overall importance of the topic to audiences using visual imagery. Khazraee and Novak (2018) argue

that the two affordances, for discourse and performance, engage users in collective identity formation and foster change when users have a common interest in being part of a digital public (Shklovski & Valtysson, 2012). About the #metoo movement, the intertextual properties of Twitter engage users in "negotiating meaning" or prioritizing textual discourse over visual imagery to further "contribute to a collectively, incrementally constructed narrative through sharing of personal stories that resonate with the group" (Khazraee & Novak, 2018, p.2), understood as the larger public.

Present in the formation of the #metoo public, a "hashtag-mediated public sphere" (Rambukkana, 2015, p.4) that is considered a community created in a text-based temporal space of circulation. With the viral responses to a political issue (Vicari et al., 2020, p.3), the #metoo movement uses its public for virality and expression of "visible personal alignments to a larger social issue" (Barnes, 2020, p.1307). In this report, the #metoo public is created by collective identity formation from a group of individuals who recognize sexual violence as a problem and organize it in an active, digital way to address it. Grunig and Hunt (1984) contend that media generates public group formations by influencing an overall perception of the issue at hand. Understanding the text-based #metoo public also demonstrates collective action as an influential component to user mobilization. Understood by scholars as "well-defined and well-maintained private-public boundaries by expressing or acting on individual interest in ways observable to relevant others" (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012, p. 377; Wang & Chu, 2019), collective action is influential in user mobilization. Conceptually illustrating the influence of collective identity formation on viral activism, publics constructed by a common goal are essential for successful large-scale social movements as defined by hashtag activism.

1.9 Hashtag Activism in Social Movements

The culmination of mass-user contributions to hashtags places value on digital activism as a necessary tool for social change. Hashtag activism "happens when large numbers of postings appear on social media under a common hashtagged word, phrase or sentence with a social or political claim" (Yang, 2016, p.13). One functionality of hashtag activism is the publicized opportunity for user interaction and deliberation on social and political issues. The scholarly debate regarding the value and productivity of hashtag activism is ongoing, some scholars arguing that hashtag activism brings awareness to social issues (Vie, 2014) and worldwide attention to viral hashtags (Enderle, 2018). Other scholars contend that activism can reframe public issues which change public beliefs and opinions (Hallahan, 1999) while simultaneously building and recruiting a base of engaged supporters (Snow & Benford, 1988). Technologically speaking, hashtag activism on social media platforms does not need organizational leadership (Hon, 2016), it is an autonomous choice to participate. The organizational framework of digital movements is argued by scholars to be a "horizontal structure" (p.76) that emphasizes a vast array of user interests (Hardt & Negri, 2011; Penney & Dadas, 2014). In the case of the gendered discourse surrounding #metoo, the German movement #aufschrei (#outcry), no organizational leadership was prompted to guide protests. Social movements provide context and counter-narratives to mainstream media, but many scholars do not define each contributor as an activist (Wang & Zhou, 2021). The goal of movements is to bring social issues to the forefront of public discourse (McKenna, 2020). In areas of social, cultural, or political issues (Staggenborg, 2011) and typically using a collective group identity (Oh et al., 2015).

Hashtag activism is a current topic for debate in terms of its social influence and general productivity. Rotman et al. (2011) argue that hashtag activism is considered "slacktivism,"

defined as "a low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity" (p.821). Hashtag activism is further criticized by scholars to be "feel-good activism", a form of low-stakes protesting that has a much lower impact in political or social spheres (Morozov, 2011). Feel-good activism and slacktivism are inadequate in productivity over the traditional form of collective action in non-digital movements (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015). These authors continue the debate of the real-world implications hashtag activism has by questioning how collective identity building enables the process of activism in social settings. Other scholars focus their research on the unmoderated communication of social media platforms and their ability to collectivize identities in a bad way.

The technologically based form of activism is also considered "cloud protesting", or a form of restructured protesting shaped by social media platforms it resides in (Milan, 2015). Cloud protesting uses technical affordances that allow for contemporary digital protests. Milan, (2015) argues “cloud protesting indicates a specific type of mobilization that is grounded on, modeled around, and enabled by social media platforms and mobile devices and the virtual universes they identify” (p.1). Further, scholars argue that cloud protesting is a theoretical approach to understanding how social platforms productively enable growing amounts of content in digital environments. Understanding cloud protesting in a socio-technical way, Milan (2015) applies the unique attributes and boundaries of social platforms to the collective sense-making of social issues, stating “connective action, in particular, cloud protesting indicates a specific type of mobilization that is centered on individuals and their needs, identities, and bodies” (Milan, 2015, p.2). This idea of an entangled interpersonal and digital sphere, where social platforms intervene in public spaces also boosts large-scale public performances like #metoo. van Dijck &

Poell (2015) argue that platforms like Twitter encourage activists to “develop a collective, communal identity that binds them together (p.3). Also contending the drawbacks of cloud protesting as a space where users can “echo the voices of like-minded people, discouraging critical engagement or dissent” (p.3).

Finally, van Dijck and Poell (2015) argue that the structure of protesting in public discourse using cloud protesting also relies on strengths in numbers. Despite the echo chamber, cloud protesting is regarded for its effectiveness in the engagement and mediation of social issues (van Dijck & Poell, 2015). This classification of hashtag activism advances the implications of social movements and the ability for virality to initiate collective action.

Another point of research in the scholarly conversation of hashtag activism is the overall vagueness of the issue at hand. Ahmed (2006) contends that hashtag activism allows necessary contextual elements and ideals of movements to be “relegated to the background” (p.31). To elaborate, deeper issues are not properly covered or understood in small texts "that simultaneously draws attention to a cause and obscures important facets of the cause such as historical background or socio-political context” (p.18). Dadas (2017) disagrees, stating that the shortened-text architecture of hashtags is an enabler of digital protesting. Continuing, Dadas (2017) contends that affordances of Twitter negotiate the constraints to digital activism while thriving from the “rhetorical velocity” of simplified activism in tweet brevity. In the case of the #metoo movement, the rapidity and volume of tweets afforded collective action and guided social change in response. However, Pipyrou (2018) argues the overall lack of mediation in the #metoo movement allows for public shaming and “mob” mentalities, stating: “on the one hand, #MeToo is little more than mob rule premised on vigilantism that foregoes judicial procedure in

favor of public shaming" (p.416). Further arguing that #metoo is simply a "trial by media" that fails "to tackle the structural problem of sexual violence" (p.416).

The start of online activism has been mocked and "trolled" on Twitter, Instagram, and other online domains. Regarded as a fundamentally less respected call for change in the public domain, the media and trolls make a spectacle of women sharing their stories across social media. This type of individual activism takes place within the personal domains of one's personal profile. Because it is in an unguarded and unprotected personal space, others can mock or reply how they see fit. Twitter "trolls" continue a status quo enforcing response by diminishing the power of a personal journey. Powell (2015) adds context to the public challenging of sexual violence by stating "how then, might our conceptualizations of justice itself, be challenged by these online counter-publics in which informal responses to rape are sought? One of the strengths of feminist theories of technology, beyond engaging with the complexities of power and emancipation, has been to further develop concepts of sociotechnical practices" (p.580) This idea of how power and emancipation intertwine with victim justice continues the activist perspective of challenging the status quo.

1.10 Virality in the Digital Age

Virality is afforded on social media platforms using rapid message circulation, necessary for establishing social movements. Bora et al. (2015) characterize the phenomenon of virality as "a theme or topic or piece of content–spreads widely through the network has, in particular, attracted a lot of attention" (p.2). Also recognized in defining virality is the term "going viral", the action of virality that portrays how "ideas, trends, objects, videos, and so forth spread quickly, uncontrollably and unpredictably into, through, and across human populations" (Gries,

2015 p.2). The research of Bora et al. (2015) argues that the unique properties of hashtags afford rapid inter-user networking and dissemination of content. Further contending that virality uses contextual patterns including the relevance of information spread (p.3), timeliness, and the total extent across platforms. Nahon and Hemsley, (2013) posit the "attention viral events receive is a result of a many-to-many mass-self communication social process" (p.94) that affords user choices to disseminate information to followers. Capabilities such as retweeting, liking, or mentioning, impact virality and the capacities for the social flow or interconnected networking. Virality is an indicator of successful mobilization and collective action (Wang et al., 2016). Additionally, network structure guides user decision-making and affords or constrains social sharing in a complex manner. Users are influenced by factors like context and content (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013) and have to do with our "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1990, p.1). Referring to how an individual chooses to be perceived by others, the framework of choosing how to digitally represent ourselves is relevant to each users' identity, their network, and the content they choose to disseminate.

