

# **Rallying Behind #MeToo**

*Analysing Twitter Users' discussion  
on Sexual Harassment*



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*When everything else is stripped apart, what stands is a truth as old as time itself: the things that tear our world apart reveal what holds us together.*

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## Introduction

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, actress Alyssa Milano took to Twitter in response to the growing sexual harassment accusations against Hollywood magnate Harvey Weinstein, and tweeted the following-

*“Suggested by a friend: 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.”*

What could have been an inconsequential tweet, struck a chord with millions across the world and in less than 24 hours, a spokesperson from Twitter confirmed that #MeToo had been tweeted nearly half a million times (Gilbert 2017). Over the next few days, the hashtag only kept mushrooming, with women and men across the world sharing their stories related to sexual assault and harassment. Contributions came from individual women, activists, organizations, journalists, bloggers, politicians, celebrities, and many others.

The movement was remarkable in that it sparked off discussions on the sensitive and often times muted issues of sexual harassment and abuse. However, the precise problem that the hashtag communicates to the public is complex — just like the issue it frames. Naturally, the movement was spoken about in a myriad of ways by various actors, including the hashtag’s users, the news media, opposition groups and others (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Sweetland-Edwards 2017). #MeToo did not start off with the intention of becoming a movement or a protest (Khomami 2017). Alyssa Milano’s goal was simply to create awareness of the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence. But social media users along with news media and other actors quickly appended their own meanings to the original frame of reference offered by Milano and turned #MeToo into a viral meme-worthy event (Khomami 2017). This influence of a single tweet upon people’s perception of an issue, brings forth some interesting questions about the meaning making processes that people engage in to make sense of reality- also known as *framing* in the social sciences (Goffman 1974). How does a movement like #MeToo shape its identity in the age of social media? How do people attach meaning to the frame/s offered by such an online movement? Do people shape these frames and alter their original meaning? What frames then stand out from these articulations and appropriations on social media? And most importantly, how do people perceive and react to a sensitive and oft-taboo subject like sexual harassment and abuse on an open platform like Twitter?

Guided by these questions, this thesis is interested in exploring the following research questions (RQ):

***RQ1: How did Twitter users frame the issue of sexual violence using #MeToo?***

***RQ2: Which other hashtags commonly co-occurred with #MeToo in the data?***

The main aim of the research is to examine how Twitter users express their opinions, feelings and comments through #MeToo and thus engage in framing the larger discussion on sexual harassment and abuse. But a more detailed explanation of the research questions will be given in the latter part of the thesis so as to address the specific concepts drawn from the literature and to better define the theoretical framework relevant to this research.

The thesis is divided into four main parts. The first part gives a background and introduction of the case in point and explicitly states the research question by addressing the gap it intends to fill in the current research on this topic. The second part delves into the conceptual framework and state of literature on social movements, digital activism, hashtags and their role in digital feminism. In turn, I will also guide a discussion on the theoretical outline used for the research and explain what aspects of the framing theory will be used for this study. In the third part, I will explain the research questions and the sub-questions and outline the research design. Here I will elaborate upon the methodology, data, instrument and unit of analysis. The last part of the thesis is my own, independent deliberation upon the collected data on the basis of the theory and literature. The research will conclude by summarizing the analysis, drawing attention to the previously discussed theoretical parameters and the guiding literature. Finally, I will outline the further scope of research and limitations of the study.

## **Research Overview and Background**

### **#MeToo: An Overview**

In order to really understand the scope of this research, it is important to give an overview of the case in point — the #MeToo movement. A brief overview about how #MeToo began and how it was received by the people has already been discussed above. In the following section, I will explain the backdrop of the movement's trigger effect and how it relates to the scope of this thesis.

#MeToo was first used by activist Tarana Burke, ten years ago, to create awareness about sexual abuse and the commonality of the problem in society (Langone 2018). However,

the hashtag went largely unnoticed on social media until 15th October 2017 when Milano tweeted about it on her own Twitter handle @Alyssa\_Milano.



*Figure 1 Alyssa Milano's tweet that is credited to have sparked the #MeToo movement.*

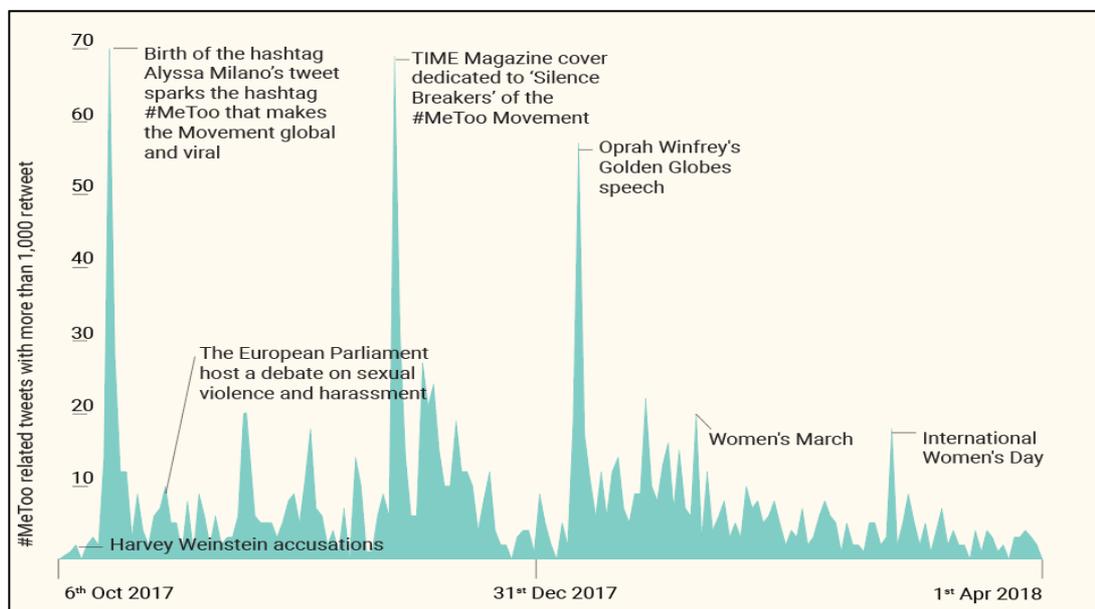
*Source: [https://twitter.com/Alyssa\\_Milano](https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano) (Retrieved on 3/11/2018)*

According to multiple news reports, in the months leading up to the #MeToo movement, there already was a growing climate of dissent against sexual harassment (Langone 2018). Many women were speaking out about sexism and rampant gender-based injustice at well-known companies like Amazon, Google and others (Dishman 2017). The American news media was keenly covering these developments and the discussion was growing about rape culture and abuse.

Then on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2017, The New York Times and the New Yorker separately published exposés about sexual harassment claims of numerous women against film producer and Hollywood magnate Harvey Weinstein. This brought forth more claims of sexual abuse and harassment against other known figures in Hollywood (Dishman 2017; Langone 2018). Influenced by these events, Alyssa Milano tweeted an appeal to all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted to write #MeToo. Her idea was to show through sheer numbers the magnitude of the problem. And her appeal worked. Within 24 hours, the hashtag was used more than four million times, not only in the

United States, but also in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and beyond (Khomami 2017). Thousands of women (and men) flooded Twitter and other social media sites with their personal experiences with sexual abuse and harassment.

Once the hashtag started trending on Twitter, it was also picked up by traditional and online news media, further adding to its reach and popularity. #MeToo was even translated into other languages and used within the context of local cultural phrases like #balancetonporc (“expose your pig”) in France, #YoTambien (“Me Too”) in Spain, #QuellaVoltaChe (“that time when”) in Italy and “أنا كمان” (“ana kamen” or “Me Too”) in Arab countries. Thus, #MeToo became a label under which women (and in many instances men too) collectively shared their experiences with and opinions regarding sexual violence.



*Figure 2 Key moments in the course of the #MeToo usage on Twitter. Sourced from (D’Elfilippo 2018). <https://tinyurl.com/ybv454kg>*

In December 2017, TIME magazine named the #MeToo movement and all of the participating “silence breakers” as their 2017 Person of the Year. They not only profiled Milano and Burke, but also numerous other women and some men from different socio-economic and racial backgrounds who have spoken out as part of the #MeToo movement (Zacharek, Dockterman, and Sweetland-Edwards 2017). TIME magazine’s coverage gave a legitimacy to #MeToo and all those who participated in it. It not only made the movement a mainstream issue but also gave hashtag feminism a place of respect in social conversations.

#MeToo is still an active hashtag even as I write this thesis and keeps resurfacing on the internet and the mainstream media every time a new allegation of sexual abuse is made.

### **Purpose of the Study and Relevance**

The importance of this research project is three-fold. First of all, it is extremely topical in its scope as a feminist hashtag movement. The movement is still in use even as I write this thesis and with each new case of sexual violence that is exposed, the movement gains more momentum.

#MeToo was not a singular event. As mentioned earlier, the hashtag drew upon and is part of an important resurgence in recent years of feminist attention to, and online and offline actions around sexual violence, patriarchy and misogyny. Mobilisations such as Slutwalks (Mendes 2015), Global Women's Marches (BBC US & Canada news desk 2017), various school and university action-groups, hashtag protests such as #WhyIStayed, #WhyILeft (R. Clark 2016) and #YesAllWomen (Barker-Plummer and Barker-Plummer 2017) — all working towards creating an awareness about the rampant rape culture across the world — are just a few of the many recent feminist collective actions. However, the #MeToo movement surpassed all of the previous movements in its reach, use and engagement across numerous countries and continents (Gilbert 2017). So much so, that the hashtag is in use even now- almost a year after it first emerged- and has developed into a well-known trope for speaking out against the various forms of sexual abuse. It thus becomes highly topical and important to study this movement in order to gain a better understanding of its contribution to the issue of sexual violence.

Secondly, even though there is a growing interest in these movements, most of the analysis of digital social movements tends to be from a 'movement-centric' or a 'techno-centric' standpoint overlooking the contribution and perspectives of the movement participants. In other words, researchers today lean towards a focus on how digital media is influencing the various aspects of social movements by changing the leadership structures, the actor-networks and the 'collective' or 'connective' action logics (Castells 2015; L. Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Diani 2016; Aarts 2013). And while those are extremely important aspects to explore and address, there seems to be a lack of attention towards the activists who shape these new 'leaderless' movements. There is relatively little research that examines how the vast audiences beyond celebrities and influencers engage in movements and shape the words and ideas that constitute the broad movement frames. This research aims to address this gap in literature by studying how common

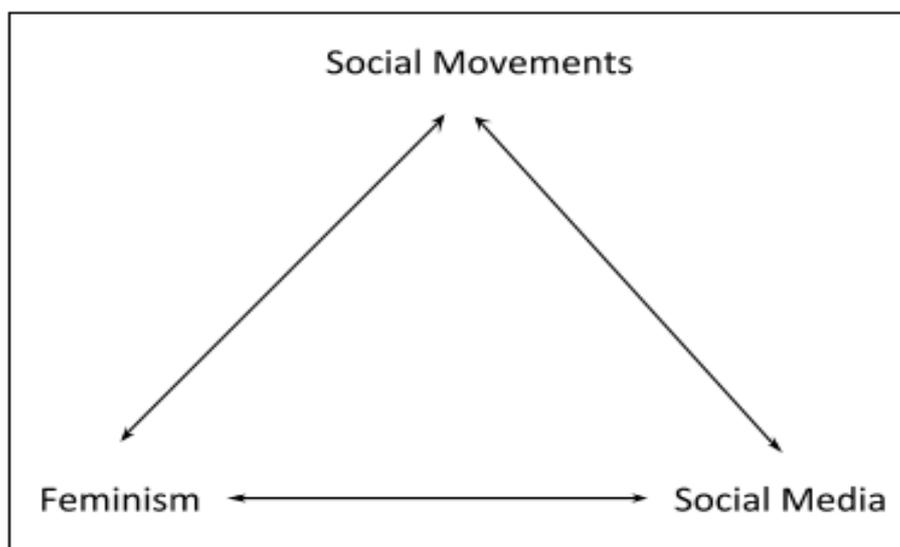
people accepted, rejected, added to and otherwise interacted with the frames offered by the #MeToo movement. After all, the success or failure of a movement often hinges on how the wider public perceived the movement, its demands and its proposed solutions (Ince, Rojas, and Davis 2017).

Lastly, up until now, the lack of research on movement participants was understandable owing to the difficulty in gaining a comprehensive list of the contributions of thousands of activists in any given movement. But the technological affordances of social media like Twitter allows researchers an access to information-rich datasets about movement participants in a way that was previously unavailable for scrutiny. Social media offers a unique space where the average citizen can directly voice their opinions, beliefs, suggestions, solutions, critique and more regarding various issues. Moreover, the utility of hashtags in collating discourse around particular issues promotes a more complex interaction amongst social media users.

In light of this background discussion, I now move on to a discussion on the relevant literature for the various concepts and key issues that delineate the scope of this study.

## Literature Review

At the outset of this chapter, I would like to put forth a basic outline of the three main concepts that guide the premise of this research. It is important to show the interlinks of these concepts in order to better locate the research questions and scope of inquiry of this study.



*Figure 3 Conceptual Model for the scope of this study (researcher's own diagram)*

The concept of social movements, social media, and feminism in this research are interconnected. Feminism is an umbrella term that encompasses multiple meanings and paradigms. However, for the purpose of this study, I will be using the following broad and pluralist definition of feminism drawn from the ideas of different feminist scholars: “Feminism is a range of social and political ideologies with the common goal of defining, establishing and achieving equality of sexes in the political, economic, social and personal arenas (Beasley 1999: 3-11).

I draw from all of these three concepts of social movements, feminism and social media to locate the research query of how users of the #MeToo on Twitter framed the discussions on sexual violence and abuse. In doing so, I explicitly state the following three key assumptions for my further arguments-

1. That #MeToo was a social movement.
2. That #MeToo is an extension of the cultivating socio-political conditions that triggered a collective feminist action in the online sphere with the help of the affordances of social media technologies like Twitter.

3. That the #MeToo movement was a feminist movement since it centred around the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

### **Social Movements: A backgrounder and conceptualisation**

According to Alain Touraine (1985), the concept of social movements is an element of a specific mode to construct social reality. Social movements have been a fairly recent field of study in the social sciences even though protests and political movements have had a long and rich history (Travaglio 2014).

In fact, it was only in the 1950s that the German sociologist, Lorenz von Stein, first introduced the term 'social movement' into scholarly discourse in his book "History of the French Social Movement from 1789 to the Present" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004). In it, Stein portrayed social movements as a continuous, unitary process by which the whole working class gained self-consciousness and power (Ibid). The emphasis of his definition on the 'working class' is important to note for the historical understanding of social movements and contentious politics. Scholars argue that social movements are a relatively modern invention as their emergence can be dated to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Western Europe and North America (Gupta 2017). Since then, social movements have been defined in myriad ways depending on the focus of study, be it through the lens of politics, culture, economics or more. What is interesting is that, as the ideas propelling social movements changed, so did the definitions and ways of looking at them in scholarly literature (Touraine 1985). Over the years, several theories, models and approaches have been formulated across a wide range of disciplines in order to explain individuals' engagement in social and political action (Klandermans 1997; Klandermans and Roggeband 2010; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

Although there is no single consensus on the definition of social movements (Opp 2009), Mario Diani's conceptualization is closest to this research's framework. He succinctly puts forth that nearly all definitions of social movements share the following three criteria: "[social movements are] ...(1) a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, (2) engaged in a political or cultural conflict, (3) on the basis of a shared collective identity" (Diani 1992).

The first and foremost established idea regarding social movements here is that they are collective. That is, they consist of multiple people working in concert towards a common end in a social sphere (Gupta 2017). These people are not arbitrarily together but also

share a sense of identity and solidarity by the virtue of believing in similar ideas of social change or resistance. Collective identity is important to understand in this context because social movements are about bringing people together. Not just people with common goals, but people who share a sense of solidarity with each other and who identify with others in the movement (Melucci 1995). This collectivity promotes interaction between actors in a social movement which can occur in multiple ways and in multiple locations, ranging from relatively formal organizations to even less structured and more free-wheeling social media platforms (Gupta 2017).

The question that arises then is why wouldn't other collective activities towards political participation be considered as a movement? For example, registering to vote, or joining a political party are political acts and they are also collective in nature where group members share a sense of solidarity and identity. Then, can these also be labelled as participation in a movement?

Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow address this question lucidly with their idea of social movements as examples of *contentious politics*, or politics "in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Essentially what they argue is that social movements are contentious because the actors challenge or make demands of other social or political figures.

Social movements are thus vehicles for ordinary people to participate in public politics and to make collective claims on others through contentious performances, displays and campaigns (Mcadam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004). There are multiple ways to engage in social movements and protests employing combinations of, but not limited to, creating special purpose associations, coalitions, demonstrations, public meetings, vigils, rallies, petition drives, pamphleteering and much more (Mcadam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2004: 3). These are non-institutional ways of protesting and occur largely outside the formal institutions like courts and legislatures (Gupta 2017: 9). But social movements also use institutional forms of protest like lobbying political parties or using courts to advance their causes.

As stated earlier, the defining features of what constitutes social movements change depending on the lens through which one is studying movements. However, it is not in the scope of this research to deliberate upon the notion of social movements itself, but to

take the discussion further and understand how social movement scholarship has evolved to include the ideas, concepts, and challenges posed by the use of evolving information and communication technologies in new social movements.

The following section will give an overview on the literature and recent scholarship regarding social media, activism, and social movements. The section begins with a brief outline on what new social movements are and how they relate to the current work on digital protest movements. I will also deliberate upon how the concept of activism has evolved due to the techno-social affordances of new media and some of the features of social media that stand out the most in terms of boosting movement participation and reach. Noting the framework of this thesis, an emphasis will be placed on the role of Twitter in digital protest and movement participation.