Virality is unpredictable (Bora et al, 2015) because of unique user processes and digital representations of self. Goffman (1990) argues that "as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged" (p.8). Nahon and Hemsley (2013) contend that by choosing whether or not to share, each user acts as a "gatekeeper" (p.50) to their network and personal expression. In the case of #metoo, contributors decide whether or not to share intimate accounts of sexual violence. Once a user does decide to share a form of information (such as retweeting or creating a tweet), they are broadcasting the message to their immediate network in the social media infrastructure. Followers then decide whether or not to interact by sharing, commenting, or liking

the content. This autonomous decision influences content to spread and the viral capability of each post. Twitter's technical affordance of retweeting another content curated by another user to one's timeline, shapes viewing abilities for individual audiences or followers. The #metoo public, created by sharing grievances of sexual violence is an example of a viral theme or topic and the successful use of circulation.

1.11 Networking and Circulation

Social media platforms are open channels for users to create or challenge identities (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015, p.866) and "represent oneself" (Goffman, 1990, p.4) in content creation and circulation. Jackson (2018) states the discourse surrounding network creation allows users to "make sense of their own social experiences" (p.1), and engage in mediated social settings (Rotman et al., 2011) weave together decisional processes on content creation and circulation. Scholars Lu and Hampton (2017) assert that social support and networks in a user's digital network consist of "social capital" (p.861), defined as "resources within a person's social network" (p.862) and are considered "social ties" (p.863). Examples include "friends, family, and other acquaintances, both on and offline)" (p.863) and can be a source of support for social media users. Also contended by Lu and Hampton (2017) is the amount of social capital each user has, which directly correlates to comfortability in the construction of content for social media platforms, mainly studied in the amount of self-disclosure. A study done by Manago et al. (2012) found that participants with a larger social network (therefore a larger audience, higher social capital) predicted higher perceived social support and life satisfaction. Expressions of emotional state are one of the dominant forms of self-disclosure on Facebook (Lin & Utz, 2015), another popular platform for individual expression. Users may feel as though self-disclosure of stressful

events provides a means for coping and gives access to social support (Derlega et al., 1993), an idea that gives meaning to mass contributions to the #metoo movement. Dadas (2017) argues that the structure of Twitter supports information flow in networks for some viral events like the #metoo movement, content creation is based on personal grievances and storytelling (Antonakis-Nashif, 2015), and may lead users to feel supported. It also provides visibility in a layered way for users to feel supported in self-disclosure. Clark-Parsons (2021) contends "individual visibility lays the foundation for collective visibility, these personal vulnerabilities quickly scaled up into political vulnerabilities" (p.372).

Research by scholars on information circulation often focuses on functionality, structure, and network size for individual users. The interactions between users increase the overall visibility of content with other users, using algorithms and discoverability (McKelvey & Hunt, 2019) and creating bigger user networks or social capital (Lu & Hampton, 2017). Personal networks are maintained using social media platforms that organize the information users engage with at the speed at which information is circulated (Dadas, 2017). Networks are exemplified in the digital proximity of Twitter users. "The many bridges between Twitter clusters means that chains of information from one Twitter follower to a follower of that follower and so on encompass about 83 percent of all Twitter users within five steps of interconnection. On average, about half of the people on Twitter are only four links away from each other" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, p.55). This idea, in combination with hashtags as a categorizing resource, illustrates the circulation potential among audiences and the fluidity of social media platforms as researched by Dadas (2017). The simultaneous network and social capital building from user disclosure therefore builds and maintains personal networks as they contribute to the #metoo

movement. Circulation encourages participation and maintenance in the interconnected collectivization of people looking to unite for societal change.

1.12 Social Movements

Social movements aim to force social change from the mobilization of people and the framing tactics protestors use as motivating forces. McAdam (1999), defines social movements as "rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means" (p. 36). This definition is useful for us to understand mobilization and collective interest as a pragmatic lens for social movements, however, a more precise definition for this report and its research exemplified in the #metoo movement is necessary. Other scholars continue laying the foundation of movements by defining the term "social movement" as a "counterweight to oppressive power" that "summons to popular action against a wide range of injustices" (Tilly, Wood, & Castañeda, 2019, p.5). We see examples of social movements dating back to the 1500s (Tilly et al., 2019), where people in history have identified significant political factors necessary for change. Tilly et al. (2019), identifies social movement campaigns in three ways: "a group of self-designated claimants, some object(s) of claims, and a public of some kind" (p. 7). Moreover, actors of movements typically represent themselves and their cause as "W.U.N.C: worthy, unified, numerous, and committed" (p.8). Attributes such as these are represented by large numbers of physical protestors, using signs, slogans, or chants (Staggenborg, 2016). Additionally stating: "movement theorists look at the role of factors such as social networks, ideology, and resources in movement recruitment" (Staggenborg, 2016, p.3), resources that demonstrate a sustained larger campaign in repeated collective action under one singular campaign. Gerbaudo and Treré argue that "social media has

become the key site where protest identities are created, channeled, and contested" (p.866). Understanding the role that identity constructs in the emergence of collective identity allows users to build digital movements.

The technosphere plays a role in generating, steering, and initiating social movements in its capabilities for collective action (Postmes & Brunsting, 2002). Characterized as "all the elements of a technological ecosystem" (Toffler, 1980; Zincir, 2017), the technosphere is the fluid connection between technology and humanity. The technosphere is a framework that affords gender-based social movements relative to digital technologies (Goddard & Woodley, 2019). Digital spaces enable "social movements to communicate, generate information, distribute information and receive feedback" (McKenna, 2020, p. 187). Twitter directly affords social movements and protest identity building. Collective action online can lead to increased future actions by contributors (Wilkins, Livingstone, & Levine, 2019), and the socio-technical lens of current literature places value on technical architectures for affording digital social movements. In this sense, social movements are facilitated and constrained by technical architectures and the activists that inhabit them. McKenna (2020) argues "the Internet enables social movements to communicate, generate information, distribute information, and receive feedback" (p.187).

Through social movements, women are using another form of speech to create solidarity and promote speaking out (Schneider & Carpenter, 2020). Movements such as #yesallwomen (Dadas, 2017), use hashtags to draw attention to gendered violence against women. Attested by Dadas (2017), #yesallwomen was created in response to the killing of women by a gunman that sparked conversation surrounding gendered violence against women. In response, media coverage was redirected to the misogyny of aggression towards women. In this example, Twitter steered and directly enabled user mobilization to afford a small-scale movement for social

change. Using the above understanding of social movements, the research presented next will explore how social movements transcend physical spaces and move into the digital sphere.

1.13 #metoo

The #metoo movement began in 2006 by activist Tarana Burke, whose goal was to raise awareness of sexual violence (Quan-Haase et al., 2021), against black women, promoting consent and recovery for survivors while simultaneously drawing attention to toxic masculinity (Sherwood, 2019). Burke began using the catchphrase after recognizing her account of sexual assault as a traumatic experience in which she realized other young girls also encounter. The phrase itself was coined by Burke after listening to the story of a 13-year-old girl being molested (Rodino-Colocino, 2018), a story which Burke tells from being a counselor at youth camp:

"I will never forget the look [on the girl's face] because I think about her all of the time. The shock of being rejected, the pain of opening a wound only to have it abruptly forced closed again—it was all on her face. And as much as I love children, as much as I cared about that child, I could not find the courage that she had found. I could not muster the energy to tell her that I understood, that I connected, that I could feel her pain … I watched her put her mask back on and go back into the world like she was all alone, and I couldn't even bring myself to whisper … me too." (Burke, 2013; Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p.97)

Burke states "it was a catchphrase to be used from survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone and that a movement for radical healing was happening and possible." (Hill, 2017, p.15). Designed to bring survivors of sexual assault together, the catchphrase "me

too" refers to individual identification of sexual violence and is intended to "redirect shame from the victims to the perpetrator" (Afzal & Wallace, 2019, p. 133). It also seeks to give survivors skills to "thrive" after the trauma of sexual assault (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p.97).

Though beginning with Burke in 2006, #metoo is an ongoing hashtag feminist movement (Clark-Parsons, 2021) that caught traction in 2017 (Lindgren, 2019). Burke's catchphrase (turned hashtag) went viral following a tweet by actress Alyssa Milano, enraged by the large number of sexual assault allegations against movie director Harvey Weinstein. Milano asked followers to tweet "Me Too" if they had ever experienced sexual violence (Clark-Parsons, 2021; Lindgren, 2019). The response was staggering, CNN reported over 12 million reactions across the globe. Reactions that promote engagement include tweets, posts, mentions, likes, and comments, spanning social media platforms in the first 24 hours following Milano's original tweet (Santiago & Criss, 2017). #metoo became successful in hashtag activism on the premise of "collectively constructing counter-narratives and reimagining group identities" (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p.6), by using individual story sharing to co-create a larger narrative (Xiong et al., 2019). The mass response to the #metoo campaign is regarded as connective action, or users creating motivated responses to social issues (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The properties of social movements and the coordinated effort of user contributions in digital environments can be defined as connective action in social networking. This theoretical framework is used to understand mobilization that is less complex than physical protesting. "Connective action networks are typically far more individualized and technologically organized sets of processes that result in action without the requirement of collective identity framing, or the levels of organizational resources required to respond effectively to opportunities" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.14). In the case of the

#metoo movement, users use narratives to constitutively organize and create a collective identity, a framework for collective action.

The #metoo movement has evolved from a self-disclosure-based movement in digital settings to social identification in connective spaces online and offline. The network of users to which an individual discloses personal information is the social ties that provide a relationship between self-disclosure and "perceived social support" (Lu & Hampton, 2017, p.862). Lu and Hampton (2017) argue that social support raised using social media platforms provides heightened personal awareness and feelings of social resources. Meaning that perceived support is a motivating factor in contributing to the #metoo hashtag. In a study done analyzing the sentiment of 2,000 #metoo tweets from the week following Alyssa Milanos' tweet, scholars Modrek and Chakalov (2019) found several categories of user contributions that used the hashtag. (1) Supportive responses from users to survivors of sexual violence (p.3) (Appendix A), (2) revelations or an expressed (sometimes sudden) further understanding of personal, life events regarding sexual violence (p.3), (3) detailed, personally embodied, accounts of traumatic experiences with sexual violence (p.4) (Appendix B), and (4) negative comments to the movement or unrelated tweets that used the hashtag #metoo (p.4). The responses made the movement famous for bringing visibility to historically private events and the forefront of gendered discourse. Jackson (2018) regards the movement as making "visible the epistemic injustice suffered by victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence and helps overcome that injustice through a process of mutual recognition" (p.3).

Other scholars, however, argue the contributions of the movement have also been regarded as the "weaponization of mediated visibility" (Trottier, 2018, p.893). Stating that the process of accusing individuals on social media platforms is a form of digital vigilantism and,

although it creates accountability, it is unwanted (Trottier, 2018). Scholars also contend that the drawbacks of this movement are more severe in aftereffects, arguing that #metoo creates a false sense of solidarity between survivors instead of genuine engagement (de la Garza, 2019) by universalizing experiences (Flaskerud, 2019) of assault.

Another discussion between scholars questions the level of severity in violent acts that tweets can account for. The brevity of tweets, user preferences in omitting story details, and simplified accounts of sexual violence capture only snapshots of salient, traumatic events. Regarding sexual assault, de la Garza (2019) argues that the 280-character count architecture tweets persist meme-like accounts of sexual violence by only allowing for minimal details of personal experiences on assault. She states that the #metoo movement "converts scandalous acts into memes that by their very popularity" (de la Garza, 2019, p.176). While memes have been used by some social movements successfully, they may be limited in their communicative capacity. Other scholars substantiate this claim, arguing that memes have the power to reframe opinions of sexual violence, stating: "online sexism and harassment are often reframed as 'acceptable' by constructing them as a form of humour" (Drakett, Rickett, Day, & Kate Milnes, 2018, (p.1). In a study conducted of popular internet memes by Drakett et al. (2018), memes containing gendered discourse typically presented "notions of tricking and game playing in sexual relations" (p.19). The user-created memes presented women as "technologically naive and men as technologically privileged" (p.19). Concerning the #metoo movement, the gendered memes studied mostly contained sexual violence against women as humorous in nature (p.32). de la Garza (2019) affirms the effect of this regarding perceptions of sexual violence, stating the "mindless and automatic social media memeing as semiotic behavior can normalize a performance of outraged effect" (p.176). Contending that misogyny is perpetuated by using

humor to shift perceptions of a serious topic, she further argues: “such hegemony converts accusations into a spectacle for the public, reinforcing hatred against women by those who resent the accusations and distorting the significance of public reports of sexual assault as relevant because of their effect on men’s lives and our institutions” (de la Garza, 2019, p. 176). In this sense, the normalization of violence against women can shift perspectives on survivor accounts of traumatic moments.

Although the intent of story sharing by survivors is to encourage understanding, scholars argue that relying on emotional responses, such as empathy, from audiences may be unproductive. Boler (1997) argues that story sharing reinforces “the annihilation of the text into an object of easy consumption” (p.266). Defining the audience reaction as passive empathy, or the “recognition that I am not you”, she argues that “empathy is possible only by this distinction” (Boler, 1997, p.256). Ultimately, Boler (1997) attests that social movements founded on empathy as an audience response lack connection between users, genuine concern, or a self-reflexive response that is desired.

Rodino-Colocino (2018) states “such empathy is ‘passive’ in that it enables oppressors, and even oppressed people, to project feelings of commonality, understanding, as well as fear and guilt rather than do the work of being self-reflexive” (p.96) Further arguing that passive empathy and the lack of genuine connection frustrates the overall productivity in #metoo ultimately maintains the status quo (p.96). Pipyrou, (2018) further contends the problematization of passive empathy in social media platforms as an enabler of public shaming that does not help dismantle the inequities of social injustice. To overcome this, Rodino-Colocino (2018) argues that social movements like #metoo need to elicit transformative empathy instead, which “requires self-reflexivity and potential transformation of one's assumptions” (p.97).

Transformative empathy is "the empathy for which Tarana Burke calls makes space for anger and rage that victim-survivors feel" (p.97). Enderle (2018) agrees, arguing #metoo is a transformative "example of a changing public sphere and a potentially permanent shift in the sexual assault discourse" (p.15) that allows the public to "redefine sexual violence and shift the surrounding discourse away from victim-blaming" (p.56).

Protest identities are also an important factor in understanding activist contributions and the perception of content by the audience. Self-categorization is a theoretical application of motivations for user vulnerability online. Self-categorization theory "argues that social identification produces psychological alignment with members of the groups to which we see ourselves as belonging" such as other trauma victims, differentiated from "outgroups" or "groups unaffected by trauma" (Muldoon, Lowe, Jetten, Cruwys, & Haslam, 2021, p.513). Self-categorization contributes to ones' "activist identity" for people belonging to the "ingroup" or the "outgroup" (p.515) and the response elicited within digital profile building. Muldoon et al. (2021) further argue that self-categorization is "instrumental in consolidating community and political identities" (p.515) for trauma survivors. This form of social identification explains the process of identity building relative to collective action in the #metoo movement. Reyes-Menendez, Saura, and Thomas (2020) state: "identity is reflected in each of the decisions that users make on social platforms" (p.2) further arguing that contributions of women are tied to their digital identity. "#MeToo women are no longer afraid to communicate their experiences of sexual harassment and, by doing so, inspire other women to share similar experiences so that to jointly see for the ways to address the problem of sexual harassment" (p.10). The #metoo movement uses collaboration and group identity to support survivors with tools of empathy, compassion, and grace in the digital sphere. Rodino-Colocino (2018) states the viral response of

survivors to the #metoo movement “counters the cruelty of sexual assault” (p.96) with empathy. Using the lens of transformative empathy, narrative building, and protest identities, the co-creation of networks is exemplified in rhetoric and text as containers for digital feminism.