### **New Social Movements and the Role of Social Media**

From the mid-1960s, the rise of post-industrial economies brought with them a new wave of social movements that were significantly different from the earlier movements. These new movements were increasingly seen to be shifting their attention from matters related to economic wellbeing and status quo, to issues related to the human rights, environment, women, and minority rights amongst others (Buechler 1995). The diverse array of theories that came forth with the study of these post-industrial, post-materialistic movements have been clubbed together under the umbrella term ‘New Social Movements’ (Buechler 1995; Travaglini 2014).

In recent years, social movements and collective action is yet again undergoing a deep technological and organisational transformation (Castells 2015). With the rise of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, we are witnessing the emergence of ‘networked social movements’ that rely on personal networks and networked communication technologies to coordinate action and achieve goals (Castells 2015; Wang, Liu, and Gao 2016). Many of the major contemporary protest movements have been accompanied by intense social media activity. Right from the Arab Spring Movements in 2011 to the Occupy Wall Street movements, the Dakota Pipeline protest or the case in point for our study- the #MeToo movement, social media have come to be a catalyst for millions of people across the world to lead, participate in, or simply witness the movements unfolding before them.

Indeed, the growing literature on such online movements has been as diverse as the use and implications of social media in movements. The 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings that led to the Arab Spring, are considered to be the start of the current wave of popular protests (Poell et al. 2016). These protests gave rise to fundamental enquiries on how social media has changed the landscape of organizational communication, activism, and participation. Reflecting on these issues, scholars like Castells (2012), Bennett and Segerberg (2012; 2013) and Margetts et al (2015) have argued that social media user activity is the most important change in transforming the very nature of activism. These theorists see social media platforms enabling more bottom-up, distributed forms of protest mobilization, organization, and communication (Poell and van Dijck 2018).

Twitter has been widely studied in this regard mainly for its widespread use in political contention, information sharing, and personal expression on a global scale (Murthy 2018; L. Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Tufekci 2017). This microblogging platform allows users to express themselves in few words and also connect freely with other users from across the world, enabling what Castells calls, “a culture of sharing” (2015). In this culture, people share content and observations online while simultaneously also constructing horizontal networks globally. And although some see microblogging as a weak form of activism or ‘slacktivism’ (Gladwell 2010) with little social or political impact (Morozov 2012), it is undeniable that this medium has allowed for a decentralized communication and connection between various actors (Earl and Kimport 2011; Shirky 2011; L. Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Castells 2015). According to Clark (2016), digitally mediated discourse is viewed as a cultural resource to be mobilized for political action offline, as opposed to being political in its own right. Van Dijck and Poell (2013) contend that since the ‘social media logic’ extends into mass media and other public discourse, it *is* political in its own right and is instrumental in shaping people’s opinions and in turn, political behaviour. This explains in part why social scientists, political entities and even the media today carefully scrutinizes the discourse unfolding on Twitter on various issues and in cases like #MeToo, also gives diligent coverage.

The discussion on social media and new social movements also brings forth a question on whether ‘collectivity’ still plays a role in today’s protest movements. Castells (2015) suggests that people participate in social movements of their own motivations and goals. This is similar to Bennett & Segerberg’s (2012) notion that collective action in digital social movements does not require ‘collective action frames’ that involve negotiations of collective identities. However, many other scholars have contended this by showing that

a ‘collective sense of self’ does emerge in the mass sharing of protest slogans and materials on social media platforms (Van Dijck and Poell 2018). Papacharissi and Oliviera (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 275) show through their analysis of Twitter communications during the 2011 Egyptian uprisings that there were ‘overwhelming expressions of solidarity’ between actors in the data. Similarly, Gerbaudo (2017) in his analysis of Facebook interactions in the 2011 Egyptian and Spanish protest movements notices that there were ‘moments of digital enthusiasm’, ‘in which the emotions of thousands of Web users fuse into a collective sense of possibility’ (van Dijck and Poell 2018).

In summary, the role of social media in expanding and re-defining social movements is of great significance. This is more evident in the role of social media users as activists who not only participate and shape the movement, but also help it grow through their horizontal networks. To take this discussion forward, it is of significance to note what van Dijck and Poell (2018: 6) describe as the ‘techno-commercial architecture of platforms’ that fundamentally steers how users connect and interact with each other, and, consequently, how social media protest organisation and communication unfolds. The next section will elaborate upon how one feature of this techno-commercial architecture of social media — the use of hashtags on Twitter — has influenced information flows and participation in movements.

### **Understanding the Hashtag**

While there are various reasons for Twitter’s popularity amongst academia, an important factor is its creation of ‘Hashtags’- brief keywords or abbreviations, prefixed by the symbol ‘#’, included in order to make tweets easily searchable amongst all Twitter message traffic (Bruns and Stieglitz 2013). A hashtag is like a metadata tag that enables people to find content marked with that particular tag. Hashtags were popularized during the San Diego forest fires in 2007, when web developer Nate Ritter used the hashtag “#sandiegofire” on Twitter so that people could easily search for updates related to the disaster (Zak 2013). Ever since, hashtags have emerged as crucial, not only to search information on Twitter (and now Facebook, instagram and other social media as well) but also as a powerful mechanism to rally support and promote activism around diverse topics (Guha 2015). Sociologically, the indexing feature of hashtags is important because it represents a collective attempt to create categories, connect content, structure conversation, and introduce meaning to a discursive field (Ince, Rojas, and Davis 2017).

In recent years, hashtags have gone beyond their simple function of tagging and earmarking to this complex utility of political, cultural and identity-oriented use. From #Sandiegofire to #Egypt, #OccupyWallStreet, #JeSuisCharlie, #Yesallwomen and now #MeToo, hashtags have been put to use by millions of social media users for a variety of causes and events. One of the most interesting functions of a hashtag is its role in assembling ad hoc publics (Bruns and Burgess 2015) with a shared interest in specific events, issues and topics. The Twitter community itself aids the emergence of these hashtags through a pre-planned effort or many a times as a result of a quickly reached consensus. The use of hashtags in a variety of situations like natural disasters, politics, pop culture, activism, advertising, promotions and much more can be labelled instances of pre-calculated planning. Whereas many of the viral hashtags end up being spontaneous and incidental.

Axel Bruns et al. (2016) show in their study that social media users can take different approaches in engaging with hashtags. They outline six categories of hashtag usage by Twitter users. Of these, the category of ‘meme hashtags’ (Ibid: 13) stands out for the purpose of this research. According to them, ‘these are terms which often emerge rapidly in response to a specific issue or topic, often expressing a particular sentiment in response to current domestic or international events.’ These hashtags inherit some of the attributes of the types of issues they respond to and have a communal “audiencing” (Fiske 1992) of issue specific ideas where users prefer to participate by posting their own content in relation to the meme. The concept of meme in social media is the result of interdisciplinary work and can be originally credited to the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1989). Bennett and Segerberg (2012) explain that like genes in the biological sphere, memes are units of social information transmission which help build and bridge networks. When people appropriate and share certain ideas over the internet, they help the meme travel to others in their network, who then also imitate and attach a personalised expression through that same meme. These concepts, inspired from interdisciplinary work, pose new and important questions for researchers about the role of hashtags in influencing wider public discourse.

### **Digital Media and/as Feminist Politics**

From its beginning, gender researchers have investigated the question of whether or not the internet could strengthen worldwide solidarity among women, create critical counter-publics, improve participation, and increase the opportunities for feminist politics

(Carstensen 2014: 489). There has been much research already done on the role and impact of media, Internet and social media on feminism, women empowerment and women's activism (Curran and Gurevitch 2005; McLean and Maalsen 2013).

In 1990, Nancy Fraser conceptualised the idea of counter publics as a critique to the limitations of the Habermasian public sphere. She argued that the counter public spheres are spaces where feminist communication subsists and considered it essential to democracy as the representative public sphere (Fraser 1990). Perhaps Fraser was not thinking of a feminist Twitter when she put forth her idea, but her analysis of the uses of counter spheres as spaces for connection, knowledge building, identity formation, and resistance by the subaltern groups can easily be juxtaposed onto how activists are using Twitter and other digital media today (Barker-Plummer and Barker-Plummer 2017). This dynamic is illustrated succinctly by Clark (2016) in her case study of #WhyIStayed and #WhyILeft that arose in response to a controversy about American National Football League's star Ray Rice assaulting his (then) fiancé Janay Palmer. Clark showed how participants used discursive tactics to counter a victim blaming discourse through the use of these two hashtags and successfully mobilised the narrative into a digital movement.

Evidently, the digital public sphere has created such a feminist counter-public that has enabled common people to express their grievances, rights and personal narratives. Social networking sites in particular have been a critical platform for researchers since they facilitate exchanges of information, discussions and comments for women in a way that few other platforms before them have been able to. They provide space for such counter-publics to empower each other, to establish protest events and even mobilize others far and wide for political action. It is in this light that Carstensen (2014) argues that the design of social media in itself enables feminist discussions to have a deep interdependence. Feminists comment on and criticize current political issues related to gender, family, equality or politics, they publish thoughts about their lives as queers and other subaltern identities, challenge sexual objectifications, restrictions and much more, all through the use of Twitter and its hashtag function (Carstensen, 2014 p. 489). Through interview-based studies with feminist activists, it has been conceptualised that Twitter does function as a space for counter hegemonic discourse building (Keller 2012; Keller, Jessalynn; Mendes, K; Ringrose 2018). Women who used the self-explanatory Twitter hashtag #BeenRapedNeverReported have even found the experience of publicly documenting and sharing their experiences with rape with other women to be personally and collectively empowering (Keller, Mendes and Ringrose 2016). In another study by Foster (2015), it

was shown that tweeting about sexism under a feminist hashtag may actually enhance women's well-being. The study revealed that this might occur for two reasons: firstly, confronting a perpetrator in anger has shown to improve well-being over time and secondly, collective action through consensus mobilisation against injustice also appears to benefit well-being (Foster 2015).

Social media and feminist hashtag usage have evidently become popular and powerful at the same time in today's network society. So much so that in 2014, the reputed journal 'Feminist Media Studies' by Taylor and Francis dedicated an entire issue with the title '*A Year in Feminist Hashtags*' in which a collection of 13 essays deliberate upon the potentials and limitations of different feminist hashtag events that took place in the preceding year. In the same issue, one essay by Samantha Thrift is very relevant to this thesis. Thrift (2014: 1090-1092) characterizes the #YesAllWomen hashtag movement as a 'feminist meme event' and argues that it came to signify more than the trigger event that led to the hashtag's emergence. Thrift posits that while some external events trigger these feminist meme events, in the end the meme becomes a reference point in itself. She shows this by arguing that #YesAllWomen surfaced as a response to a tragic event where a misogynistic gunman killed six and wounded thirteen women. But soon enough the hashtag became a critical feminist intervention in the way the general public conceptualises and chooses to frame misogyny and gender-based violence. Through their participation in such feminist meme events, contributors end up making every day acts of misogyny and sexism worthy of documentation, remembrance and of public and political discussion (Ibid: 1091). For Thrift, the praise for hashtag feminism does not just lie in its potential to 'make visible the injustices and abuses which hide in plain sight' (Hess 2014; Kendzior 2014; Weiss 2014; Dr. Brooks 2014). Instead she contends that such a way of creating meme events "better signals the action, dynamism and generative, creative capacity of "doing feminism in the network". In a similar vein, this research questions whether #MeToo has the kind of power to become a feminist meme event and in turn be a tool to frame collective feminist discourse surrounding sexual violence.

Through these studies, it can be seen that digital communication strategies are not merely used to support political action, *they are* political acts in themselves. By using certain hashtags, publicly talking about their experiences with different social evils and showcasing solidarity, the users participating in hashtag feminist campaigns are employing the public nature of social media platforms like Twitter to make contentious political claims. With the help of social media, pressing issues can be made public and

more people can be involved in the discussion. These collective public discussions on social media have the power to provoke expansive political debates far beyond the platform that they originate on (Clark 2016; Baer 2016; Drüeke and Zobl 2016). Baer (2016) investigates the role of digital media in affecting the particular ways that contemporary feminist protests make meaning and are understood transnationally, nationally, and locally. Her findings show the possibilities that hashtag feminism offers new subjectivities and social formations, thereby redoing feminist protest actions for this neoliberal age.

Hashtags are increasingly seen as a technological affordance that lets these varied voices be heard under a common unit of expression. Along with the hashtags pointed out above, other campaigns like #Solidarityisforwhitewomen, #Girlslikeus, #NotyourAsiansidekick #BlackWomen and more are examples of how the increased use of digital media has altered, influenced and shaped feminism in the twenty-first century, where multiple identities even within feminism are slowly being asserted and accepted (R. Clark 2016; Drüeke and Zobl 2016; Scharff, Smith-Prei, and Stehle 2016). In summary, the abundant literature shows how digital feminism- especially through the use of hashtags- is slowly but steadily evolving into a powerful tool for activism and contention.

## Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, I will be using two theoretical ideas which are closely linked to each other. Firstly, I use the larger theory of framing in social movements to identify the ways in which Twitter users interacted with the frame/s that the #MeToo movement offers regarding sexual violence. Benford and Snow's outline of collective action frames will guide this process of frame identification (D. A. Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000). Secondly, Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) conceptualisation of 'personal action frames' will also be used to analyse the personalised nature of activism in this hashtag movement. In doing this, the thesis aims to present a fruitful area of research in which the collective and personalized framing of digital movement discourse can be examined. By using a participant-centric perspective to understand the framing of sexual violence, I hope to learn more about how the common public reacts to hashtag movements.

In the following section, I will provide a detailed outline of the theoretical concepts used in this study, including an outline of the framing theory, the concepts related to collective action frames, core framing tasks and personal action frames in connective action.

### Framing Theory

Since the 1990s, not only has the framing concept been extensively applied to a large volume of social movement studies within sociology, but it has also been utilized in many other fields like psychology, linguistics, political science and policy studies (Benford and Snow 2000). The concept of framing was borrowed into the study of social movements from the original work of Erving Goffman (1974). For Goffman, frames denote "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Benford and Snow 2000: 614). Accordingly, frames give meaning to events or occurrences, which in turn help organize experience and guide action (Goffman 1974).

Social movement scholars interested in the framing approach began by taking what the literature largely ignored until then: meaning work—the struggle over the production of mobilizing ideas and countermobilizing ideas and meanings (Benford and Snow 2000). European sociology was the first to embrace a New Social Movements approach and focused on framing as a holistic theory in itself rather than just a methodological alternative (Melucci 1995; Buechler 1995; Benford and Snow 2000). American

scholarship although slow to embrace this change, soon realised the importance of understanding the discursive and salient features of movement communication. For this thesis, I take such an approach to framing, where it will not only constitute as the theoretical framework, but also a guiding light for the methodology and analysis.

### **Framing as Meaning Construction**

According to Benford and Snow (1988: 198), “movements function as carriers and transmitters of mobilising beliefs and ideas.” But this is not a passive process. Movement actors like leaders, activists, rank-and-file participants, media, counter-movement adversaries and others are actively engaged in the production and meaning making process of different ideas. This can also be applied to Twitter users who end up being movement participants just by using a hashtag like #MeToo to engage in the conversations. These hashtag users are part of the process of shaping the movement’s ideas and discourse and are in a constant process of structuring existing as well as new ideas in relation to movement frames. And as such, Benford and Snow (1988) refer to social movement actors as ‘signifying agents’ that are deeply embroiled along with the media and the state in what Stuart Hall (1982) refers to as the ‘politics of signification’. This signifying work is conceptualised with the help of the verb ‘framing’ (Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000).

Benford (2013) explains that frames contribute to such an interpretive work by performing three core functions -

1. They focus attention by emphasising what is relevant and what is irrelevant in our sensual field. Or, in other words, they show us what is ‘in-frame’ and what is ‘out-frame’ in relation to the object of orientation.
2. They articulate mechanisms by tying together the various scattered elements of reality so that one set of meanings is focused on instead of another.
3. Lastly, they perform a transformative function by reconstituting the way in which some objects of attention are seen or understood as relating to each other or to the actor.

When these ideas are seen in relation to social movements, it can be understood that meanings are typically contestable and negotiable and thus open to debate and differential interpretation (Benford 2013). Naturally, the leaders, participants and adversaries of social movements are vital to negotiations of meanings that movements provide in thinking about particular issues or grievances. This is the basic logic that guides the scope

of this thesis. By giving analytical space to Twitter users' discourse on #MeToo, I aim to understand the negotiations of meanings that took place surrounding the issue of sexual violence. Specifically, I aim to find out how #MeToo users interpreted the call to action that triggered the movement; and what were the most common problems, solutions and personal expressions that were voiced in that process.

### **Collective Action Frames**

The discussion above shows that frames are how individuals understand the world while also providing a context to different situations. When movement leaders or activists frame events and ideas to articulate common grievances and identify appropriate targets to resolve conflicts, they come to be known as collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000). According to Benford and Snow (2000: 614), collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organisation (SMO). They are meant to perform an interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the everyday life, but in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988: 198).

For some scholars like Klandermans (1997), collective action frames serve the same purpose as that of the concept of “schemas” in psychology, which tends to overlook the interactive and constructionist character of the framing processes in movements. However, collective action frames are different from the known idea of schemas. As Gamson (1992: 111) notes it, “collective action frames are much more than mere aggregations of individual attitude and beliefs”. Instead, they are highly interactive outcomes of negotiations and shared meaning makings about ideas of “what is” and “what is going on”. As a result, they are dynamic and constantly evolving.

Collective action is constituted by two main characteristic features where one concerns their core action-oriented tasks and the other relates to their discursive, interactive processes that supplement the core tasks. Snow and Benford (1988) derived the concept of core framing tasks of collective action frames by building on John Wilson's (1973) ‘decomposition of ideology’. They note that there are three core framing tasks of collective action frames in social movements. They are described briefly as follows and will be used to locate and identify the different types of frames in the #MeToo movement.

## **Diagnostic Frames**

Diagnostic framing constructs the problems around which movements mobilise (Gupta 2017). This construction involves naming of grievances as well as interpreting them in such a way that multiple people who are victims or targets of the problem, begin to see themselves as connected to a common cause and in need of a common solution (Gupta 2017: 144). Diagnostic framing also involves the attribution of blame by attaching a motive and identity to these culpable agents (Benford and Snow 2000: 616). However, Benford and Snow point to the difficulty that social movements face in reaching a consensus on the attribution of blame, which many a times leads to a fracturing in movement ideology or support. This process leads to a continuous negotiation of diagnostic frames as actors, events and contexts that define them shift over time (Gupta 2017: 145).

The issue of sexual violence is a case in point to explain the diagnostic framing process. The reality of sexual coercion is not new, but the construction of this condition as a social problem is a relatively recent consequence of activist efforts and ideological shifts (Chasteen 2001: 102). Throughout history, forced sex was an invisible harm, outside the domain of both public and scientific discourse. The feminist anti rape movement that began in the 1960s, is credited to have first brought this issue into wider public debate (Chasteen 2001). The diverse feminist movements during this period identified that sexual violence is a social injustice and needs to be addressed collectively. Through the many political struggles in constructing and reconstructing the definition and connotation of rape, sexual violence was brought out of silence and into the public eye with this social movement. Sexual violence has been framed as both an instance and an example of larger patterns of social injustice through gender inequality, women's oppression, and men's abuse of power through sexual terrorism (L. M. G. Clark and Lewis 1977; Griffin 1971; Lloyd and Emery 2000; White 1999). These frames connected the experiences of multiple women and emphasised a common identity for other movement participants. Since then, the anti-rape movement has gone through many different phases, each framing the issue differently to locate the most pressing problems of their time.

In order to be successful, movements are also required to establish a cultural framework that implicitly and explicitly reveals injustice to activists and potential activists to convince them that their cause is just, important and achievable (Sibbersen 2012: 18). Ultimately, successful frames must be capable of convincing participants that their cause is just, important and achievable.

## **Prognostic Frames**

After diagnosing the problem and the injustice, movement actors also need to identify the solutions that they want to propose to eliminate that injustice. The purpose of prognostic framing is not only to suggest solutions to problems but also to identify strategies, tactics and targets (Snow and Benford 1988: 201). The identification of problems is highly influenced by the diagnostic frames and in turn also affects the solutions that will be made available to movement actors (Benford and Snow 2000). The prognostic dimension is key to movement differentiation (Benford and Snow 2000).

For example, even though many feminists, women's rights advocates and other actors identify sexual violence against women as a core problem, and the patriarchal institutions as a source of that problem, they differ wildly when it comes to how those problems should be confronted. Gupta (2017: 149) explains that there could be different prognostic frames for this issue depending on whether one is trying to find a radical or a moderate solution. While some might call for a change or reformation of anti-rape laws, or create awareness about consent, others might advocate that the only way to combat crimes related to sexual abuse is to abolish patriarchy completely.

## **Motivational Frames**

Motivational framing, the final core framing task, provides a "call to arms" or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive (Benford and Snow 2000). According to Bert Klandermans (1984), diagnostic and prognostic framing together constitutes a "consensus mobilization". Simply put, it means that if and only when movements are able to persuade others of their diagnosis of and solutions for a social problem, can they generate support for their agenda. But support alone does not translate into action. The movements need to utilize "vocabularies of motives" that spur action (Klandermans 1984; Benford 1993). Motivational framing involves cognitive appeals as well as emotional calls which can galvanize feelings and make people identify with the movement. Particularly, emotions of moral shocks and negative experiences can move previously uncommitted bystanders into action (Jeff Goodwin and Jasper 2006). On the other hand, positive emotions like love, solidarity, and references to collective identity can bolster committed activism (Ibid). Motivational framing that emphasises on collective identity has the potential to stir people into action and be part of a collective movement (Gupta 2017; 147).

Continuing the example of anti-rape movements, motivational calls such as “No means no”, “the personal is political”, “Any woman can be a rape victim” and “Any man can be a rapist” have been some commonly used calls to action to draw attention to larger themes surrounding the issue (Chasteen 2010: 104). Aaronette White’s (1999) study on a black feminist anti-rape movement that started in 1992, is a landmark study on how Black feminist groups used different framing processes to mobilise support and address issues surrounding power, social inequality and sexual violence, all the while bringing in a distinct Black Feminist master frame. In her study White shows how, the movement leaders and participants made use of specific vocabularies that would appeal to the black community so as to garner support for a collective action and awareness campaign.

### **Contested Processes**

Contested processes consist of counter-framing regarding the movement ideology or message. Counter-frames are a natural outcome of opposition to movements and the way in which movements react to it. Every movement faces opposition on various levels and it directly or indirectly shapes the evolution of the movement frame. Many a times, opposition or disputes can stem from within the movement actors itself. These are called intra-movement disputes and literature shows that differences of opinions that lead to such disputes usually come up in the prognostic and diagnostic stages of action framing (Benford and Snow 2000). In the case of #MeToo, we will analyse if and what kinds of counter frames came up regarding the movement, its participants, and its collective framing of sexual violence.

### **Personal Action Frames**

While the above discussion is helpful in identifying the ways in which movement actors frame their discourse with the help of collective framing processes, it is not always the case with new digital movements like the #MeToo movement. To understand the role of activists in these new movements, the work of Bennett and Segerberg (Bennett and Segerberg 2012, 2011; Bennett, Segerberg, and Walker 2014) proves helpful. The authors contend that digital platforms and social media sharing practices are transforming the dynamic of activism where the traditional ‘collective action’ is giving way to a new logic of ‘connective action’. In this connective logic, taking public action or contributing to a common good becomes ‘an act of personal expression, recognition or self-validation, achieved by sharing ideas and actions’ (Benett & Segerberg, 2012: 752-753). To guide

their study, the authors use the cases of the 2010 G20 protests, and the 2011 US Occupy protests in which a large part of the movement planning and action was coordinated over social media technologies. According to the authors, technology platforms and applications are taking the role of established political organisations in these new movements. Political demands and grievances are often shared in very personalised accounts that travel over social networking platforms, email lists and online coordinating platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012: 742). For example, in the 2011 US Occupy protests, the frame of ‘we are the 99 percent’ emerged from one of the digital movement participants and travelled the world where other activists and common people added on to the message with personal stories and images. And all of this happened over multiple social media platforms including Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook that set in motion a networked meaning making process.

Connective action is thus based on a personalised nature of activism where ‘personal action frames’ guide content sharing. From this point of view, political action is based on easily adaptable ideas wherein “the action frames are inclusive of different personal reasons for contesting a situation that needs to be changed” (Ibid: 744). These personal action frames are easily shareable via Digitally Networked Action (DNA) and can travel transnationally because of their flexible nature. However, personal action frames do not spread automatically. Bennett and Segerberg note that “people must show each other how they can appropriate, shape, and share themes [...] In this interactive process of personalization and sharing, communication networks may become scaled up and stabilized through the digital technologies people use to share ideas and relationships with others” (2012: 746).

The case of #MeToo offers a good opportunity to add to this growing literature utilising Bennett and Segerberg’s concept of ‘personal action frames’ in new digital movements. My conjecture is that ‘#MeToo’ was in itself a personal call for action and thus, a majority of the tweets were personalised in nature, posited alongside a collective action framing.

In the next part of the thesis, I will explain the research questions and the methodology that guides the further analysis.

## Research Design

### Research Questions and Definition of Terms

For ease of access, I reiterate the research questions in this section along with the aim and rationale for each. This study sets out with two interrelated questions drawn from the existing literature and theoretical concepts. First of all, I will be studying how the wider public — those people who are not the movement leaders and influencers — framed the issue of sexual violence using #MeToo on Twitter.

#### **RQ1: How did Twitter users frame the issue of sexual violence using #MeToo?**

*Sub Question (SQ): Which were the most prominent collective and personal action frames?*

In order to answer the above questions, I begin by analysing the data for various issue-based themes surrounding sexual violence. These themes will then be further analysed to identify the most prominent collective and personal action frames. Through this I would like to understand the different problems, solutions and personal thoughts expressed by common people regarding sexual violence.

The second research question that guides this thesis is how users appended their own meanings to #MeToo by using other hashtags. This broad question is broken down into a sub question to give more specificity to the analysis.

#### **RQ2: Which other hashtags commonly co-occurred with #MeToo in the data?**

*SQ: How do these co-occurring hashtags relate to the collective and personal action frames in the #MeToo movement?*

Accordingly, I begin by finding out the hashtag co-occurrence – other hashtags that appear in tweets with #MeToo – to understand how people attached and associated different meanings to the movement frame, thus extending the scope of #MeToo's influence. Here I argue that hashtags, as indexing behaviours, become a way to append meanings to the messages of a movement and create issue-specific frames. In other words, I propose that social media users engage in framing processes via hashtags and link diverse issues together through the indexing feature of hashtags. By analysing the most frequently appearing hashtag clusters along with #MeToo, I aim to find out which issues users link with #MeToo movement the most and in turn, how they relate to the collective and personal action frames.

## **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this research, I will be using the definition of sexual violence as outlined by the largest anti-sexual violence organisation in the world — RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), following the guidelines of United Nations and World Health Organisation.

*“The term "sexual violence" is an all-encompassing, non-legal term that refers to crimes like sexual assault, rape, and sexual abuse. It can be defined as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” (RAINN.org n.d.)*

## **Data and Sampling**

The data for this research was sourced from Professor Axel Bruns at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia. It was drawn with the help of the Twitter streaming Application Programming Interface (API) (Gaffney and Puschmann 2014). Although the #MeToo hashtag first appeared on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017, the data available for this study is only from the 17<sup>th</sup> October until 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Even then, a total of 4.2 million tweets have been downloaded as part of this dataset.

Since the raw data set has all the tweets using #MeToo across the globe, it was necessary to qualify the tweets that would be useful for the specific goals of this study. In order to reduce the data to a manageable sample, Dr. Puschmann drew a random sample of 5000 tweets using a custom written software in R statistical package. The data was also filtered with the following criteria that were carefully chosen for this research keeping in mind the scope and time constraints of the project.

1. Only English tweets
2. No retweets
3. No @ mention tweets directed at other users
4. No URLs
5. No tweets with just #MeToo as the content

The inherent limitations of Twitter data have to be addressed here. First of all, since there is no way to fully access Twitter's data stream, researchers have to rely on Twitter's public search API. This results in issues of representability as some tweets get excluded from the results and the information about how much of the data are lost is not disclosed on Twitter's own site (Gaffney and Puschmann 2014). Secondly, since the aim of the study was to gauge the original discourse surrounding sexual violence and the #MeToo hashtag, those tweets that simply used the hashtag without any other content, or those tweets which used the hashtag with an @ mention or a link to another website were discarded from the material. Tweets from formal institutions like media organisations, NGOs, other activist groups and so on were also removed as far as possible. Additionally, the original data corpus contained tweets in many different languages, but owing to the language restrictions of the researcher, only English language tweets were chosen for the final data sample.

Finally, due to time and resource restrictions, I chose to analyse tweets over a one-month time period- that is, from 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017 until the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and drew a sample size of 2000 tweets from this month-long data set. The unit of my analysis is each individual tweet with the time and date it was posted. I have also tried to analyse the gender of a user as far as possible and in cases where I needed a reference to understand the tweet, I manually cross-checked the profile over Twitter. This was especially useful to weed out the tweets from spam profiles.

## **Methodology**

### **Qualitative Content Analysis**

The literature has stressed the importance of framing in public understanding of science issues (Nisbet 2015), but methodological challenges have led to a scarcity of empirical research on framing in interpersonal conversations. Responding to this gap of literature, I consider the space of Twitter conversations to be the natural field where personal opinions and expressions can be unobtrusively measured and analysed. However, since framing has been used as a theory as well as a method over the years, there is confusion in its exact utility as an independent methodology. I thus turn to another well-versed approach in framing studies — the qualitative content analysis.

Content analysis is 'a technique for examining information and content, in written or symbolic materials' (Neuman 1997: 31). According to Schreier (2012: 1), 'Qualitative

content analysis (QCA) is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame developed during the analysis process itself. This process of coding lies at the heart of the QCA and covers all of the data to uncover the meanings that feature in it.' QCA is systematic, flexible and reduces the data to understand the themes and frames in the descriptive data.

According to Schreier (2012: 6) QCA is conducted by following the steps shown in the table below-

*Table 1 Steps in Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier 2012)*

1. Deciding on your research question
2. Selecting your material
3. Building a coding frame
4. Dividing your material into units of coding
5. Trying out your coding frame
6. Evaluating and modifying your coding frame
7. Main analysis
8. Interpreting and presenting your findings

These steps were followed to thoroughly conduct the analysis. The coding process was done in three stages. After deciding the research question, procuring and sampling my data I proceeded to build a coding frame. I used the software MAXQDA throughout my analysis in order to systematically sort, code and understand the thematic patterns in the data. However, I manually went through each tweet to code it and understand the deeper context and meanings of the text.

In the preliminary stage of coding, I closely read 100 tweets and adopted an open, inductive coding strategy to find relevant themes and codes that emerged from the data. Since I had been closely and actively following the development of #MeToo movement on Twitter and other news media since it emerged in October 2017, I already had a general idea of the overall themes that might emerge from my data. Using this as a starting point, I began with a basic set of codes that I expected to find in my data regarding sexual harassment or violence, regarding the role of perpetrators and victims, public reactions to harassment and counter frames against the movement. From there, I let the data shape my coding structure and kept adding new codes or categories to my existing list. This helped

me keep an open mind during the coding process and avoid overlooking important details due to biases. This also allowed me to mindfully interact with the data and use an open coding approach. As new themes emerged, I reviewed the data with a more focused outlook, merging, and tweaking the codes as I progressed. Throughout this process, I maintained a project journal and recorded my questions, doubts and justifications regarding the coding process. These measures were taken to avoid what Shreier (2012) warns as a pitfall of ‘getting lost in the data’ in a qualitative content analysis approach.

The different uses of #MeToo in the data were categorized as a way of understanding the tweeting activity centred around the subject of sexual violence. As mentioned before, the content of each tweet decided which code it was assigned to. Since the coding was performed inductively, this first stage of coding produced a large corpus of codes, many of which overlapped, with little distinction between categories.

In the second stage of analysis, I edited, merged and reviewed the codes that had emerged in the first round of coding and coded the next 100 tweets from my sample. As I got better acquainted with the data, I also revised the code list to incorporate the emerging patterns and themes. As such this round of coding took longer and saw many rounds of edits. I also consulted my supervisors regarding the code list at this stage and took into consideration their suggestions.

In the final round of coding I developed a more concise and theory-driven code list. Six major thematic frames emerged at this stage:

- (1) Personal experience tweets
- (2) Diagnostic tweets
- (3) Prognostic tweets
- (4) Motivational tweets
- (5) Oppositional tweets
- (6) Reflexive tweets regarding the #MeToo movement

These coding categories helped me to stay focused on my research questions regarding the collective and personal action frames used by #MeToo participants to discuss sexual violence. At this stage I also found some other categories in the data including the following -

- (1) Tweets that have political references,
- (2) Tweets that have religious references,
- (3) Tweets that refer to news,

(4) Organisational tweets

(5) Spam tweets

Moreover, to answer the second research question on what connecting issues came up through hashtags co-occurring with #MeToo, I made a separate list of all mentioned hashtags to identify the most recurring ones. The ones with the most frequency were then compiled in a separate table.

Additionally, due to the complexity of the issue in focus, many tweets had to be coded into two or more categories. Therefore, the coding categories are not mutually exclusive. The figure below is a screenshot of the coding categories and their respective frequency in the data.

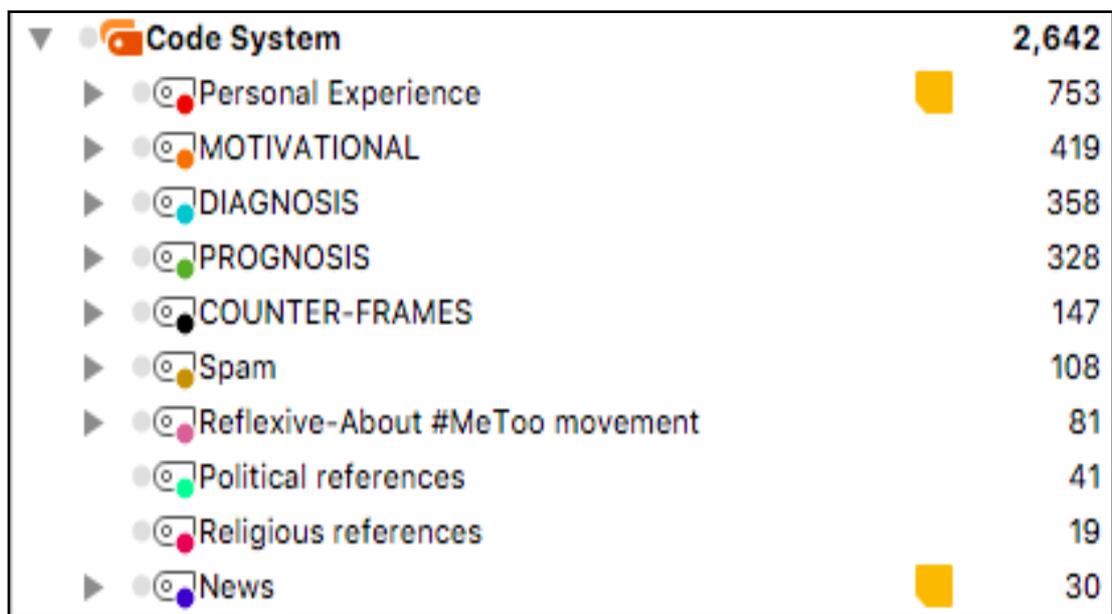


Figure 4 Final Code List for data analysis. Figures on the right denote the frequency of codes in the data.