1.14 Chapter 1 Summary

The research presented in Chapter 1 synthesized key literature in digital activism by recognizing hashtags as vehicles for connection in society that affords movements for social change. First, arguing that large-scale user mobilization is instrumental in collective identity building. Research on thematic analysis, hashtag publics, and circulation supplements this report contends user motivation for mobilization that can be encouraged by likeness. The addition, then, of searchability in hashtags adjusts the power of "cloud protesting" (Milan, 2015) in multidimensional ways. First, by bringing social issues to the forefront of public discourse and defining social media platforms that structure discourse surrounding public issues and interpersonal connections. Secondly, by inviting collective sense-making and the creation of publics online as they have evolved from physical protesting. Third, feminism in hashtag activism is highlighted for its role in bringing visibility to visceral private moments (Antonakis-Nashif, 2015) and situates the #metoo movement at the intersection of gendered discourse and digital activism. Eventually, the research of Chapter 1 leads to changing the status quo and societal perception of the #metoo movement. Applying collective action to the #metoo movement that is both afforded and constrained by social media platforms, the research in Chapter 1 covers the motivation of joining a hashtag movement by outlining the motivations of users to engage and share their grievances. Summarizing the foundational elements of the #metoo movement and affordances of hashtags as they reside within and steer digital social

movements. The goal of Chapter 1 is to synthesize the role technical architectures and algorithms play in the technosphere. This leads to the reports' foundational elements of Twitter that afford hashtag activism to continue addressing the social implications of user-to-user utterances, both functionally and performatively.

2. Chapter 2 – Theoretical Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research presented will first evaluate scholarship on the study of digital rhetoric and its influence on social media platforms in combination with intertextuality to gain a better perspective on hashtag categorization. Intertextuality and digital rhetoric situate hashtags as searchable segments of conversational performances across public discourse. Digital rhetoric becomes a constitutive and connective container for the sphere of social networking platforms. Then, by applying the above research of social movement studies to the digital rhetorical capacities of Twitter, this chapter will better clarify the overall affordances for mobilization and collective action in digital spaces. Lastly, the contextual evidence of digital interlinking in this chapter uses feminism and technofeminist studies to recognize gendered discourse in pursuit of social change. The history of digital feminism coupled with the architectures and affordances of social media platforms will situate collective action and the social implications derived from digital activism as previously researched in chapter one. Lastly, Chapter 2 will summarize the key points of this report in its entirety as they are exemplified in the social implications of movements and the consequences of user mobilization. The research presented will then be used to present the public-facing application for chapter 3 as a representation of furthering the #metoo movement.

2.2 Digital Rhetoric

Digital rhetoric is a theoretical application that provides a framework for digital activism, connective action, and social media platforms in their constitutive form. Starting with Richard Lanham (1992), the term digital rhetoric was originally defined as the digitized word (in

opposition to the spoken or printed word) which creates the base of digital rhetoric in its simplest form. Lanham later expanded upon this by contending that digital rhetoric is the process of using a computer, argued a rhetorical device, as "the fulfillment of social thought" (Lanham, 1992, p.243). This definition is broad and outdated with the continuous evolution of electronics and the technological sphere in which social platforms reside. A more complex understanding and concise definition are necessary with the advancement of technology and its infiltration of the social world. Mary Hocks (2003) recognizes the overarching value of digital rhetoric, stating "digital rhetoric describes a system of ongoing dialogue and negotiations among writers, audiences, and institutional contexts, but it focuses on the multiple modalities available for making meaning using new communication and information technologies" (p.632). Expanding on Lanham and Hocks' conceptualization of digital rhetoric is scholar Douglas Eyman (2015), who contends that the digitized word is of conceptual importance, affording evolutionary changes in the digital sphere. Eyman argues the early application of digital rhetoric can be recognized using Roland Barthes' social linking of text. Barthes (1974) attests that texts are physically and socially connected networks, between authors and the content, further, the individual text is the foundational element of social spaces. Thus, with the progression of the digital environment, linking digital texts to its audience in hypertext theory is only continued further by the increase of technological speed (Crawford, 1996, p. 671) and rapid creation of content.

Scholars connect the framework of digital rhetoric with a technical architecture called hypertext. Eyman (2015) argues the idea of connected writing is comparable to hypertext, a form of interlinking documents or text. Hypertext is the early form of hyperlinking that ultimately constructs networks (p.105). Hypertext is a signifier of structure, connectedness, and digital

linkages, creating a framework for digital rhetorical practice (Eyman, 2015, p.25-26). Scholars contend that the intersection of digital rhetoric and hypertext lays the groundwork for the formation of a continuous, digital environment (Landow, 2006) in which social networks reside. Digital feminism is founded on the environment of media and gendered expression as a form of social transformation.

Barbara Warnick (2002) builds on hypertext in exploring digital rhetoric using several feminist theoretical approaches. In the first approach, Warnick (2002) argues that intertextual properties of the digital sphere afford to collaboration, stating that collective identity building, is founded on digital self-expression. She further posits that connectivity for women is ultimately made possible through "symbolic action as carried out through visual images, specialized argots, hypertext patterns" (p.15). In the second approach, she underlines the importance of intertextual application of hypertext within networks using the lens of digital rhetoric to challenge identity building. James Zappen (2005) adds to this, contending the transformation of media and digital rhetoric "encourages self-expression, participation, and creative collaboration" (p.321). The application of hyperlinks and hypertext for user mobility provide a cultural layer for representation and change in new media (Manovich, 2002), using characteristics like speed (Zappen, 2005 p.321) to afford digital interactions. Manovich (2002) explains how hypertext is a steppingstone in the digital sphere, where "every hypertext reader gets her version of the complete text by selecting a particular path" (p.61) to construct a technologically curated version of themselves. This form of "digital lifestyle building" (Manovich, 2002) afford interactivity and collaboration in communities of similar interest (Miller, 2003). In summation, scholars argue that digital rhetoric and hypertext characteristics foster group identities, create publics, and cultivate public discourse on current events (Zappen, 2005, p.324) in hyper-immediate forms (Fagerjord,

2003). Using the conceptualization of digital rhetoric as a foundational, constitutive element of media that affords connection and inspires action from users, the next section will outline the affordances and implications of virality on social media platforms.

2.3 Text and Intertextuality

Text is a crucial facet of digital rhetoric, used on Twitter in its technical architectures for its multifunctional application to networking and community building (Warnick, 2002). De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) describe text as a "communicative occurrence" (p.7) or a combination of words that can effectively portray ideas from person to person. Also arguing that text allows for moments of “intentionality” (p.9) and purposeful interaction. Eyman (2015) further expands on this, describing digital text as a layered “representation of discourse” (Eyman, 2015, p.22) Scholars can further understand text as a vehicle for interaction, the broader scope of rhetoric allows text to be applicable in the multifaceted sphere of user-to-user engagement. A key aspect of text is its interactive potential and the role of genre creation. Genre, themes, and interactivity make relationships of social, political, and ideological value possible (Briggs & Bauman, 1992, p.148). Scholars contend that text is simultaneously a performative and demonstrative medium (Eyman, 2015, p.37), with fluidity in use and application. Intertextual linkages in digital environments use a combination of hypertext theory and performative information. This combination provides a vehicle for narrative building, recognized as a tool in social change and activism (Jones, 2015).

Intertextuality, a concept defined by Farrelly (2020) as “instances of texts linking to other texts (explicitly, implicitly, by referring to them or incorporating elements of them)” (p.1) and “accounts for discursive elements in social relations of power and solidarity” (p.1).