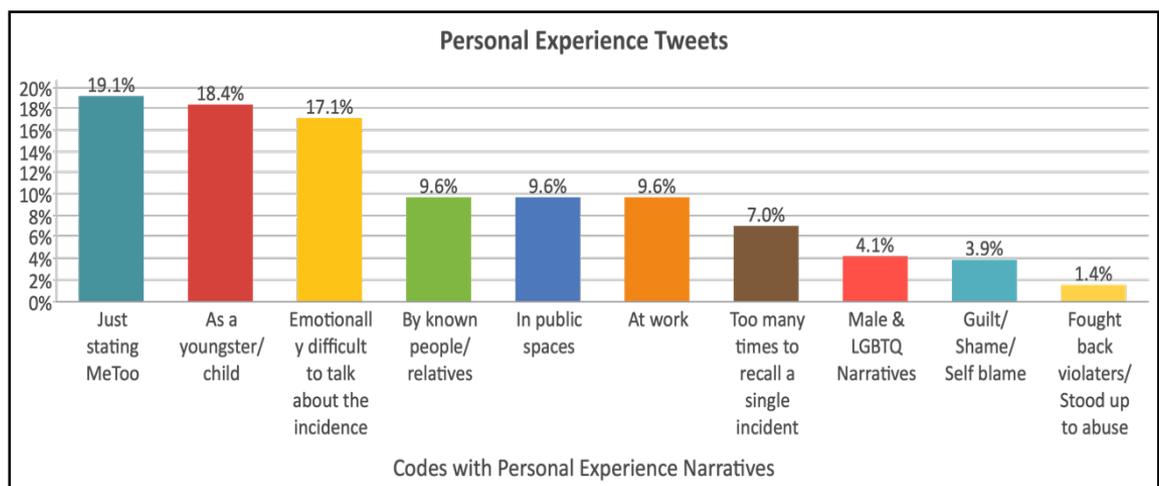
## Findings and Analysis

After laying the groundwork for the research with regard to the guiding questions, literature, theories and methods, I now begin the in-depth analysis of the data. In this chapter, I will put forth the findings from my study and discuss each in detail.

This study was guided by two main research questions. Firstly, I set out to understand how the issue of sexual violence was framed by users of #MeToo; and secondly, how do people use hashtags to extend the movement frames. Accordingly, the findings of this study are presented in two sections. The first section is a thematic overview of the different opinions and expressions that came up from users of #MeToo surrounding sexual violence. I guide this discussion with the help of the same categories used to code the data. In the end I collate the findings to construct the most prominent frames that emerged from the data. The second section of this chapter is related to the other research question. In this part, I will discuss the most common hashtags that were used with #MeToo and show how these hashtags connect to the prominent frames surrounding sexual violence.

In order to protect the identity of Twitter users that I have quoted to guide my arguments, I have made minor changes to the usernames (beginning with an @ symbol). The original usernames can be found in appendix 3, cross referenced with the edited usernames quoted in this chapter.

### Personal Experience Tweets



*Figure 5 Code Categories with personal experience narratives*

In the following section I discuss the different kinds of personal experiences with sexual violence that were shared through #MeToo. I guide the discussion by citing examples of the tweets from the data. All of the sub-categories surrounding personal narratives have been clubbed together into broad themes to facilitate a discussion and avoid the pitfall of redundant descriptions.

Out of the 2000 tweets that were analysed, 753 tweets fell under this category, making it the largest coded category. It clearly indicates that #MeToo was about sharing personal stories, incidents or memories regarding the different kinds of sexual harassment, violence or abuse. In order to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences, I purposely chose to make sub-categories clustered around the experiences that were shared. I believe this gives an insight into the kinds of abuse people typically face and are willing to talk about through a hashtag like #MeToo.

#### #MeToo as a standalone expression

It is important to first address the inherently personalized prompt that #MeToo provided its users. The ‘Me’ in #MeToo became a reference for people to add personal narratives while the ‘Too’ showed a collective experience shared by many others just like them. Combined, these two words became a powerful rhizomatic form, connecting all kinds of experiences related to sexual violence.

@Saraheli: Oh yeah #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 12:12:22)

@bald\_yellow: Truth is #MeToo 😞😞(17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 12:17:35)

@DrHannah: I'm late to this. But #metoo (16<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 16:28:13)

With 107 tweets coded in this sub-category, a majority (19.1%) of the personal experience tweets were simple statements with the words Me Too and little additional details in them. Many of these tweets were in a matter of fact way stating words like “*but obviously*” or “*ofcourse*” followed by Me Too, highlighting the fact that it was common knowledge that sexual harassment and abuse is a part of everyday experiences. Many other tweets in this sub-category had an apologetic tone that stated it was hard to say it or that they were late participate in the movement, “*but #MeToo*”.

#### Incidents of abuse as a youngster/child

A striking feature of the personal experiences shared in #MeToo discussion was a reference to incidences or experiences of sexual abuse or harassment as youngsters or children. I define the category of youngsters or children as a broad age group ranging from infancy up to 21 years of age. Even though a majority of the tweets do explicitly state the age or the age range while narrating their experience, in some of the cases it is not clear. In order to ensure objectivity in such cases, I paid close attention to words like “*children*”, “*child*”, “*toddler*”, “*school*”, “*teenage*” to estimate the age of the users from the information in their tweets.

@mentalAunty: Molested at 4 by cousins, sexually assaulted by neighbour at 11, groped by strangers in public transport. #MeToo & there are many like me (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 11:21:47)

@floweryfeast: I don't owe anyone a story. But #metoo I'm 14. Keep that in mind. (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 20:17:44)

@Survived\_This\_Far: I was raped when I was 11. Sexually harassed years ago by a boss and last year by a maintenance man at my apartment. #MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 03:17:41)

@PlayPoison: Surviving sexual assault abuse and rape. #MeAt14 #MeToo #survivor #ptsd #ptsdawareness #molestation survivor #rapesurvivor (12<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 16:10:58)

Most of the narrators in this category seem to precisely define what kind of sexual abuse they went through and pinpoint if it was harassment, molestation, rape or anything else. These tweets also express the emotional trauma of child abuse. Many survivors talk about how they had to live through intense fear, shame or guilt due to the incidence/s. By cross-checking the twitter profiles with the help of usernames, it can be seen that a majority of the users are women. However, there are also many male users who share experiences of abuse as children. I have made a separate sub-category to compile the experiences shared by men, but I will get to that in the following pages.

### Emotionally difficult to talk about or recall experience

This category comes close to the child abuse category with 96 tweets referring to an emotional trauma or difficulty in speaking/recalling the incident of sexual abuse. These narrations express how difficult it is to share their experiences due to a number of

complex reasons. The narrators use #MeToo along with these expressions showing a willingness to participate in the MeToo movement, but hesitant to go into the details of how or what exactly happened.

@Esfakha: Even recalling that disturbing moment makes sick let along telling/talking about it. Yes it is hard. #victim #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 12:39:09)

@Gilly: This whole experience still haunts me and affects me deeply. #MeToo (24<sup>th</sup> October 2017 09:56:23)

@TaylorT: I would like to acknowledge that it happened, but I'm still not ready to take about it. #MeToo (16<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 00:48:32)

Many of the tweets also refer to a lack of courage to talk about their experiences. It shows the fear in the minds of victims while openly talking about a subject like sexual harassment or abuse. This provides an insight into the nature of victim blaming in most societies where the assault victims are the ones to face negative repercussions instead of the abusers feeling fearful or hesitant.

#### Abuse by known people/ relatives/ partners

This subcategory was specifically noted in order to understand whether the myth of sexual harassment as something perpetrated by strangers holds true. However, a greater number of #MeToo users spoke about harassment or violence by known people compared to the categories that noted of abuse by strangers. Even then, it is important to clarify that tweets from other categories like '*as a youngster or child*', '*At work*', '*in school/university*', '*issue of consent*' have also been coded in this particular category if the reference is made to a known person as an abuser.

The tweets in this category correspond with existing research that shows in most cases of sexual assault, the offender is known to the survivor – such as an employer, co-worker, friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, spouse, neighbor, or relative (Geddes 2018). In fact, a large number of the narrations in the #MeToo data refer to abusers being an intimate partner or spouse, friend, neighbour, relative, colleague or boss.

#### Abuse in public spaces

This sub-category refers to the incidents of sexual abuse, harassment or violence in public spaces and 54 tweets from the data explicitly talk about their personal experiences in such a setting. Users share stories of different kinds of harassment that they have faced with the most common incidents being that of stalking, molestation, verbal abuse and more. Unlike the previous category of harassment or abuse by known people, this category talks of incidents perpetrated by strangers. Users even talk about how common this form of harassment is and almost entirely talk of men as the abusers. Only 3 tweets could be identified that spoke of sexual harassment in a public space at the hands of a woman. The following tweets are some of the examples:

@oceaneyes: multiple times when I went past groups of guys they touched me, slapped or grabbed my butt and I was told to take it as a compliment #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:49:46)

@annabag: Because I have to carry pepper spray with me even during the day after years of being groped by strangers on the street or in stores. #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 15:41:44)

@divya: From unwanted cat calls and groping to feelings of unease as a female walking home at night, I'm lucky it hasn't been worse but #MeToo (20<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 03:43:25)

@alihof: Currently hiding in the bathroom from a creeper at the arrival gate. #metoo (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017, 17:33:25)

The matter-of-fact tone in these tweets shows that women are acutely aware of how common harassment is in public spaces. Some tweets also describe the strategies that they use to protect themselves from abuse. Like in the two tweets above where ‘use of a pepper spray’ or ‘hiding in the women’s bathroom’ is a strategy to be safe.

### Abuse at work

Fifty-four tweets specifically mention of harassment or abuse at places of work. Use of power by male superiors and colleagues are the most common experiences. From this corpus of tweets, a majority of the users report experiences of harassment while working as a waitress. Many users point out that working in the hospitality industry has a high risk of workplace abuse. Many other tweets also complain about the commonplace misogynistic and sexist attitude of male colleagues and supervisors.

### Expressions of fear, guilt, shame and confusion

Narrators also expressed emotions of living under fear of abuse or living with guilt and shame after being sexually violated. Survivors spoke about a state of confusion or self-doubts as to whether their experience constituted as sexual violence and whether they were at fault for it. References to issues of consent were also part of the narrative where quotation marks were used to make visible the interpersonal conversations between abusers and victims or while referring to society's questions and their own reasons. Some also pointed out how their abusers knew that they were uncomfortable and yet continued to abuse them. Others wrote about how their experiences almost seemed insignificant compared to others' traumatic experiences. Or there are yet other narratives that speak of how it never occurred to them to complain or officially report their abusers to the authorities. Some even say that they were stopped from speaking out about their abuse by use of threats, power or by imbibing the idea that no one would believe them.

The idea that one cannot claim that they have been sexually violated unless they are completely unable to cope with the mental and/or physical pain is very pronounced in these narratives.

@clfalvo: "Why didn't you say no?" I did. He chose not to hear it. #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 02:49:12)

@ChiefLife: For years I drown in guilt from being raped by my "friend" while passed out drunk cuz maybe if I weren't drunk it wouldn't had happen #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:49:26)

@AgreeableM: I struggled with #MeToo Was I really harassed? Hadn't I been asking for it? It was guys being guys when they touched me. But yeah #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 09:20:35)

@caorion: He always said "It's not a big deal. You just have to lie there." #metoo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 14:34:03)

@martav: The amount of times I've typed up then deleted my #MeToo bc I have told myself that it could've been worse.. is part of the problem (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:47:57)

These tweets also show that the victims need time to reflect upon their experiences and understand what they went through. Often times sexual abuse is not easy to categorise, and the data reflects this idea. Many victims express how they spent years living with

guilt or self-blame because of sexual abuse and only came to know later that it is not their fault. Expressions of low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, fear of intimacy or physical contact from the opposite sex is prominent in many of these personal narratives.

#### Male and LGBTQ experiences with sexual abuse

Although the #MeToo movement prominently features women's experiences with sexual harassment and abuse, there were some men and queer people who spoke out about their stories as well. However, the proportion was very low compared to the female narratives. What stands out in the tweets from male users is the mention of abuse as a youngster or a child compared to experiences of sexual abuse as an older man.

@coffeep0wered: As a child, I was molested by my cousin, and almost raped by a friend who wanted to "open me up sexually." Both were girls. #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 20:53:12)

In terms of the LGBTQ narratives, unless it was explicitly indicated in the tweet, the usernames or user descriptions, it was hard to precisely state that certain narratives were from identities other than cisgender women or men. Even then, the researcher identified 5 tweets that specifically mentioned of or addressed the LGBTQ community. Interestingly, 4 out of these 5 tweets was a call to action to the community identifying as a trans/gay or queer person in their narration. Only one user narrated an incidence of abuse as a child.

@ROBERTC6620: It happen to me in the Navy #metoo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 11:10:34)

@gameofgays: i got physical abused by my mom's ex boyfriend when i was 5. it was the most horrible thing i've ever had to experience. #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 11:39:24)

@BryanBondy: When #MeToo became a thing I asked rhetorically when the gay community would start dealing with it. Thank you Anthony Rapp (for real). (30<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 20:12:08)

I have taken liberty to club together the experiences of men and queer identities because they were a small part of the personal experience category. But it does not mean that I denote these experiences to be similar.

### Standing up to abuse

Although a majority of the personal experience narratives were about incidents of abuse where the victim got violated, some users also narrated incidents where they stood up to their abusers. And even though only 8 users gave this perspective, it is important to point them out as a form of motivational narration.

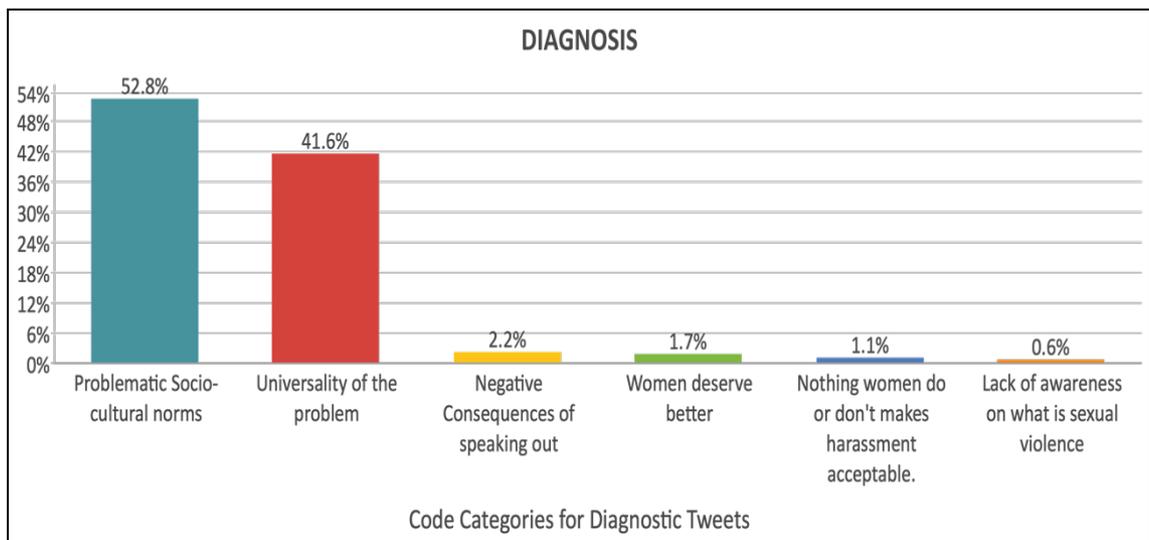
@KraagKrachtig: One I threw of the stairs, another I pushed away with such force he smacked against the wall. I hate violation and being violent. #metoo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 09:28:53)

@SaraRebotta: Yesterday I flipped off a dude who whistled at me. I've never done that before but it felt great. #metoo #feminism #👊 (05<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 23:25:42)

To sum up this discussion, I would like to draw attention to an undercurrent narrative in almost all of these personal experience tweets- the expressions of relief in being able to share their painful experience with the world. A large number of users state that even though it was a painful process to recount their traumatic experience, it feels good to not keep it as a secret anymore. Many also express that their experiences need to be told so that others who are silently suffering can identify with them and find some relief. This finding corresponds with previous studies showing that women find the act of publicly documenting and sharing their experiences with rape as personally and collectively empowering (Keller, Jessalynn; Mendes, K; Ringrose 2018; Foster 2015; R. Clark 2016; Baer 2016; Drücke and Zobl 2016).

### Diagnostic Tweets

The diagnostic category of tweets came third in the overall data. This category consisted of tweets that gave different reasons as to why sexual violence takes place, why it is problematic and defined who was to blame for the social problem. A total of 358 tweets were coded in this category.



*Figure 6 Code Categories for Diagnostic Tweets*

As discussed previously in the theory chapter, according to Benford and Snow (2000), the diagnostic aspect of social movements consists of presenting a problem that needs to be addressed collectively. It involves the naming of grievances and attributing the problem to various causes and targets. Most importantly, diagnostic framing involves the process of interpreting grievances in a way that multiple people who are victims or targets of the problem, begin to see themselves as connected to a common cause and in need of a common solution.