Intertextuality is an application of user engagement on Twitter (Willem & Tortajada, 2021). The functional and digitally-enabled value of text is formed using its fluid properties of connection on social media platforms. Twitter uses its text-based architectures to act as a vehicle for intertextual exchanges in communication. Within genres of hashtags, these exchanges are considered "templates that carry social, cultural, and communal currency for the process of identity formation" (Bamberg, 2007, p.3). The action of examining linguistic syntax in text allows audiences to effectively consume and use others' text on Twitter, an affordance of its microblogging capacity. The performative function of tweets and the permeable boundaries of social media platforms give users access to hyperlinked information and genres of topics, such as the #metoo movement, where viral tweets use real-time updates and intertextual information that flows across public discourse using user engagement. On platforms like Twitter, users apply the criteria outlined by De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) to intertextual microblogging, transforming the social interaction of written communication into situational encounters of the narrative building as contended by Jones (2015) and interpersonal conversations. Using the properties of social media platforms like Twitter, we can further explore the implications of text as it helps progress the advancement of feminism in digital spheres.

2.4 Technofeminism

Digital feminism intersects media and feminism as a container for gendered discourse in the #metoo movement. Warnick (2002) considers the effects of technology on "how women think about themselves and their relation to such technologies" (p.65). Her scholarly research is concerned with evaluating how computer-mediated discourse can support or influence the ideologies and values of women as a marginalized community. Warnick (2002) attests the

traditionally masculine-centered discourse in digital spheres needs challenging to support women and the metanarratives they choose to identify with (Warnick, 2002, p.63). Herring (1999), argues in accordance with Warnick (2002) that the communication of males online contains patterns of dominance leading to female victimization. Scholars describe the intersection of digital space and individual action in feminist movements using cyberfeminism and technofeminism as frameworks for the female experience.

Cyberfeminism is considered Willem and Tortajada (2021) as "the early online version of feminist struggle" (p.63) and is an important contributor to framing digital feminist studies. The overall focus of cyberfeminism is on the expression of gendered discourse online and the overall "(lack of) coverage of feminist issues" (p.63). Contending the necessity of growth in feminism on social media, contributions from users using strikes, demonstrations, hashtags, and videos on women's rights and reframing tactics build a "popular" version of feminism. Willem and Tortajada (2021) also argue that cyberfeminism encourages activism online in the #metoo movement as a form of community participation, expressing that "hashtags rather than long written posts are being used as weapons in a cultural battle" (p.64).

Scholarly research also examines feminism as a continuous call on societal change and inequality, giving voices to women (Afzal & Wallace, 2019). An archive called the feminist mesh, (or FemMesh) coined by Afzal and Wallace (2019) is a framework for viewing movements like #metoo as a movement that "attends to structural discrimination" (p.148) by providing a broader viewpoint of feminism as a network. The FemMesh views technology as a structured, time-based, interconnected fabric of communication that is entangled by individual participation in feminist campaigns. Afzal and Wallace (2019) describe the FemMesh as "a fourth-wave, cyberfeminist mode of knowledge production that mends together the individual

subject and the collective to combine second-wave activism and consciousness-raising, and third wave individual choice and responsibility" (p.131). The technological connections individuals construct from the participation of movements and shared stories are the foundation of the FemMesh to be further understood. The FemMesh is akin to a timeline that uses cyberfeminism to understand past and present feminist ideologies. The digitally connected space allows users to contribute "their voices to this alternative archive that directs feminism to change and to change the future" (Afzal & Wallace, 2019, p.138). The #metoo movement resides as a "node" (p.131) on the FemMesh, a cyberfeminist (p.131), an interconnected archive of technology and feminism that affords further gendered discourse. Movements like #metoo are intertwined with other feminist movements where the "simultaneous action of holding together feminist stories and allowing them the freedom to continue moving and intersecting with new bits of knowledge is made possible by the flexibility of the mesh" (Afzal & Wallace, 2019, p. 132). The FemMesh provides a viewpoint of #metoo as a movement that connects to past movements while continuing to expand upon other waves of feminism as they come.

Different than cyberfeminism, but useful as a viewpoint for the FemMesh is technofeminism. Technofeminism introduces the intersection of gendered politics to technology, drawing on cyberfeminism's features while qualifying that "gender is embedded in technology itself (Wajcman, 2010, p.146). Questioning the implications of a traditionally masculine technological perspective, Wajcman (2010) theorizes that technology is a combination of the masculine and feminine and should be further studied. Technofeminism is useful to further recognize the importance of feminism in technology, both in the application of gendered movements and their continued shaping of technology as beneficial to gendered discourse (Wajcman, 2010). Technofeminist literature recognizes the dynamics of patriarchal institutions

while placing power dynamics within rhetorical spaces at the forefront of gendered discourse. Verma (2018) posits that this intersection blends "the personal and the political, but it also specifically centers women's experiences about how we analyze these experiences" (p.4) for women on social media platforms. Technofeminism thus creates a framework for viewing the #metoo movement and its orientation to gender and the personal narratives of lived, bodied experiences to generate social change in digital spaces. Stating," the World Wide Web is seen as beyond the control of any one group, and thus open to being deployed by women for their own social and political purposes. This is highly subversive of the conventional definition of women as biologically determined and confined to the private sphere" (Wajcman, 2004, p.3). Thus, encouraging the study of feminism from a standpoint of digital social change that seeks increased visibility of lived experiences in an inclusive space. The fortifying discourse of women's rights (Verma, 2018) using technology. Scholars argue women embodiment in digital spaces using a technofeminist lens "takes into account a user's body as well as how they have used that body (or have been coerced into using that body or have endured that body being used) over her or his lifetime" (Haas & Eble, 2018, p.24).

Research on technofeminist studies contends the potential of digital feminist rhetoric for change and advancement surrounding women's rights. Wajcman (2010) states "technofeminist theorists have simultaneously recognized that the emancipatory potential of the fluidity of gender discourse and enhanced participation of women in online space remains 'constrained by the visceral, lived gender relations of the material world' (p.148). In this case, technofeminism is intersectional in feminist rhetoric and its spatial application to activism in digital practice. Clark-Parsons (2021) substantiates this claim, contending that feminism in hashtags (and therefore digitally) increases communicative moments in gender discourse. They state: "some scholars

frame hashtag feminism as a powerful practice in the politics of visibility, a form of activism focused on shifting how we represent, interpret, and respond to social injustices through public performances" (p.3).

The advancement of intersectional feminist studies is seen by scholars as having the power to "theorize the convergence, co-constitution, imbrication, or interwovenness of systems of oppression" (Carastathis, 2014, p.307). Furthermore, the intersection of feminism and race in digital spaces focuses on the "complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories" (McCall, 2005, p.1786). Exemplified in digital Black feminism, argued by Steele (2021) to "unseat the oppressive forces in society that harm everyone, not only Black women" (p.4) and is comprised of "a diverse group of women, men and nonbinary folks" (p.6). As the experience of marginalized or oppressed women recognizes a long history of "sexual violence written out of the public record, excluded, or ignored" (Quan-Haase et al., 2021 p.1702; Serisier, 2018), digital Black feminism thus provides a framework for users of all backgrounds to share their stories. Argued by Steele (2021), digital Black feminism is an "analytical tool that centers Black women in digital studies rather than advocating for inclusion" (p.10) and is a contemporary analysis for users within social media platforms to critique, contextualize, and resist (Steele, 2021) the traditional view of feminism and progress inclusivity in digital spaces. In combination with technofeminism and cyberfeminism, digital Black feminism is researched further within social platforms for encouraging survivors to speak on their experiences with sexual violence (Serisier, 2018) and critique rape culture on social media platforms (Quan-Haase et al., 2021, p.1703).

In application to the #metoo movement, cyberfeminism, Black feminism, the FemMesh and the early contributions of Warnick (2002) on technofeminism situate female participation as

central in the conversation of gender equality and inclusivity on social media platforms. Cyberfeminism encourages contributions to digital mediums and the coverage of all women, while the FemMesh archives important feminist rhetoric. Using principles of cyberfeminism and technofeminism, the FemMesh connects feminist movements both on and offline. Furthermore, Black feminism encourages oppressed communities to engage with technology and bring the intersection of gender and race to the forefront of public discourse. In this case, the #metoo movement is a successful application of digital feminism on social media. The recognized embodiment and physicality of sexual violence in social change is a foundational element for upward development toward fair treatment of all women.

2.5 Feminism in Digital Protest

Between October 15th, 2017, and September 30th, 2018, #metoo was tweeted over 19 million times (Anderson & Toor, 2018). That works out to an average of 55,319 tweets per day in just under one year since the original tweet from Alyssa Milano. The #metoo movement is comprised of a multitude of individuals using self-disclosure to progress the public discourse surrounding sexual assault. Self-disclosure can be beneficial by alleviating the stress caused by active concealment and providing social support (Gueta et al., 2020). Hashtagging posts under a collectively defined term in social movements provides a vehicle for visibility from private events to public discourse. Willem and Tortajada (2021) contend the network of users calling for change brings dimensionality and perspectives upon sharing the no-longer privatized moments previously regarded as personal (or non-shareable), ultimately contributing to cyberfeminism. Cyberfeminism further “includes the voices of women of colour, queer women, transgender

people, working-class women, and women with functional diversity" (p.64). Antonakis-Nashif (2015) describes the importance of mass sharing in how society has evolved because of female advocacy across the globe, stating "these masses of tweets helped many women (including those who were never in touch with feminist theory or thoughts before) to leave behind these internalized mechanisms of silencing their testimonies" (p.111). The content of posts within the hashtag network #metoo "introduces a variety of personal and political vulnerabilities" (Clark-Parsons, 2021, p.368) as well as the inclusivity of women who have encountered sexual violence. Clark-Parsons (2021) also argues that the gendered discourse of the movement frames "sexual violence as an issue that is deeply rooted in gendered systems of power" (p.371). Furthermore, visibility in sexual violence allows for the progressive perception of individual autonomy expressed in survivor accounts. With numerous women responding and a hashtag called "#metoo", a social media consumer is asked to question who else in their proximity is affected by sexual violence.

The individuality of story expression provides the public more context of the implications of trauma experiences and the different forms of sexual violence. Networks of feminist hashtags choose to "seize definitional power" by personally defining sexism (Antonakis-Nashif, 2015, p.103) and misogyny in the vast forms they come in. Storytelling from individuals affected by sexual violence gives visibility in moments not necessarily defined as sexist or a typical form of "assault" (Antonakis-Nashif, 2015, p.103), such as catcalling, stalking, and verbal abuse. Challenging the status quo by sharing individual experiences aids in promoting further discourse, asking viewers of content to question the significance of a topic accounted for by large numbers of people. Hashtags allow for individual accounts of underrepresented issues within traditional media to be defined and understood by the public. In this case, sexual violence against women.

2.6 Social Implications of Techno-Movements

Widespread audiences of the #metoo movement saw an increase in the recognition of sexual violence following initial virality. Social ramifications also were observed in survivor recognition and perpetrator consequences. Twitter has been an instrumental platform in many facets of hashtag activism and the continued success of information dissemination, bringing the #metoo movement to the forefront of gendered discourse. In the first week after the viral tweet from actress Alyssa Milano, over 1.5 million tweets were posted using #metoo (Modrek & Chakalov, 2019, p.2). Many responses contained self-disclosed accounts of experiences with sexual assault, resulting in public discourse on the topics of misogyny, politics, and harassment (Schneider & Carpenter, 2020) both on and off Twitter. On the other side, bystanders of the viral movement should also be considered. Modrek and Chakalov (2019) posit that parallel to the survivors' contentions on Twitter, millions of users were confronted with the knowledge of people in their networks' visceral experiences of assault, resulting in the "subsequent normalizing of the revelations" (p.2). This outpouring prompted a widespread response. Hashtags such as #Himthough were counter-responses to #metoo. Some users used validation to show support (Enderle, 2018), while some counter-publics formed, and survivors even received backlash.

Another change following the #metoo movement was an economic advancement for food service employees that moved tip-based employees into an hourly paying position. Rodino-Colocino (2018) states "the seven states in the United States that made this structural reform cut sexual abuse of female food servers in half. The very structure of the tip makes women vulnerable to men's sexual abuse and to women's silence" (p.99). Another change following the

movement is seen in a study by (Levy & Mattsson, 2021). The study states that countries with a strong #metoo movement (such as the United States) saw a “statistically significant effect of 10%” (p.12) increase in the reporting of sexual violence by victims. They further found that the movement “not only changed the behavior of victims but that the increased reporting also increased the number of arrests for sexual assaults” (p.21) by 5%. Another study found a correlation between the “#MeToo movement and greater recognition of past unwanted sexual experiences as “sexual assault’ over time” (Jaffe, Cero, & DiLillo, 2021, p.209). Further contending that recognition of previous experiences may encourage future recognition and overall “shifts in cultural awareness” (p.216) as survivors overcome traumatic barriers. Aftereffects of #metoo continue to be seen in other hashtags centered around feminism and the unequal treatment of women.

Although the biggest digital feminist movement, #metoo is not the only large-scale mobilization that has encouraged social ramifications from the digital sphere. In 2014, the hashtag #yesallwomen emerged from the video of a gunman on a shooting spree expressing his rage on women is the reason behind the violent crimes. This viral hashtag called attention to and quickly spread information on the idea that "yes, all women suffer from a culture that rewards men’s aggressive behavior toward them” (Dadas, 2017, p.17). In 2018, anonymous Instagram accounts led to the termination of jobs for men accused of sexual misconduct (Maheshwari, 2018). Two years later, the public social media testimonies of more than 100 women on the rape and harassment from an Egyptian man led to his arrest in July of 2020 (Migiro, 2020). Online feminist movements such as #metoo and the German movement against sexual violence #aufschrei (#outcry) (Rambukkana, 2015) brought to light the importance of numbers in spreading awareness in providing a call on societal change. Those partaking in online protesting

use personal experiences to ask for reform in society, using the number of posts as an agent for starting the conversation.

2.8 Summary of Report

The research summarized in this report is intended to understand the implications of digital rhetoric regarding activism as it functions in social media platforms. Chapter 1 begins by synthesizing literature on social media platforms as bounded systems (boyd & Ellison, 2007) and the affordances that comprise them. The report then introduces Twitter as a foundational element of the #metoo movement for its role as a text-based platform. The research then understands asymmetrical microblogging (Gruzd et al., 2011), technical constraints on users, and architectures (Bossetta, 2018) of Twitter as affordances for virality. By examining the literature on architectures, affordances, and hashtag publics, the report further recognized algorithms for their role in curating user timelines and placing trending hashtags in user timelines. Some architectures are seen in retweeting, liking, and mentioning tweets. Affordances are subsequently seen in audience size, reach, and the content of user contributions. The range of affordances is explored using the lens of collective action, co-creation of narratives (Xiong et al., 2019), and self-disclosure as motivation for engaging in gendered discourse. Finally, literature regarding the #metoo movement was synthesized to recognize the communicative properties exemplified in mass mobilization and self-mass communication (Castells, 2009).

In Chapter 2, the literature review introduces intertextuality and digital rhetoric as affording forces for virality. Key concepts from Eyman (2015) and Warnick (2002) were applied to digital rhetoric and intertextuality as a vehicle for the hyperlinked technosphere of activism. Constitutive rhetoric is exemplified in the application of the FemMesh from Afzal and Wallace

(2019), an archival form of digital feminism that stitches together gender-based social movements throughout time. This report observes the overarching framework of rhetoric in cyberfeminism, digital Black feminism, and technofeminism as frameworks for inclusivity (Willem & Tortajada, 2021) and the embodiment of women's lived experiences (Haas & Eble, 2018) regarding sexual violence. The combined application of rhetoric, feminism and protesting are entities that cohabitate the fluid sphere of social media platforms. As a result of the above synthesis, #metoo gained recognition for its role in bringing visibility to sexual violence (Antonakis-Nashif, 2015) and the survivor experience of trauma. Finally, the social ramifications of digital movements are then synthesized for their real-world implications of gender-based injustices. Chapter 2 summarizes the theoretical application of rhetoric as a container for the technical architectures that digitize individual values and contributions in Chapter 1. The social applications of the research synthesized in Chapters 1 and 2 are exemplified in a public contribution to the #mtoo movement in Chapter 3.