The data shows that #MeToo was fairly successful in bringing about this collective grievance redressal. Most of the tweets consisted of some form of diagnostic element in them- right from pointing out how common sexual violence is, to discussing the multiple sociocultural norms that lead to sexual assault and harassment. A large number of users expressed their surprise on seeing the number of people (mainly women) who had shared stories of sexual violence. The movement made people think of sexual violence as a common problem that many deal with right from childhood and well into their daily adult lives. #MeToo's collective use through a commonly identifiable experience allowed people to acknowledge it as a social injustice. This also led people to discuss and open up about the complexities of this issue. Problematic sociocultural norms like misogyny, normalising harassment and a lack of accountability for perpetrators were sighted as the main reasons for the problem of sexual violence.

### Power, Misogyny and Problematic Socio-Cultural Norms

With 52.8% of tweets coded under this category, the diagnosis of problematic socio-cultural norms was cited the most in the data. Broad references were made to patriarchy, misogyny, common issues of victim blaming or the ways in which sexual abuse has been normalised through popular culture and norms. Most of these tweets were coded along with the personal experiences or prognosis categories since the narratives were a mix of personal expressions and problem identification.

Many tweets referred to the double standards that society imposes on men and women. Narratives show how men are easily exempted from any abusive behaviour and the notion of “boys will be boys” renders any wrongful behaviour on their part as harmless. On the other hand, women are subjected to strict social rules about how to behave, what to wear and so on. The common victim blaming rhetoric is also repeatedly used in these tweets to show how such social attitudes cultivate a culture of silence around incidents of sexual abuse.

@vartika.g: Your catcalling isn't cool, your lewdness is offensive. That sexist joke you casually made didn't make you a macho. #MeToo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 16:38)

@anotherliar: Being called slut or whore when you don't like a guy back or do what he wants. #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> october 2017, 19:54:01)

@ForEverB: We have a culture of men that disrespects women's bodies and a culture of women that accepts it as the norm. It has to stop. #MeToo (13<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 12:39:38)

@ObiwanCan: If she is too drunk she is being irresponsible and raunchy If he is too drunk he didnt mean it he didnt know what he was doing #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 4:35)

A big part of this narrative also included tweets that identified how a lack of belief and general apathy towards survivors is problematic as it worsens the trauma for victims and also normalises the culture of abuse. Moreover, the culture of witnessing abuse and yet doing nothing to stop it or help out is another common problem according to the tweets.

@ rese: Lack of empathy, lack of understanding and playing it down - everywhere. Disgusting. #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 15:48:21)

@ Laura\_K: Keeping silent is part of the problem! #MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 1:18)

### Sexual Violence as a ubiquitous problem

One hundred and twenty-five tweets directly mention how common the problem is or how #MeToo made them realise this fact. After observing and cross-checking the usernames and twitter profiles, the researcher found that a majority of the tweets that show surprise or disbelief at how many people are using #MeToo seem to be men. Whereas most women have tweeted statements emphasising that it is a part of their lives and they have always known it is a common occurrence. But there also were a small number of tweets (12) that mention how this is an issue faced by men as well as women.

@mubinabg: The whole #metoo should open our eyes, this is real. It happens everywhere weather u r living in developed or developing country (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 09:27:40)

@Teresa: Like pretty much every woman I know, #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:14)

@ThaKing: The magnitude of people that I follow tweeting #MeToo is insane and that's only the people that speak up. We gotta do better #IHearYou (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 14:16)

@donalgibson: I guess I'm naive, but I'm shocked by the pervasiveness of the #metoo conversation. We need to be better as humans and, specifically, as men (20<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 03:25:32)

@kevbenedict: In the few weeks since the #MeToo campaign began, I've found out that so many of my friends are sexual assault survivors. All of us need to be there for them, to support them, and to make sure that we do all we can to end this epidemic (10<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 19:25:35)

### Negative consequences of speaking out

The tweets in this theme directly address the consequences of a victim blaming attitude in most societies — what is also indirectly reflected in some of the personal experience tweets. These messages point to the negative consequences that victims of abuse end up facing simply for speaking out against perpetrators. Some tweets mentioned how their work place became hostile when they complained against their abusers. Others wrote about being fired from their jobs for speaking out against workplace sexual harassment.

A few of the narratives also focused on the social dimension of being discredited as a liar or a victim for calling out their perpetrators.

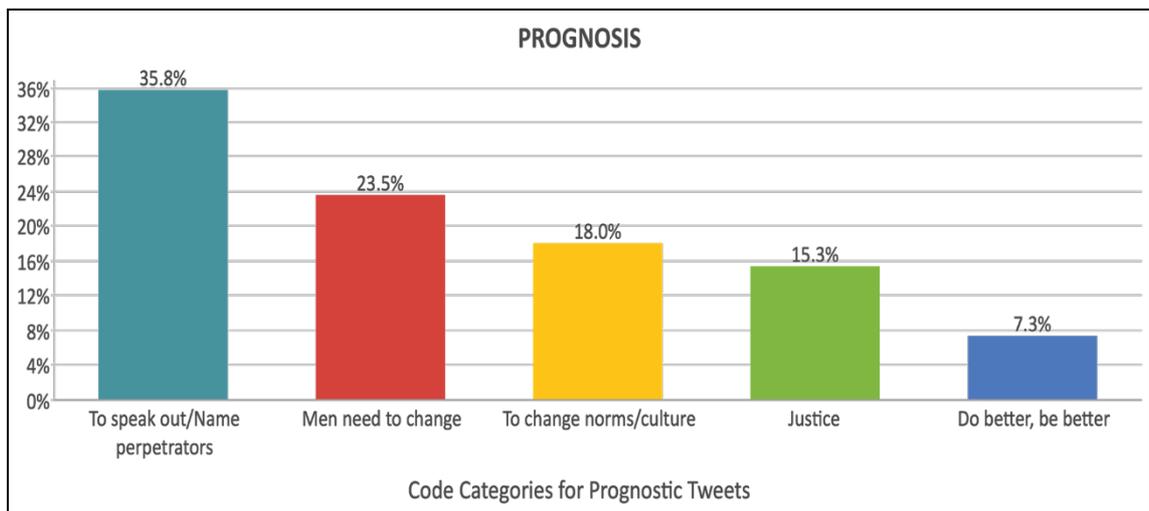
@KimLang: More #MeToo. Was fired from a job for standing up to him after I had gone to HR about it who said "We don't want to get involved in this".  
(17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 15:54:20)

@kayla\_coro: 1 time a lady Chef told me if I ever wanted to make it in the service industry the golden rule was to never report sexual harassment #metoo  
(25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 04:59:21)

These tweets show the power dynamic that stops victims from speaking up. Just like the victim blaming discourse, this also enables a culture of silence regarding sexual abuse. However, some other tweets argue that this way of thinking is precisely what the problem is. It puts the responsibility and guilt of abuse on the victims whereas it should be the other way around. These tweets mention that nothing women do or don't makes abuse acceptable. Some other tweets also pointed to the lack of awareness about sexual violence as a problem. The idea that these tweets convey is that because people don't know much about what sexual violence or how widespread it is, they can be dismissive of its impact.

### Prognostic Tweets

This category collates the solution-oriented tweets surrounding #MeToo and sexual violence. Along with solutions, the users have also suggested how the problems can be mitigated. Almost all of the solutions seem to be influenced by the problems framed in the diagnostic tweets, supporting Benford and Snow's notion that diagnostic and prognostic framing tasks are dependent on each other (2000: 617). However, the prognostic tweets in the data were fewer compared to the diagnostic, motivational or personal experience tweets. The final coding process yielded five major themes under which the 327 prognostic tweets were categorised. However, this theme ranked the lowest amongst the other collective action frames- namely diagnostic and motivational frames.



*Figure 7 Code Categories for Prognostic Tweets*

### To speak out about abuse and abusers

The most resounding solution and call for action that was suggested through the #MeToo movement was that women need to speak out about their abuse, name their perpetrators and make it okay to talk about this issue.

@ brandon: End the secrecy & don't protect them. Say their names. #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:47:14)

@ AADada: I want other women to know it's okay to speak up. I know how it feels to be too scared to. Let's change the stigma. #MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 23:24:47)

One hundred and seventeen tweets, that is 35.8% of the total tweets have been coded as part of this theme. It is important to draw attention to the fact that #MeToo began as a call to action for victims of sexual violence to speak out and create awareness about the problem. Following that idea, most users commented on how open discussions about this issue is in itself a big part of the solution to reducing sexual crimes. A majority of these tweets spoke from a female centric perspective where men are the abusers and women are the victims.

Some tweets also mention that there can be no change unless and until the abusers are publicly named. This is the only way to ensure that these men don't continue their predatory behaviour without fear of consequence. But it was found that only 7 tweets directly or indirectly named and accused someone of sexual abuse. And even from that small number, the researcher is unsure of the validity of one of the tweets due to its content. Four tweets refer to known men from the media and political field.

@ CaitlinDo: Adding my name to the apparently LENGTHY list of women  
Rupert Myers was a total creep to online #MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017,  
20:16:04)

@ Laygo: Dr. John M. Hucklebridge grabbed me by my hair dragged me from the  
bedroom to the living room then made me give him oral sex #metoo (31<sup>st</sup>  
October 2017, 16:18:37)

@ BakeUpLilSu: The man who raped me ran for mayor of Minneapolis. He lost.  
#MeToo (08<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 03:08:15)

@ karkai: I was molested by Pat Robertson. I swear. #metoo (11<sup>th</sup> November  
2017, 02:24:44)

The rest of the tweets in this category named and shamed famous people but did not directly name anyone who they knew to be abusers. The narrative in these tweets implied that powerful men like Harvey Weinstein and Donald Trump continue to use their positions to abuse others because they are not publicly shamed for their actions.

@Salty\_Dog: #Hollywood will remain #HarveyWood until names are named.  
Regardless of #MeToo ism. (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:35:21)

@ beebo: After reading Lena Headey's #MeToo I feel like we MUST shame  
Harvey weinstein GoT style in the street 🚨 (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017,  
19:19:36)

### Men need to change and address the problem

The second biggest theme in the solution oriented #MeToo tweets was that men need to change and own up to the problem of sexual violence. Seventy-seven tweets mention this in their narratives and hold men accountable. This narrative stems from the collectively understood problem that men and patriarchy are the root cause of sexual violence. Out of the seventy-four tweets, fifty state that men need to accept the problem and take measures to change their attitudes and behaviour towards women. Eighteen tweets explicitly refer to the issue of consent and the phrase “no means no” is used often. Nine tweets go on to say that in light of the #MeToo discussion, men must come out and support women, believe them and be more empathetic. Some of these tweets came from men themselves urging other men to collectively do better.

- @ MarkFairclou: Guys, don't be dicks, respect women. Not on our watch. It's unacceptable, men need to hear it from other men. Call it out. #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 11:02:05)
- @ AndrewNaid: Not all, but so damn many men treat women like sex objects. Instead of getting defensive, listen, empathize and try to understand #metoo (25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:51:34)
- @ jayb: Seeing this #MeToo campaign - I can't help think we as men need to own up to being abusers rather than women tell us they've been abused ½ (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 13:08:01)
- @NikkiB: No means No! End of discussion. #MeToo (20<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 03:44:50)
- @ LatikaG: I can add to the #MeToo movt because it's a sad part of a woman's life. But more men need to join dialog using #IWill or #HowIWillChange. (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 3:51)
- @ heathl: The #metoo movement is great but whats needed is the #idid movement from the men. The aggressors need to take responsibility. (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 11:03:04)

### Sociocultural change through awareness and action

Another theme that frequently featured in the #MeToo discussion was a call to create awareness about sexual abuse, stop the shame culture surrounding the issue, and create better redressal systems for victims of abuse. A recurrent theme in the data suggested that #MeToo was considered part of the solution by helping create awareness through dialogue. Many users aptly pointed out that the first step in understanding the nature of sexual violence is to know about the different kinds of sexual violence. And indeed, some users tried to do this by citing the different forms of sexual violence like harassment, abuse, rape. Others pointed to the muted forms of harassment like inappropriate touching, sexual comments, stalking and more and stated that all of these also constitute sexual harassment and should not be accepted as normal. Another solution that comes up in the data is that parents need to teach their children about sexual abuse and ensure that both girls and boys are educated about consent and respect.

@ ajay\_v: Real change can only come about from everyone taking part in the dialogue of #MeToo. I applaud all the women and men of the #MeTooCampaign. (21<sup>st</sup> October 2017, 08:01:59)

@ e\_lyn: -> inappropriated touches, words or following. Harassment comes in different forms. Don't be afraid to speak up. You're not alone. #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 21:20)

@ hanab: With that said- #MeToo I believe in the power of change through conversation & connection. (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 21:52:45)

@ MrMax: Please remember there is difference between sexual harassment, sexual assault & rape. Please judge carefully. Prison a horror 4 sex!! #MeToo (31<sup>st</sup> October 2017, 01:23:52)

About twenty-four tweets also suggested that the only way for change to happen is if we all do better and act more humane with one another. Tweets under this theme suggested a more idealistic and hopeful way of thinking.

### Social justice and laws

With so many allegations and narratives of injustice that surfaced with #MeToo, there also was discussion about laws surrounding sexual crimes, cases of justice or injustice and issues of reporting abusers to the authorities. One solution that predominantly appeared in the data was to change laws that make it difficult to report sexual violence crimes. Numerous users also pointed to inaccessible or hostile authorities that makes it hard for victims to report incidents of abuse. Some write about the cases of injustice where the police refused to take their complaint or where abusers were acquitted without any charges. I have specifically coded these tweets under the prognostic category because they not only point out the institutional failures, but also give an idea on what might help the survivors get justice.

@ Dranksty\_J: I was assaulted by a man I didn't know in Morgantown over a year ago and they never processed the rape kit. #metoo #wvu #westvirginia (20<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 02:58:22)

@ athenian: Sexual assault and Rape will not stop until the violators are charged, arrested and punished. #MeToo #DOJ #AG #Alabama #AL (12<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 21:12:06)

@ StopTheStatute: World now knows no 1 is immune 2 sex crimes since #metoo & unmasking of sadistic & emboldened predators some w/over 100 victims facing NO Criminal Justice due 2 statute of limitation-SIGN & RT #StopTheStatute of Limitation Petition Now Harvey (10<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 22:23:43)

The last tweet shown above is from a Twitter account created specifically to spread awareness about the Statute of Limitation in the United States. This law makes it invalid to file a lawsuit against any perpetrator after a given period of time (RAINN.org *Understanding the Statute of Limitations*)

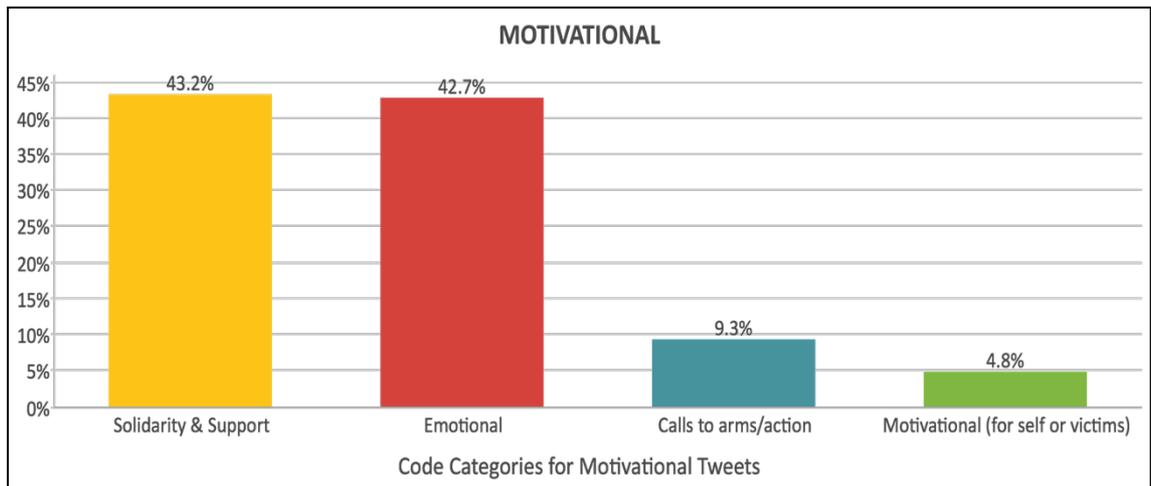
A couple of users cite personal experiences of fighting a legal case against their abusers. Interestingly, the data also shows a few tweets from men who apologise for their past behaviour. However, these tweets amount to very few compared to the larger data set.

@ AsLostAsA: Raped by a family member at 13, facing him in court 13 years later, the verdict of a hung jury but not giving up. I will get justice! #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:00:31)

@ dreadpirate: In response to #metoo I offer this. I'm sorry I have been that guy. Not for years but I have been him. I strive to be better and encourage other men to do so as well. We created this world, this nightmare where so many women are harassed and victimized. (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 16:35)

### Motivational Tweets

As the data analysis progressed, it was clear that #MeToo was exceedingly used with a motivational frame. I have utilised Benford and Snow's (2000) outline of motivational framing to define this category where all the messages with emotional vocabularies of motive and calls to action were coded under this category. This theme was the most used collective action frame with four hundred and nineteen tweets framing #MeToo as a motivational meme. There were four generic vocabularies of motive that emerged from the data: vocabularies of solidarity and support, emotions, calls to arms and action, and self-motivation.



*Figure 8 Code Categories for Motivational Tweets.*

According to Benford and Snow (2000), motivational framing in collective action involves a consensus mobilisation by putting together the diagnostic and prognostic elements of the movement. #MeToo users diagnosed that the widespread problem of sexual abuse can be mitigated if everyone came together to collectively speak out against it. But that also gave rise to the biggest chunk of motivational messages that expressed how it is overwhelming to see the amount of MeToo posts on their social media feed. This seems to have driven people to foster the idea of creating a safe space where victims are believed and feel supported. To a large extent, #MeToo became that safe space. This is not to say that the #MeToo supporters did not face contention and backlash. But, by and large, the movement garnered a response deeply rooted in emotions of solidarity, support, hope, gratitude and in a few cases, even anger and sarcasm at the reasons that cause sexual violence. There was an outpour of messages of solidarity and support with people saying they believed the stories shared by survivors and respected their courage. At the same time, emotional reactions of disbelief, gratitude, hope and anger came very close to the solidarity messages as seen in the graph above.