3. Chapter 3 – Application of Research

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 applies the research presented in this report to an applicable social media campaign by recognizing the strategies, objectives, and audience necessary for the successful dissemination of content. The campaign is designed using several elements of the research synthesized in all three chapters of the report. (1) Participation in the #metoo movement, the public (Warner, 2002), and continued influence on the FemMesh. (2) User connectivity and inclusion as a critical contributor to social change (Shahin and Dai, 2019). (3) Relevant content promoting increased positive sentiment as support for traumatic events (Khazraee & Novak, 2018) that encourages positive mindsets (Rieger & Hofer, 2017).

In application to the elements of digital rhetoric, feminism, and the permeable boundaries of social media platforms, this next chapter successfully leverages the properties of hashtags on Twitter for greater visibility in intersectional feminist movements and survivor support. Twitter, the microblogging platform the #metoo movement originated on, is used in a two-phased campaign that focuses on the empowerment of assault survivors and increased visibility of resources. The campaign will leverage sentiment analysis, audience engagement, and campaign reach using the already established Joyful Heart Foundation. The foundation's mission is to support survivors of sexual violence and transform ideologies surrounding rape culture (Joyful Heart, 2022) which exemplifies the survivor experience seen in user contributions within #metoo. Furthermore, the campaign will use data analytics from software platform Meltwater, a media analytics software, to analyze implicative patterns of digital reach. Phase two of the campaign within the future implications section will recommend applying the Meltwater analytics to progress resource information and further infuse positive sentiment into #metoo.

3.2 Campaign Goals and Objectives

The goals of this public-facing application are twofold:

1. Infuse positive sentiment into the #metoo hashtag using The Joyful Heart Foundation to increase survivor support resources.
2. Reinforce the research presented in Chapters 1 and 2 on the implications of user engagement surrounding social injustices of sexual violence by creating content that adapts the original goal of #metoo as a survivor recognition movement to a survivor support campaign.

Content generated within this Twitter campaign embodies survivor support using text-based rhetoric with messages of positivity from the national organization The Joyful Heart Foundation. With a mission to **"**transform society's response to sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse, support survivors' healing, and end this violence forever" (Joyful Heart, 2022). This foundation is exemplary for a campaign to use the current audience of the foundation and increase societal recognition of sexual violence as a social injustice. Joyful Heart also sheds light on the aftereffects of sexual violence, highlighting a need for survivor support. The content generated within this public application for Joyful Heart is a two-phased plan that will contain inclusive quotes to engage audiences. Phase one is detailed in this chapter and will make survivors aware of a supportive space to move through traumatic experiences and set the stage for more content strategies to engage future audiences. Phase two is idealized in the future implications section (below) and will use insight gained from phase one to bring attention to resources that can further survivor well-being and market the Joyful Heart Foundation. The

Twitter profile for Joyful Heart will share content that drives audience engagement and infuse sentiment in the current #metoo hashtag.

Measurable objectives upon campaign launch will be defined using data analysis software Meltwater. Twitter's background analytics measuring awareness through reach and visibility of our messages will also be used. Measurable objectives are represented in the following ways:

● Campaign reach: the average number of Twitter users who have viewed the campaign's content in a one-week period. Analytics derived from the Joyful Heart Foundations' Twitter post analytics.

Sample measurable goal: at the time of evaluation, based on 83,000 recent mentions of the #metoo hashtag (Satterfield, 2022), we can estimate that a single tweet has the potential to reach 15,000 followers within one week.

● Campaign engagement: measured through likes, replies, and retweets. The industry average engagement rate on Twitter will be leveraged to understand current user behavior.

Sample measurable goal: using an industry average Twitter engagement rate of .04% (Statista, 2022), using 83,000 tweets, would equal 600 total engagements from followers within one week.

● Campaign sentiment: pre-campaign launch, we will evaluate current sentiment (negative, neutral, or positive) using Meltwater to understand audience sentiment on the #metoo hashtag. Weekly, the #metoo hashtag will be evaluated to understand if there were significant impacts.

Sample measurable goal: see a 10% increase in sentiment (from negative to neutral or positive) from pre-launch to post-launch.

3.3 Infusing Positivity into the #metoo Movement

As informed by the research in chapters 1 and 2, the #metoo movement is an intersectional feminist approach to contemporary activism in the digital sphere. As feminist moments continue to evolve, so do the needs of the audience and the message created for engagement. The campaign content will be intentionally inclusive of all audiences, representing the diverse interests and experiences of individuals by being authentic in language, using quotes from individuals that fairly represent inclusivity and diversity and sharing multiple voices across tweets. Text-based messages presented within the tweets will be accessible to all audiences to encourage engagement with the voices represented across the entirety of the campaign. As societal values dynamically change, so does the approach of feminism and inclusion within the campaign that will seek to value the audience as a driving force for engagement. Because the foundation of the campaign is powerful messages and positive sentiment, quotes from figures that represent kindness, change, and social justice will be included.

Functional quotes used with the campaign strategy could include:

"There is nothing as powerful as knowing that you are not alone. The sooner young women understand that they are not an anomaly, the sooner they can begin their healing process."- Tarana Burke

"The emerging women… will be strong minded, strong-hearted, strong-souled, and strong-bodied… strength and beauty must go together." -Louisa May Alcott

The above quotes used in phase one of the campaign for the Joyful Heart Foundation provide content that reinforces scholarly ideas regarding feminist collaboration and digital media. With the current sentiment of the #metoo hashtag on twitter skewing negative (Reyes-Menendez, Saura, & Filipe, 2020), the infusion of positive sentiment may be beneficial for users observing the hashtag.

Scholars contend that digital motivational quotes can improve self-esteem (Bedrov & Bulaj, 2018) and even increase feelings of support (Inkelaar & Simpson, 2015) from the network connections created online. Rieger and Klimmt, (2019) state "social media may thus serve as a source of (virtually) daily 'doses of inspiration'" (p.101). Continuing, positive messages are seen to "promote thoughtfulness, contemplation, and more complex effect" (p.112) when connected to "human virtue", connection, or human struggles (Rieger & Hofer, 2017, p.99). Lastly, content deemed eudaimonic, inspirational, or meaningful may steer the audience toward a better mental state and can encourage "the facilitation of coping abilities" (Rieger & Hofer, 2017; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019, p.99).

For survivors of sexual violence, sides effects of trauma can include depression and low self-esteem (Krahé & Berger, 2017). Bedrov and Bulaj (2018) contend persons with these side effects see continued issues "with low self-esteem and self-efficacy contributing to poor coping, helplessness," and "a decrease in positive health behaviors" (p.1). Self-esteem is defined as "the extent that one feels accepted by others and is a social construct that highly values perceptions of close friends and family" (Bedrov & Bulaj, 2018, p.2; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Information on survivors' mindset informs this research to engage further with others and find support using connection with others (Khazraee & Novak, 2018). By creating content focused on a text-based message, this example campaign seeks to drive engagement in the #metoo movement with

positive content. The current sentiment of the #metoo hashtag is a typically negative-based sentiment, so the infusion of positive sentiment may encourage support for survivors in phase one of the campaign. Scholars have connected the emotions elicited from media to personal emotional elevation (Dale et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2012). Therefore, creating content that encourages engagement using positive or inspirational messages have the potential to drive survivor representation and interconnectivity through reach, engagement and sentiment.

3.4 Media Audience

The largest age group of females on Twitter is 18-29-year-olds (Auxier & Anderson, 2022) with 42% stating in a survey that they use the social media platform. Around 58% of social media users ages 18-29 report using social media to share on issues regarding political and social issues (Auxier & Anderson, 2022), the same study contending that Twitter users are 22% White, 29% Black and 23% Hispanic. Furthermore, 80% of Twitter users are affluent millennials and in US adult Twitter users, 65% of the most active users are women and 42% of users hold a college degree in some capacity (Aslam, 2022). These statistics are notable for opportunities of content creation on Twitter. In analyzing the statistics, the most beneficial target audience for this public-facing application is between the ages of 23-29 that are considered White or Black. This age range includes older Gen Z (between 23 and 24) and younger Millennial (between 25 and 30) female-identifying persons. The target female persona is a single, young affluent professional in the workforce that holds a college degree in some capacity. The persona does not have children, lives in a suburban area, consumes social media, and has more than one social networking platform. Characteristics of the average female-identifying Twitter user that could be receptive and engage with the tweets are exemplified in the persona and evaluated for content

creation. Although Twitter is not the highest used platform by this age range, or gender, it is the initial starting point for hashtag creation and text-based content concerning the #metoo movement and is the 6th-ranked used social networking application (Aslam, 2022).

3.5 Future Implications

The future for campaigns on social media platforms is vast in the array of implications possible for advancement of user mindsets. In this campaign, phase one simultaneously uses positive quotes and the Joyful Heart Foundations' platform to bring further awareness to its audience and provide support for survivors. Phase one deploys a content strategy of text-based images and powerful quotes that drive the current conversations within the #metoo hashtag. The completion of phase one will set the stage for phase two to create action in healing and offering further support in resources to the audience. It seeks to be inclusive of audience consumption intentional in content. Additionally, the abundant possibilities for approaching the varying needs of survivors as they evolve is recognized in designing phase two. Phase two will use insight and analytics from phase one to encourage survivors to process lived experiences (Rambukkana, 2015), enable them to contextualize, move through and recognize the implications of trauma (Clark-Parsons, 2021). Public displays of encouragement are necessary its role in increasing visibility for trauma survivors and sexual violence. Analytics on campaign reach, engagement and sentiment shift present an opportunity to continue infusing #metoo with content and encourage the movement to continue forward with resources that can facilitate better mindsets (Rieger & Hofer, 2017). Phases one and two are dynamic in content abilities and will use analytics to make changes, further inclusivity in digital spaces and understand the multifaceted approach necessary for survivor support.

3.6 Application Synthesis

As a survivor of rape, I have come to understand the deep-rooted implications and lifelong struggle of self-criticism, self-doubt, PTSD, and depression following traumatic events of sexual violence on a personal level. I have also learned the value of connecting with other survivors, an unspoken understanding of each other's struggles. The path of growth and recovery is not linear, it is not equal for all, it is a long and winding road of grief and self-reflection. Society needs more resources for survivors to move through the trauma of forced violence, personal moments that feed silently on inflicted shame and depend on personal doubt. Advocacy for survivors is necessary to challenge the status quo of rape culture. This necessity to create further resources for survivors, my personal experience in combination with the research synthesized in Chapters 1 and 2 informed the application design of Chapter 3. With a goal of encouraging support for survivors between Twitter users and creating a dynamic space for foundations to provide resources for survivors of sexual violence. This is in response to the original messages seen in the #metoo movement, including self-disclosure of grievances, personal accounts of sexual violence, and the permanent repercussions of trauma. The application follows the original goal of activist Tarana Burke to build women up, especially survivors, using positive sentiment. The application also stands to foster further "eudaimonic" (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019, p.98) messages on social media. It also includes inspirational messages that have a positive impact on social media users (Rieger & Hofer, 2017), not solely survivors of sexual violence. Considered countering "cruelty with empathy" (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p.96), this approach takes a new aim at contributing to the #metoo movement, simultaneously promoting recovery from the trauma of sexual violence.

Chapter 3 uses the frameworks of positive sentiment, and awareness raising in a public-facing application by joining the #metoo conversation on Twitter. Combining elements of traumatic experiences related to sexual violence currently conveyed online, research from scholars is composited to recognize the aftereffects of sexual violence on survivors, typically seen in higher levels of depression and lower levels of self-esteem (Krahé & Berger, 2017) that is countered with uplifting content (Rieger & Hofer, 2017). Using quotes of positive sentiment, the application encourages the #metoo movement to continue forward in a new direction. Instead of using personal narratives to connect users, the public-facing application of this report applies circulation and common traits of Twitter users to facilitate better mindsets (Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). Subsequently, the application uses the technical architectures of Twitter and affordances of sentiment to value survivors without reliving past experiences. It also furthers the visibility of the #metoo hashtag, uses themes of support and intertextual hyperlinking as recognized in the research of this report for affording the #metoo movement.

Appendix A – Original Tweet

(Leach, & Ferrière, 2020)

Appendix B – Response Tweet

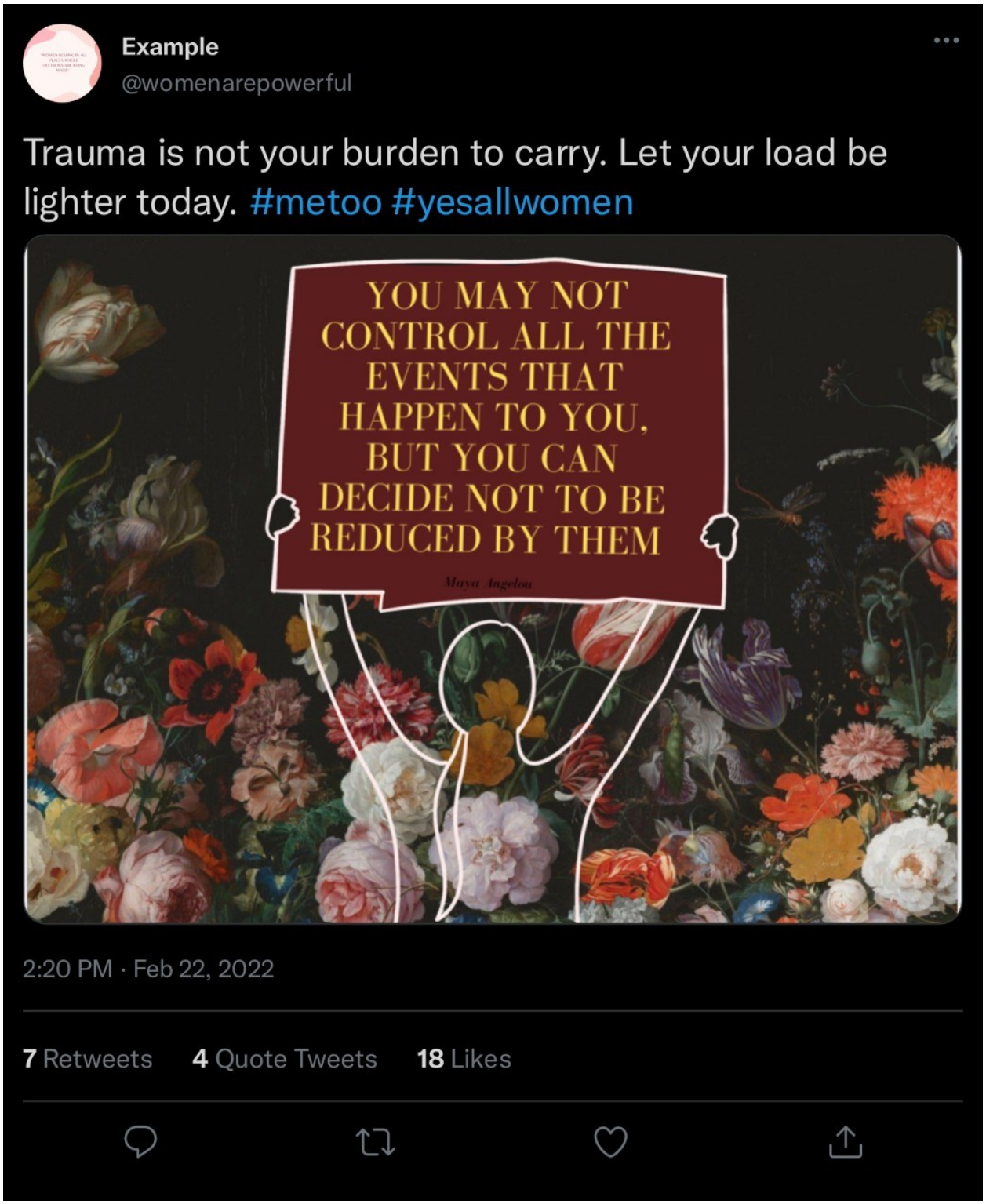
(Zou, Gonzales, & Li, 2020)

Appendix C – Support Tweet

(McHutchison, 2018)

Appendix D – Picture-Based Tweet 1

Appendix E – Picture Based Tweet 2



Appendix F – Text-Based Tweet 2

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