The role of emotions in social movements is well studied in the literature (J Goodwin and Jasper 2014). Emotions are considered vital as the “raw material” for channelising collective action (Ibid: 619). Gamson (1992:32) argued that “injustice frames,” essential to protest, depend on “the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul.” The digital affordance of twitter data is very useful in pinpointing these emotional responses in social movement research. Up until recently, methodological barriers persisted in getting a real time overview on individual participants’ emotional reactions. The frozen reactions of participants in the form of this twitter data allowed this research to understand the emotional reactions to the #MeToo movement eliciting viral

engagement and participation. Interestingly, the use of emoticons or smileys to express feelings was also commonly observed. These tweets contained symbols like hearts, angry or sad faces, punches and claps to name a few.

### Solidarity and Support

Of the total tweets analysed, 42% of the tweets were categorised under this code, and it shows that a vast majority of the #MeToo discussion riveted around the idea of solidarity, empathy, and support. Many people have expressed that they understand the plight of the survivors and extend support to all. All of the tweets in this category showed an overwhelming sense of collective identity with references to words like “us”, “we are stronger together”, “United we stand” and more. Many users addressed the people who cannot speak out about their experiences with sexual violence and stated that their silent #MeToos are heard.

@ wendal: You're all strong as hell and I look up to every single one of you. We stand together in this fight #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:01:52)

@ erikatre: You're not alone #MeToo. (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 22:33:29)

@hownotto: if you have a #metoo story you can't share for any reason, I'm thinking of you tonight. I know you exist, and you matter, and I hope you're ok. And if you need somewhere to vent, about anything, my DMs are open. ❤️ (12.11.2017 03:47:05)

In the same vein as the solidarity messages, numerous people also tweeted posts saying they believe the survivors and support them. The support messages were from diverse actors and highly collective in nature. Men pledged support to women, victims sent out strength and support to other victims, women showed support and love to men who are standing up for them and more, sending out the message that #MeToo is about healing with empathy and togetherness. This gave #MeToo a sense of community and acted as a call to action to join hands and participate freely without the fear of ridicule, disbelief or blame.

@ Anvital: It's simultaneously horrifying to know how many other women experience the same thing I do and reassuring that I'm not alone #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 22:50)

@ ItsSilly: Stay strong. I love you all. ❤️ #metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:07:24)

@ quantumanim: Sending out Light & ❤️ to all for whom "#MeToo" is true, & for those who ❤️, believe & support them. May this mark the shift to a safe 🌍4All (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 20:50:03)

### Emotional Vocabularies

Seventy-eight tweets express how triggering it is to see all of the #MeToo posts. Through their emotional reactions, these people directly or indirectly serve the purpose of motivating others to take notice and act upon the problem of sexual violence. There is a sense of urgency in these messages, pleading the world to understand how terrible it is that so many people have to face the trauma. Words like “heart-breaking”, “disheartening”, “triggering”, “scary” feature repetitively in these tweets.

@Dave\_And: So, so much #MeToo on my social media. Hits me deep in the gut. The point I take away is this should NEVER HAPPEN. PERIOD. Be good, do good. (17.10.2017 13:50:51)

@emanal: Reading all the #metoo stories is making my heart ache 🌹 (17.10.2017 19:47:39)

Many other messages expressed hope and gratitude towards the #MeToo movement. There were many who hoped about a positive social change through the awareness that #MeToo was bringing about. Most were also grateful towards the movement for giving them a chance to speak out and share their stories of abuse. Others thanked the people who inspired them to speak up and break the silence. There were also those who were simply grateful for the belief and support they received from friends, family and the hashtag community via #MeToo.

@ChristinaC: Thank you to those people who inspired me to say #MeToo I look forward to a day when I don't have to feel on guard around men (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 09:37:11)

@defythety: And I like to thank all sexual abuse survivors for coming forward with your stories. I know what's it like. #MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 12:37:03)

@\_AlienAn: As a woman, no as a decent human being, I'm thankful for the conversation of sexual assault/harassment. Hopefully it generates change.  
#MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 21:40:09)

While there were many tweets with positive emotions, there was also an undercurrent of anger, sarcasm and dismay towards the injustice and the failures of society to ensure safety for women. Emotions of frustration and hostility marked these narratives. What is interesting is that, in all of these tweets, anger is seen to be a tool for contention. Users channelise their frustration through sarcastic messages on Twitter. This does two things- firstly it bitterly points to the various victim blaming remarks that are commonly heard and secondly, it acts as a catalyst for others to also be angry and take action.

@ KateSimpson: I'm so angry right now. A page that I have followed and loved for a long time started mocking #metoo and making rape jokes. I'm so done. (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 02:10:12)

@littlecom: guess i shouldve dressed more modestly than jeans and a tshirt  
#MeToo (17.10.2017 12:02:55)

### Call to arms and action

Befitting the idea of a motivational frame, there were a few tweets that summoned a call to action regarding the injustice of sexual violence. There were two kinds of messages- one that called upon women to fight for justice and the other emphasised that this culture of abuse has to stop. The first category held a view that the only solution to stop the problem of sexual violence in society was to fight back and protest against it. Suggestions that came forth under this theme involved holding institutions accountable for the ways in which they address allegations of sexual violence and to demand basic rights of safety in public places and professional settings. A striking reference to collective identity as women and as survivors of sexual abuse rung out in these tweets.

@ chloe: The systems of power which support perpetrators can help by being accountable. By believing, investigating & acting #metoo #HimThough  
(18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 16:45)

@ itsscha: I sincerely hope the women of the world keep rebelling. #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 5:40)

@ Darkwing: Women are taught to use their sexual harassment experiences to make them stronger. Meh... How about crotch punch retaliation instead?  
#metoo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 18:10:25)

@BrookeSwen: Make it stop. Enough is enough. #MeToo (18.10.2017 07:27:10)

### You are not your abuse

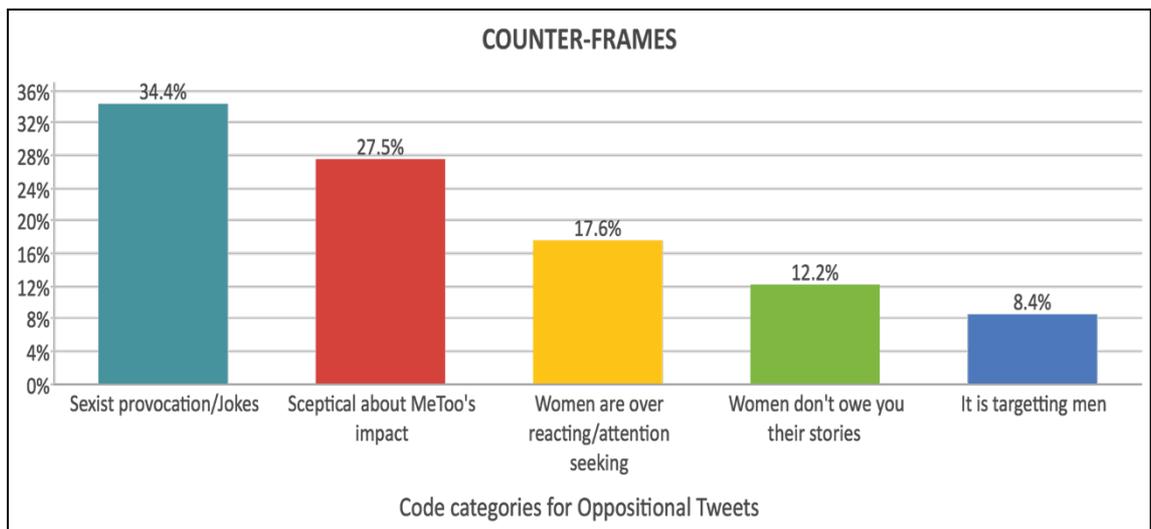
Many tweets also used a motivational message- either to themselves or to the world in general. These tweets emphasised that those who have faced sexual abuse are not victims, but survivors. The tweets state that the guilt should not be upon the survivor, instead the abusers should be ashamed and scared. The idea that one's abuse does not define the person they are, and it should not be a lifelong identity is reflected strongly in these messages.

@atortilla: Keep getting stronger. There's no reason you should regret something they did #MeToo (29<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 20:15:28)

@vettie: A Survivor not a victim #MeToo (24<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 17:56:17)

### Oppositional Tweets

Like all movements, #MeToo also faced backlash and criticism and one hundred and forty-seven tweets are coded in this category. The criticism came from both men and women. Benford and Snow (2000) call this backlash as 'contested processes' within movement framing. They consist of the counter-frames opposing the movement's ideology or message and are a natural outcome of any social movement. In the case of #MeToo, there were two striking themes in the counter framing discourse.



*Figure 9 Code Categories for Oppositional Tweets.*

The most prominent counter-frame theme began showing up in the data as time progressed and grew more common towards the end of the sampled one-month time frame- i.e. closer to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017. These consisted of provocative tweets against women and contained a lot of sexist and derogatory jokes that falsely claim of rape and sexual abuse. The other counter frames that showed up in the data were more to do with the ideology of the movement itself. Some stated that #MeToo was problematic because women do not owe anyone their traumatic stories just to be believed. These tweets also mention how #MeToo is further victimising the survivors and therefore not the right way to deal with the issue of sexual violence. Others claimed that women who are using #MeToo are overreacting or falsely accusing men of abuse for ulterior motives. Some wrote a personal #MeToo story but in the same post also distanced themselves from it by critiquing certain discomfoting aspects of the movement.

Another theme which emerged was based on the idea that hashtag movements do not contribute to offline change. Some movement participants also stated that #MeToo is exclusionary and does not give equal weightage to LGBTQ or male stories of sexual violence.

#### Sexist provocation and jokes

Forty-four tweets were from provocateurs who purposely used #MeToo to post sexist or crude humour against the movement. Most of these tweets consisted of body shaming women or making fun of the ethos of the movement by sharing crude and false stories of sexual violence. After cross-checking the actual twitter profiles of these users, it was

found that almost all of them were male users; with the exception of two cases in which the identity could not be determined solely by observing the twitter profile.

@ PubD: Fat women, IT IS NOT OK TO SPEAK TO MEN #MeToo (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:40:34)

@ andrewlaw: Just molested myself, as I was feeling left out. #MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 15:51:22)

### Sceptical about #MeToo's impact

The idea that what happens in the online world does not affect anything offline is reflected in this theme of tweets. Thirty-six tweets are coded in this category and they point to a known question in literature over the impact of online versus offline social movements. One tweet stuck out in this category:

@ tearzrobin: The problem with hashtags is that they only bring awareness to the result of an issue, not the solution. #MeToo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 11:37)

Even though the findings from the prognostic theme stated above counter this claim, it shows the common idea about the failure of hashtag activism. Another notion reflected in the data is that it is fashionable to use hashtags as a form of activism or protest and it excuses people of the responsibility to do any real ground work to solve the problems. This tweet sums up the notion quite clearly:

@ LouieB: WHAT HASHTAG ARE WE GOING TO USE TO SOLVE TODAY'S FASHIONABLE PROBLEM SO WE DON'T HAVE TO PUT IN ANY REAL WORK? #MeToo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 17:39)

However, these statements are very sparse compared to the overall data and do not share popular support. Previous studies on various digital movements including the Arab Springs, Occupy Wall Street and #BringBackOurGirls show that digital movements do succeed in creating offline impact (L. W. Bennett 2012; Pond and Lewis 2017; Balci and Gölcü 2013; Keller 2012; Meraz and Papacharissi 2013). But new digital movements bring with them new questions to verify and corroborate with existing research and the extent of the offline impact that #MeToo brought about can certainly be a potential research area.

### Women are over-reacting or falsely accusing

Another theme that began showing up more frequently towards the latter half of the one-month sample was the notion that women were overreacting or lying with the help of #MeToo. These tweets were almost entirely from male users and depicted that men are being targeted by extremist feminists. Some also gave realistic accounts of women claiming sexual harassment in harmless incidences of interaction. However, a majority of these tweets aim to falsify the larger #MeToo movement as a malicious attempt to slander good men.

@ muhaba: Guy smiles. Girl: #metoo (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 15:50)

@ lolly: No tolerance for this kind of men bashing because of few bastards. Women become more and more hysterical 😞 Stay normal!#MeToo (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 10:45:57)

@ smiffiey: The women who claim years later they weren't expecting the first kiss are no different to those who complain years later of assault. #MeToo (7<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 08:54:27)

@ IamHeret: I'm against anyone sexually harassing women. But this #MeToo hashtag might get out of control, with bs allegations to get attention. (25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 19:28:40)

@ whats\_3: hand feminists a weapon such as #metoo and watch them burn partially innocent guys (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 20:37:30)

### Women do not owe you their stories

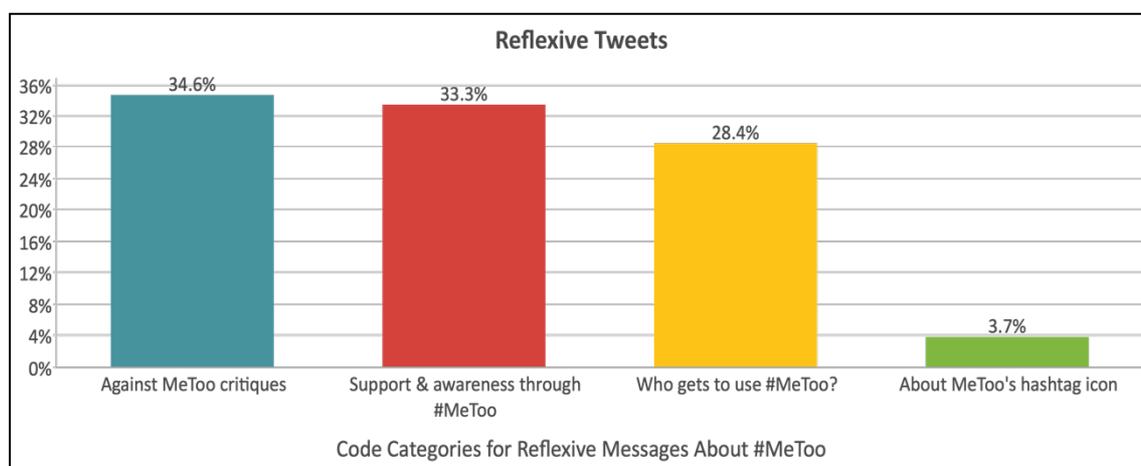
These tweets formed a small (sixteen tweets), but telling cluster of thought that women are feeling pressured to share their personal accounts of sexual abuse just to be believed. If the women do not show their trauma, it means they are lying or did not go through any emotional distress. These posts were largely from women users and critiqued the common notion that sexual abuse survivors need to adopt a victim identity in order to be taken seriously.

@ Heather: Reminder that if a woman didn't post #MeToo, it doesn't mean she wasn't sexually assaulted or harassed. Survivors don't owe you their story. (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 12:30:14)

@ Kenzie: I hate this whole #metoo cause women shouldn't have to publicly announce their emotional trauma so men will start treating women like humans instead of objects for their own pleasure (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 9:16)

### Reflexive Tweets about #MeToo

It is a natural process for social movement actors to reflect back upon the movement and engage in a dialogue to either defend the movement ideologies from contesting actors; or to show the movement's progress. Likewise, the #MeToo movement also saw a considerable engagement from participants trying to defend the purpose and goals of the movement.



*Figure 10 Code Categories for Reflexive Tweets about the #MeToo movement.*

Many tweets were openly supportive of the movement and its role in creating a lasting change for the future. Others staked claims over who could use #MeToo and who were the in-group and out-group actors. This category is important for two reasons- first of all, it shows how #MeToo was considered as a movement with real impact by many of the hashtag users. Secondly, it shows the formation of a collective identity and community through #MeToo, where participants wanted to delineate the us versus them boundaries. In this case, the data reflects that there was some contention from within the movement actors themselves on where to draw the boundary. Some claimed that #MeToo is about both men and women who were sexually violated and so the movement is not gender based. A few others claimed that since men are the most common perpetrators of sexual violence, they should not use #MeToo and instead should use a different hashtag. There was yet another idea that comes up more often in the data- the fact that it is

hypocritical when known sexual offenders use #MeToo to show sympathy or claim victimhood.

### Against #MeToo Critiques

Twenty-eight tweets were defensive statements against the #MeToo critiques. Some tried to justify why the movement is important, while others expressed emotions of anger regarding the backlash. A majority of these tweets are references to men who are speaking against the movement. Some also expressed that women just need a little time and space to vent out their suppressed emotions surrounding sexual violence and so critiques-including men and the media should be more more empathetic and thoughtful.

@ Clisa: Can all the think-pieces about 'here's the problem with #MeToo' just fuck off, please? Give us ten minutes to express ourselves, GOD (17<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 12:40:34)

@ Ravina: Men: "Now a woman can say anything & I'll be blamed! No one will believe me over her" WELL, SHIT...now you know what that feels like #metoo (21<sup>st</sup> October 2017, 08:14:56)

@ joshdeer: The whole #MeToo thing wasn't about villainizing men. It was to help us understand how bad things are, they're asking for help. Have empathy (6<sup>th</sup> November 2017, 02:03:18)

### Support and hope about #MeToo

Along with the defensive tweets, there were many who were openly supportive and hopeful about the movement. These tweets showed an optimistic narrative and considered #MeToo a welcome change. Statements of how #MeToo has been powerful and inspiring for everyone are commonly seen in this category. Many wrote about #MeToo's role in creating awareness and boosting offline conversations around this issue.

@ Underrated\_ : Love the #MeToo movement. Met so many women that were scared to speak up about it, hearing their stories was terrible. This outlet is great. (24<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 14:26:52)

@ AndiIn: When you go to the pub and spend the entire night ranting about the state of the world, misogyny, #metoo and how to make things better 🤔  
(20<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 17:36:36)

@ moll: A high-powered man is being taken down every day w/this #metoo campaign. It feels like we lifted a rock on the worm pile of humanity. #yuck (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017, 17:03:55)

There were a few tweets that also critically examined the difference in conversations surrounding sexual violence in the wake of #MeToo. One tweet in particular stood out for me as it shows the way society perceived victims of sexual violence previously, versus how it has changed today in the wake of #MeToo.

@ essbe: 25 years later the world now knows Anita Hill was telling the truth. Maybe everyone should start believing trumps accusers #MeToo (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2017, 13:53)

### Staking claims over #MeToo

This category is somewhat unclear and has multiple viewpoints expressed by users. As mentioned earlier, some tweets say that #MeToo is only about women and victims, other say it is hypocritical of men and other known abusers to hijack #MeToo for sympathy or approval. It generally shows a contention in agreeing to who #MeToo is helping and how.

@ viktorija: Idk I feel weird about guys posting #metoo statuses (17.10.2017 14:17:32)

@ whatkindof: That moment when someone you feel has made you uncomfortable in the past Facebook likes your #MeToo post... (18<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 15:38)

@ payton\_: The #metoo movement is for ANYONE MALE OR FEMALE who have been sexually assaulted. It's not feminism it's an awareness movement! (19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, 05:20:57)

Apart from the themes discussed above, the data showed multiple tweets with political and religious references. The political references were quite openly influenced by American politics and repeatedly evoked the trope of Donald Trump as the quintessential

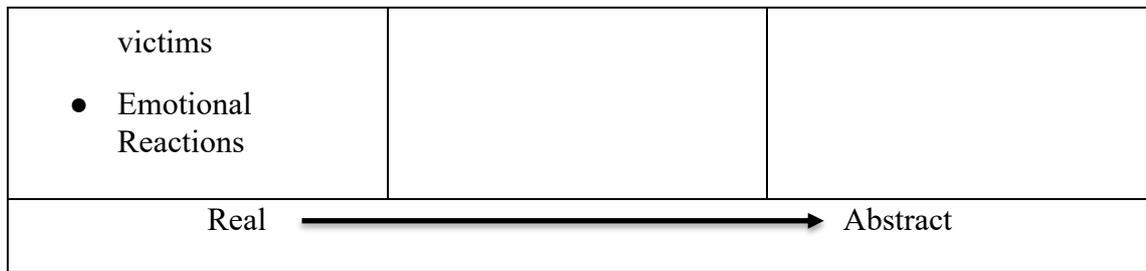
perpetrator who uses his power for sexual abuse with no fear of consequence. The religious references in the tweets came up in a moralistic manner and sometimes, also as rhetorical and sarcastic questions about the role of women in religious texts.

### Framing Sexual Violence Through #MeToo

So far, I have guided attention to each category of the coding framework. In doing so, we looked at the micro patterns that emerged from the data and the supporting tweets to guide the discussion. I would now like to redirect attention to the first research question that guides this thesis and summarise the findings. In order to identify the larger frames in the data, I have utilised the most frequently occurring codes as shown in the graphs earlier and extrapolated them to commonly identified frames from literature surrounding feminist movements, sexual violence and collective action. The table below summarises this process of frame extraction.

*Table 2 Frames derived from the data (Researcher's own)*

<b>Most Frequent Code</b>	<b>Code Category</b>	<b>Frame Abstraction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just Stating #MeToo</li> <li>• Abused as a child/youngster</li> </ul>	Personal Expression	Personal Action Frame
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problematic Socio-Cultural Norms</li> <li>• Universality of the problem</li> </ul>	Diagnostic Frame	Social Injustice Frame + Sexual Terrorism Frame
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To speak out/name perpetrators</li> <li>• Men need to change/Own up to the problem</li> </ul>	Prognostic Frame	Restorative Justice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solidarity, support and empathy towards (other)</li> </ul>	Motivational Frame	Solidarity Frame



Personal Action Frames: The Personal is Political

An overwhelming majority of the users engaged in the #MeToo movement through a personalised expression- either by sharing their own stories of sexual abuse or by expressing how they personally associate with the movement and help the victims. Most used #MeToo as a standalone expression in their tweets with little to no other reference. This gives a valuable insight into the idea that #MeToo became a meme in itself- a symbolic reference to a claim of having experienced sexual violence in some form. Victims of sexual violence appropriated, shaped and shared themes surrounding sexual violence to give unique perspectives on the various ways in which sexual violence occurs. This helped frame sexual violence as a complex issue that is universal.

A large number of users engaged in sharing personal stories where they revealed experiences of sexual abuse as children or young adults. This is an important finding because it helps identify child abuse as a common problem pointed out through personal narratives. Secondly, it shows people were willing to share these personal experiences to make sense of the problem, to give others a perspective and to shift the burden of that secret on to the society. This emotional turbulence of trying to make sense of what had happened to them, feeling guilty or ashamed and suffering through a traumatic episode is very evident in the shared personal stories. A large corpus of tweets also writes about how #MeToo has triggered those difficult emotions again but the act of sharing their stories and reading other stories is a helpful process. All of this corroborates with Bennett & Segerberg’s (2012) notion of personalised action frames in the new digital social movements.

Social Injustice and Sexual Terrorism Frame

Injustice frames appear to be ubiquitous in framing and social movement literature (Gamson 1992; William and Ratner 1996; Bert. Klandermans 1997; Capek 1993; Benford

and Snow 2000). This is a broad frame that covers all kinds of social injustice and is crucial in the formation of collective action (Benford 1997). As part of the diagnostic framing process, movement actors have to articulate their grievances and point out the problems that need to be changed and, identify targets to blame.

The findings from the current study show that users have strongly engaged in an injustice frame to highlight the issue of sexual violence as an injustice against women, children and other subaltern groups. However, the injustice frame is used in conjunction with the sexual terrorism frame in the MeToo discussions. In this frame, sexual violence is a form of patriarchal oppression that limits a woman's ability to participate in the social sphere on an equal footing with men (Marshall 2003; Sheffield 1987). Sheffield (1987: 392) defines sexual terrorism as a system in which males frighten and, by frightening, dominate and control females. She explains:

*Sexual terrorism is manifested through actual and implied violence; and all females, irrespective of race, class, physical or mental abilities, and sexual orientation, are potential victims- at any age, at any time, or in any place. Sexual terrorism employs a variety of means: rape, battery, incestuous abuse, sexual abuse of children, sexual harassment, pornography, prostitution and sexual slavery, and murder. (1992: 393)*

As findings in the previous section show, injustice frames identifying sexual violence as a form of social discrimination and terrorism appeared in a majority of #MeToo users' accounts. Many tweets point to the double standards for men and women in social situations. The victim blaming discourse is also pointed out as a severe injustice against survivors. Various users give personal accounts of how they were blamed for their own abuse while the man/men who did it were socially pardoned without any consequences.

Largely, the discussion surrounded the appalling fact that such a large number of women (mainly) are affected by various forms of sexual violence on a daily basis. For many, this was only noticeable after thousands of survivors spoke out about their experiences with #MeToo. In explaining why these incidents occurred, most users adopted a power analysis that framed sexual violence as a product of problematic socio-cultural norms including patriarchy and normalised misogynistic behaviour. The analysis shows that the users of #MeToo almost entirely held men responsible for this problem. And even though

there were some tweets pointing out that men can be victims of sexual abuse too, it does not seem to have diffused the blame on men.

### Restorative Justice

There were two prognostic frames that came up frequently in the data. First was that victims need to speak out about incidences of sexual violence and publicly name their violators. The second demanded that men — identified as the violators in the diagnostic framing — need to own up to the problem and change their behaviour. In trying to connect these narratives to the literature on prognostic frames surrounding the issue of sexual violence, I identified the frame of restorative justice as apt to summarise the #MeToo discourse.

Working as an alternative approach to justice, restorative justice is a philosophy that aims to get offenders to take responsibility for their actions and redeem themselves by understanding the harm they have caused to the victims and the community (Koss, Bachar, and Hopkins 2003). This approach focuses on communication between the victim and the offender if possible where the victim can share their experience and make the community and the offender understand the hurt or harm they caused. The goal is to negotiate for a resolution to the satisfaction of all participants and place the crime in a larger social perspective in order to avoid similar occurrences in the future. John Braithwaite (2003) defines restorative justice as follows in his book on the same topic-

*“...A process where all stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm.”* (2003: 35)

Restorative justice is about the idea that if crime hurts, justice should heal. It considers open dialogue and conversations as central to the process of healing and social change through awareness. When I look at #MeToo users’ discourse on how to deal with the problem of sexual violence, the idea of restorative justice stands out. #MeToo encouraged women to publicly share their stories of abuse. It encouraged a communal awareness building process by means of dialogue and awareness. This is also exemplified by the numerous tweets demanding that men simply need to accept that sexual violence against women is a common problem and that they are at fault for either engaging in such behaviour or being silent bystanders. Many users also emphasised that since so many

women are sharing their stories of victimhood, men should also introspect and use the hashtag #ItWasMe or #ImSorry to show they understand the problem and are willing to change. And indeed, many male users did use these hashtags to confess of their behaviour and pledge never to do it again.

In framing their thoughts on sexual violence, many #MeToo users expressed their disappointment at the way in which traditional judicial institutions handled their complaints. Users point out the negative repercussions of reporting abuse, including being fired from work, police not believing their complaints and a traumatic backlash from institutions and their communities. This demonstrates that the idea of justice and healing are interdependent. Common themes that were coded in this analysis included the desire of victims to have their experiences heard, affirmed, validated in front of their community and a need for offenders to demonstrate responsibility and accountability. Most #MeToo users were concerned about addressing the underlying causes of sexual violence in the society and reducing the risk of others being harmed in the future. These findings are very similar to what many other researchers have found while trying to understand what victims perceive as fair solutions to deal with their cases of sexual violence (Jülich and Thorburn 2017). #MeToo users align with previous research in the belief that validation from the community, accountability on behalf of the violators and a general social awareness about this issue are important components to a solutions framework regarding sexual violence. It is with this logic that I derive the frame of restorative justice in summarising #MeToo users' prognostic discourse.

### Solidarity Frame

Evidently, the data analysis supports the idea that #MeToo was made up of a strong solidarity frame. More than 80% of the tweets coded in the motivational category, frame the discourse through emotional messages of togetherness, support, belief and love. A lot of literature on feminist social movements movements shows evidence of the solidarity frame used to evoke a collective identity based on common grievances, power struggles and intersectional identities (Scholz 2018; Talpade-Mohanty 2003; Taylor 1989). As the diagnostic frame indicates, the issue of sexual violence is universal and affects people of all age, race, class or geographic location. This is exactly what the #MeToo tweets showed the masses, thus bringing together victims of sexual violence in an upsurge of emotional action.

According to Benford and Snow (2000), motivational framing should provide a rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action including the appropriate construction of vocabularies of motive. In case of the #MeToo movement, the motivational vocabularies made use of phrases such as “Together we stand”, “Together we fight”, “I believe you”, “I hear your stories” and “I support you”. As a victim or not, these vocabularies constructed #MeToo as a unanimous movement where empathy and support trumped partisan politics.

Although there were a few tweets that brought out the issue of #MeToo as exclusionary to the struggles of LGBTQ community, minority groups and those who may not have access to social media to participate in a digital movement. But a majority of the people framed the issue of sexual violence as a problem that can only be solved if people came together to listen to victims’ stories, believe their traumatic experiences, offer support and in turn fight to end this violence as a collectivity.

### Counter frames

Two main counter frames came up against the #MeToo movement. The first consisted of sexist humour and mockery of sexual violence and the second was a disbelief and victim blaming narrative. The first and most prominent counter frame can be on account of the nature of social media where gender-based trolling is extremely common. Several studies show how the internet and social media are highly antagonistic towards women where, messages of rape and death threats along with body shaming and sexist humour are common (Cole 2015; Ganzer 2014; Hardaker and McGlashan 2016).

Cole (2015) points out that a majority of women face some form of sexist antagonism on social media for simply speaking or participating in issues. According to Cole, “violent anti-feminist engagement in social media functions as a disciplinary rhetoric.” She states that that “the goal of this rhetoric is to silence the women participating in public as feminist.” In the case of #MeToo, it was observed that as the movement progressed in time, the messages of sexist humour or ridicule began to increase in frequency. Many tweeted anti-feminist messages claiming the movement was a way for male hating women to target good men.

On the other hand, the second counter frame was against those who expressed to have been victims of sexual violence. These movement opposers claimed that women were falsely accusing men of sexual abuse simply for personal gains or showing victimhood.

Others brought up the common question of the authenticity of a claim when many years have passed since the incidence. Parallel to this was the narrative that victims who do not report to the police or respected authorities of a sexual abuse are at fault themselves. These tweets framed the issue of sexual violence through the lens of victim blaming and disbelief. Ironically, this is exactly what the #MeToo movement tried to counter by enabling women to voice out experiences that could not or had not been openly spoken before for fear of being further victimised. Even then, the counter frames to the #MeToo movement were few and far compared to the other prominent movement frames described above.

To briefly summarise the findings from the first question, it can be said that the #MeToo users framed the issue of sexual violence prominently from a personal expression frame and brought attention to the salient frames of social injustice, sexual terrorism, restorative justice and solidarity.

In the next section, I will turn attention to the second research question related to the co-occurring hashtags in the data in order to understand which connecting issues users referred to when speaking of sexual violence through the use of #MeToo.

### Co-Occurring Hashtags in the #MeToo Tweets

Co-occurrence is a linguistics term that refers to an above-chance frequency of two terms in a text corpus, occurring with each other. Hashtag co-occurrence is similar in that it finds the most frequently occurring hashtags alongside a particular hashtag. This form of hashtag mapping has become widely popular in hashtag network studies to visualise and map out the social media networks created through co-occurring hashtags. However, due to my limitations in knowledge and skills to use software necessary to create these hashtag visualisations, as noted in the methods chapter, I have restricted my analysis to simply noting down the most frequently used hashtags that co-occur with #MeToo in the data.

To do this, I coded each hashtag other than #MeToo that appeared in a tweet. In the end I compiled the most frequent hashtags as shown in table 3.

*Table 3 List of Most Frequently Co-Occurring Hashtags with #MeToo*

<b>Hashtag</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
#Trump	60
#Hollywood	59
#Weinstein	57
#NoMore	19
#sexual	15
#Spacey	14
#Iwill	12
#IHearYou	11
#Victim	11
#BlackLivesMatter	10
#MenToo	10
#YesAllWomen	10
#HimThough	9
#IBelieveYou	8
#NoMeansNo	8
#NotAllMen	8
#HowIWillChange	8
#HimToo	7
#Speak	6

The analysis shows that there were many different hashtags that were semantically similar but worded differently. Therefore, even the most frequent hashtag- #Trump as shown above was only used 60 times in a data set of 2000 tweets. However, there were many more variations of these hashtags that could be clustered thematically. I will come to that in the next part.

Among the hashtags shown in table 3, #Trump, #Weinstein, #Spacey form the top ten most common hashtags. This indicates that #MeToo users held on to the triggering social and political events to frame their opinions on the issue. Donald Trump’s appointment as the President of the United States even after multiple allegations of sexual harassment during the run up to the elections had become a major cause of discontent among people in the US. Whereas the #MeToo movement was sparked off just days after the allegations of a culture of sexual abuse perpetrated by Harvey Weinstein.

The next two frequently appearing hashtags- #Sexual and #Victim directly address the issue at hand. Three hashtags- #NoMore, #IWill and #IHearYou refer to the protest

messages or slogans where the latter two are personalised pledges showing support towards the victims.

The last of the top ten hashtags are particularly interesting to observe how users engage in linking diverse issues together by means of hashtags in digital movements. The hashtags BlackLivesMatter and YesAllWomen appear just as many times as #MeToo. Both #BlackLivesMatter as well as #YesAllWomen are two different hashtag movements that trended in the United States in 2013 and 2014 respectively and were used to protest against social injustices through power dynamics. #YesAllWomen spoke out against the issue of domestic violence whereas #BlackLivesMatter (or #BLM) protested against the issue of police brutality against innocent black people. The appearance of these two hashtags alongside #MeToo suggests that users connected the diverse issues of Black rights, women's issues and sexual violence under a common frame of social injustice.

To find out more about the thematic patterns of these co-occurring hashtags in the #MeToo movement, I compiled the various hashtags with similar thematic meanings by order of frequency as shown in the table below (Table 4).

*Table 4 Co-occurring hashtags organised by themes & frequency*

Category	Definition	Examples	Frequency
Personal Expressions	Expressions or statements with a personal message or pledge.	#IHearYou, #IBelieveYou, #ISupportYou, #StandWithYou, #Iwill, #Solidarity, #IPledgeWithYou #ImSorry #Iknow #ItStopsWithMe #ImWithHer #ISpeakMyTruth #ISupportMeToo #YesIDid #HowIWillChange #IDidThat #ImGuilty #ItWasMe	211
Hollywood	All the hashtags that refer to Hollywood. Names of hollywood personalities also included.	#Hollywood, #PedoWood, #HollywoodIsDead, #KevinSpacey, #Spacey, #Cosby, #Weinstein, #HareyWeinstein #Corey	167
Protest Messages	Action oriented statemets intended to stop unwanted issues.	#Stopabuse, #Stopharrassment, #Stopssexualharrassment, #StopViolence, #StopIt #NoMore #EnoughIsEnough	125
Politics	Political references, hashtags and text. Names of political personalities also included.	#Trump, #DonaldTrump, #NotMyPresident, #RoyMoore, #AlFranken, #AnitaHill, #BillClinton, #HilaryClinton #Congress	123
Men	Messages, words addressing men or men's issues	#MenToo, #Men, #MenDontFuckUp, #MenWhoHarrass, #MenWhoAbuse, #MenWhoRape #HimThough #HimToo #Him #ToxicMasculinity #WhyMen	52
Other hashtag movements	References to other hashtag movements like Black Lives Matter and All Lives Matter.	#BlackLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter #BringBackOurGirls #YesAllWomen #Aufschrei #BalancTonPorc #ViajoSola #MoiAussi #YoTambién #G20	20
Women	Messages, words addressing women or women's issues	#YesAllWomen #Women #WomenWhoRoar #WomenPower #WomenRise#WomenBoycottTwitter #WomensConvention #WomenMarch #BlackWomen	19
		Total-	<b>717</b>

This thematic clustering of commonly used hashtags gives a deeper insight into the issues most addressed by #MeToo's users. The table shows that hashtags with personalised expressions of solidarity, support or rectification formed the largest cluster. These hashtags begin with or contain a personal pronoun "I" and enable a self-motivated form of action statement to extend the #MeToo movement's original frame.

The second group of hashtags are references to Hollywood and known celebrities who have been accused of sexual abuse. This category reflects the diagnostic framing processes where users identified the targets to blame. The cluster of political hashtags is very similar to this one since users have also named and called out known political leaders

for sexual offenses. It shows that people associated Hollywood and Politics as similar cases where sexual violence was an institutionalised culture. In fact, a majority of the tweets in these categories refer to both Hollywood and American political figures together. One tweet exemplifies this succinctly-

@RoseK: Hollywood and DC are two sides of the same coin, if you ask me.  
#Trump #Weinstein #Clinton #Cosby #sexualharassment #MeToo (09.11.2017  
20:36:55)

Another frequently occurring cluster of hashtags are action-oriented protest messages like #StopAbuse, #StopHarassment, #NoMore and others. These hashtags seem to have aided the motivational framing tasks in #MeToo, and function in almost the same way as sloganeering in offline protests, expressing a memorable phrase intended to communicate an idea or purpose.

Other common hashtags found in the data were strikingly divided on gender binaries. The hashtags addressing or referring to men were more or less accusatory whereas those referring to women were motivational and inspiring. Interestingly the frequency of men-oriented hashtags was higher than those for women. Almost all the women-oriented hashtags projected a strong, unanimous and resilient identity of women. This points to a rationale of motivating self and others to feel stronger with the movement and assert a collective identity.

Lastly, another cluster of hashtags that appeared in a small percentage in the data was those that referenced other movements. As mentioned previously, #BlackLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter and #YesAllWomen, #Aufschrei, #BringBackOurGirls and even #G20 were used. At the same time, I also noticed the names of movements derived from #MeToo in other languages like #BalancTonPorc and #MoiAussi in French and #YoTambien in Spanish. These co-occurring hashtags noticeably point to the connection that hashtags become frame bridging tools to connect one idea or meme event with another in the digital world. They are indicative of the mental maps of users trying to express themselves with a tweet. It shows that users connect disparate issues with similar semantic frames through the affordance of a hashtag. The repetitive use of #Trump and #Clinton with #Weinstein and #Spacey, or the references to #BlackLivesMatters and #YesAllWomen, is also an example of this and shows how people connected #MeToo with different issues under a common injustice frame.

Summing up, the analysis of hashtags that appear with #MeToo shows the following. First, most of what the audience adds to the conversations is personalised solidarity and support. This is consistent with the overall data analysis that shows personal expressions and emotional frame as a prominent movement frame for #MeToo. Social movement research stresses on the importance of emotions in movement mobilisation (Jeff Goodwin and Jasper 2006; Benford and Snow 2000) and it is strongly reflected in the way users framed the issue of sexual violence through emotionally charged messages as well as hashtags. Moreover, the use of personal references even in the hashtags reflects Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) concept of personal action frames in new social movements.

Second, many users linked the issue of power and sexual terrorism in the American entertainment industry, and politics by using hashtags like Hollywood and Trump together. Other #MeToo related hashtags emphasises a clear gender binary where men were blamed for the problems related to sexual violence and women were portrayed as survivors and strong fighters. Lastly, the references to other known hashtag movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #YesAllWomen demonstrate that the argument of frame extension through co-occurring hashtags holds true for the #MeToo movement. Users seem to have linked the issues of social injustice and solidarity in these other movements to the similar framing of #MeToo. This is in keeping with framing research that shows how individuals tend to use cognitive shortcuts and reasoning heuristics to link issues with similar frames (Tversky and Kahneman 1981).

## Discussion

*“It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together.”*

– Michel Foucault (1978: 100)

In the introductory part of this thesis, I asked a few questions to set the stage for an in-depth inquiry into the issue of hashtag movements, digital activism, framing and the process of meaning making over social media. In this section, I would like to bring attention back to these larger questions in light of the findings of this study. I will discuss the relevance and implications of my findings in relation to the literature and theoretical concepts that have been discussed so far and position this research in the larger field of study.

Summing up, the overall findings of this study point to the following broad issues-

This study indicates that #MeToo is a case of individualised collective action whereby personal action frames merged with collective action frames to form a hybrid of the two framing logics. This aligns with Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) argument that today’s new social movements which coalesce around Digitally Networked Action (DNA), have given rise to an era of personalised political action that still reflects collective identities, but are more individualised. In these digital movements, people chose to participate based on their individual values, needs and motivations. #MeToo saw thousands of people sharing their personal stories on Twitter and other social media because of a personal motivation to end the problem of sexual violence and protect themselves, their loved ones and other victims.

This personalised political action allowed the #MeToo movement to challenge the normalised, secretive and tolerant attitude towards sexual violence. Through her tweet, Alyssa Milano urged women to write ‘MeToo’ if they had faced any kind of sexual harassment or abuse, to show the magnitude of this problem. By framing the message in this manner, #MeToo became a personal action frame that was flexible, easy to shape and share over personal networks near and far. Moreover, #MeToo was inclusive of the complex personal reasons for contesting sexual violence. In the end, these two simple words not only became a personal action frame but also ended up being a powerful meme event (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Bruns et al. 2016) against sexual violence that is still in use today — more than a year after it surfaced. #MeToo seems to have become an enduring frame of reference for interpreting and responding to current and future social phenomena linked to sexual violence and social injustice. This idea, although not in the

scope of this research, seems to correspond with Benford and Snow's (2000) argument that, the more inclusive and flexible collective action frames are, the more likely they are to function as, or evolve into "master frames".

The feminist movement of the 1970s largely influenced the way in which issues of sexual violence are constructed and framed by the masses. By retaliating against and redefining common discourses that shrugged off sexual violence with the justification that 'men rape because they can't control primeval urges', the feminist movement of the 70s transformed the law, popular culture, and people's everyday lives (Chasteen 2001). However, the battles over the social meaning of sexual violence across the world persist, and only goes to illustrate how social problems can be constructed and reconstructed in various public arenas (Ibid). As various scholars including Benford and Snow (1992) have noted, everyday conditions are not seen as problematic until they are actively framed as such.

As previous feminist movements have shown, the reality of sexual coercion is not new. However, the feminist movements so far had only focused on making this issue visible as a social problem. Since the 1970s, feminist movements have had to battle the existing power dynamics to even bring forth terms like 'sexual violence', 'sexual harassment', 'date rape' and 'marital rape' into public and academic attention. What the general public failed to absorb is just how common the occurrence of sexual violence is. Going back to the concept of diagnostic framing by Benford and Snow (2000), it can be seen that the process of problem construction in any social movement is a process of continuous negotiation as actors, events and contexts that define them shift over time. Similarly, the issue of sexual violence has been diagnosed with new frames over the years, leading to many hashtag feminist movements in the recent years, including the #MeToo movement.

By tapping into the vast potential of digital networks and social media affordances, #MeToo users collectively framed the issue as a problem affecting day to day lives of millions across the world. They made use of the opportunity to present their deeply personal stories and secrets to the world and turn the victim blaming discourse to a new direction. By doing so, #MeToo enabled a change in conversations that allowed the victims to control the way their stories are framed. It gave a chance for survivors to feel part of a collective identity by seeing thousands of others who had suffered a trauma just like them, or even worse than them. #MeToo helped put the issue in perspective — for both, men and women. It also gave the victims a chance to heal together through empathy, solidarity and open conversations.

As more and more people began to use the hashtag to talk about their personal experiences with sexual abuse, it prompted others to join in and break the chain of silence surrounding this issue. As mentioned in the background chapter at the beginning of this thesis, the mainstream media also joined in the discussion on #MeToo and that gave further impetus to bring forth this issue into popular discourse. As a result, people who may not have given much thought to this issue began to take notice.

Consequently, #MeToo's framing became entrenched in the idea of sexual violence as a ubiquitous issue that needs to be addressed collectively. #MeToo users framed sexual violence as a broad social injustice that is complex and traumatic, and which affects a wide spectrum of people in all societies.

Most of all, the reason why #MeToo was different compared to the previous anti-rape movements is because of the power of social media. I carefully use the word power here to indicate the astounding ability of social media to give a voice and a public platform to all those who use it. Social media has given power to people to bring forth hidden realities, share concerns and collectively shape discourse (Clark 2016). Similar to many other feminist hashtag movements in the recent years, what was witnessed through #MeToo was "a resistance to the conventional modalities of public speech: that is, the conventions about who can speak, what they may speak about, who will be accorded the title of expert, or credible and what effect this may have on the circulation of the speech, the public perception, and legal, political and cultural arenas" (Foucault 1972). Through #MeToo, the power to shape discourse on sexual violence was, in part, handed back to the ones who suffer from it. This also reflects what the literature denotes to be the power of social media in giving voice to common people and communities, bypassing the barriers of censorship and repression imposed by the state and social norms (Clark 2016; Carstensen 2014; Castells 2015). Indeed, the explosion of hashtag feminism in recent years has evidenced social media's unprecedented capacity as political tools Clark (2016: 800).

For Thrift (2014), the praise for hashtag feminism does not just lie in its potential to 'make visible the injustices and abuses which hide in plain sight'. Instead, it can be contended that such a way of creating meme events 'better signals the action, dynamism and generative, creative capacity of truly "doing feminism in the network" and engaging in the issues relevant to today's social structures (Hess 2014; Kendzior 2014; Weiss 2014; Dr. Brooks 2014). This thesis shows that #MeToo movement stands as yet another example of such a feminist meme event that makes visible the hidden injustice in society, and also allows people to engage with feminist issues such as sexual terrorism and its

implications on everyday lives of women and children. When victims come forth with their deeply personal, and at times traumatic experiences with sexual violence, they put themselves at risk of being discredited, blamed, threatened and physically harmed. But when these individual voices get multiplied with thousands of others, all categorised under the same hashtag, it gives strength to echo a #MeToo and be less afraid of the backlash. This is not to say that #MeToo users did not face backlash and online abuse. The data shows that there were a considerable number of tweets that were intended as sexist provocation or trolling and supports previous studies on antagonistic rhetoric against women on social media (Cole 2015; Ganzer 2014; Hardaker and McGlashan 2016). But this number is much lesser compared to the overall supportive, solidarity and belief messages in the #MeToo movement.

However, as Bennett and Segerberg (2012) warn, it can be tempting for critics to dismiss participation in digital movements as noise. The act of tweeting can be as mundane as posting nothing more than ‘#MeToo’ while on the commute to work. But when this is combined with the networked power of hashtags and the discursive influence of collective storytelling, online personal expressions can grow into online collective action (Clark 2016: 800). This is what I have tried to highlight through this study — the idea that it is vital to understand the discourse produced by the wider public in a movement in order to know how the issue is framed by common people. This helps get a perspective of the drawing room conversations beyond celebrity quotes and media reports.

Another way to understand this active and dynamic process of framing is by studying the co-occurring hashtags in the data. The findings of this study show that users engaged in linking diverse issues with #MeToo to add to the movement’s framing. #MeToo users linked the movement with previous meme events like #BlackLivesMatter, #YesAllWomen and even #Aufschrei since they all seemingly fall under a common social injustice frame. Additionally, users also came up with new hashtags that furthered #MeToo’s personal action frame to include #IStandWithYou, #IBelieveYou, #ImSorry and others. These findings sustain my argument that hashtags, as indexing behaviours, become a way for social media users to append meanings to the messages of a movement and create communities focused around certain specific issues. Through the co-occurring hashtags found with #MeToo, we can see that users engaged in framing processes and linked social issues together. Moreover, the co-occurring hashtags also connected with the broad collective and personal action frames found in the data.

The interesting aspect of #MeToo is that it emerged on Twitter without any formal or central leadership that was working to make it into a social movement. The only resonance that #MeToo users had was a shared belief in the narrative behind the hashtag and the want of collective support to raise awareness about the issue of sexual violence. The #MeToo movement brought public awareness to the prevalence of sexual violence in ways that statistical data alone was not able to accomplish. For years, feminist and sexual violence activists and organisations like the UN have campaigned about the stark statistics on sexual violence — an estimated 35 percent, or one in three women worldwide experience some form of sexual violence in their lives (WHO 2014). Their efforts did create some awareness and social change, but #MeToo changed the way people perceived this issue altogether. When people saw their social media feeds full of #MeToo posts, it helped drive the point home as to how common sexual violence is. It is in this regard that #MeToo represented (and still does) a spontaneously rising voice of protest and personalised collective expression through social media. The findings from this study provide some significant insights into the promises and pitfalls of digital feminist activism for raising a feminist consciousness and producing solidarity — all from the perspective of those that rallied with #MeToo.

## Conclusion

This study set out to explore how the issue of sexual violence was framed by users of #MeToo. Additionally, it also studied how co-occurring hashtags in a digital movement relate to the larger movement frames. To do this, I conducted a qualitative content analysis over a month-long data set with 2000 tweets. Using theoretical concepts of collective action frames from Benford and Snow (2000) and personal action frames from Bennett and Segerberg (2012), I particularly looked for diagnostic, prognostic, motivational, contested and personal action frames surrounding sexual violence in the data.

The findings show that #MeToo was framed most using personal action frames that narrated individual experiences with sexual violence. In trying to pinpoint the reasons as to why these incidents of violence occur, a social injustice frame was used in conjunction with sexual terrorism frame. Users also engaged in proposing a variety of solutions to curb the problem and a restorative justice frame seemed to emerge from the data stressing on the importance of awareness, community-oriented dialogue regarding sexual violence and an acknowledgement from the perpetrators (mainly men) that their actions have caused harm to the victims. But the highlight of #MeToo has been the tremendous show of solidarity and emotional support towards survivors of sexual violence. Four generic vocabularies of motive emerged from the data namely, vocabularies of solidarity and support, emotions, calls to arms and action, and self-motivation. These seemed to stand out amongst all other collective action frames and were also influenced by personal action frames.

Furthermore, it was found that the co-occurring hashtags with #MeToo had a pattern that reflected the movement frames stated above. Hashtags became a tool to amplify the messages that users wanted to highlight in their tweets. They also show us the mental maps that people used to connect issues like sexual violence (#MeToo) and Black Lives Matter (#BLM), or Donald Trump (#Trump) and Harvey Weinstein (#Weinstein) to denote that these different issues or people fall under similar paradigms of social problems. People also made use of hashtags to evoke motivational frames with personal action messages like #IStandWithYou, #IBelieveYou or #ImSorry.

Clearly, the power of a viral social media movement seems to have provided a potential space for expressing personal experiences with and opinions about the problem of sexual violence. Yet, #MeToo seems to fall short in the search for justice as it leaves some

critical questions regarding how the perpetrators — apart from well-known offenders — will be held accountable for their actions, and what about those who cannot participate in this digital movement.

Ultimately, the #MeToo movement reflects the work that feminists have been trying to do for decades— create awareness about rape culture and condone the casual social attitude that blames victims for their abuse. #MeToo’s framing shows that sexual violence is pervasive, often perpetrated by someone known to the victim, and that such behaviour is condoned or at least tolerated because of a pervasive rape culture (Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2017). In that regard, #MeToo is not the first of its kind and neither will it be the last feminist movement against sexual violence. What we are seeing is the growing use of social media and its affordances to highlight the political nature of lived personal experiences. This burgeoning use of hashtag feminism is illustrating the idea that dynamic, solidarity-based online networks and dialogue can initiate offline socio-political change simply by creating awareness about the social problem. Indeed, Marshall McLuhan’s words still hold true that the “medium is the message” (McLuhan 1964).

However, it is just as important to scrutinise and pay close attention to the power dynamics shaping these movement frames. We need to remember that hashtag activism, though powerful, cannot be representative of the voices of all victims and neither is it a definitive approach to achieve offline change. It is one thing to talk about sexual harassment and a whole other thing to make a significant impact in people’s everyday lives (Stache 2015). Failing to constructively deal with these issues will lead to a loss of belief in the movement and its potential to move beyond rhetoric to realise a meaningful change.

## Limitations and Further Scope

### Limitations

As with any research, this study is bound by some inevitable limitations. First of all, the thesis has the inherent shortcomings of a qualitative research inquiry including issues of replicability and transferability. The results of this study are limited only to this work and cannot be generalised. Additionally, it may be hard to replicate the findings since my own subjectivities guided the coding process. And although I have tried my best to define each code category as clearly as possible to avoid ambiguity, the data could still be analysed differently by others.

Secondly, the research questions, methodology and sample size had to be restricted keeping in mind the limited time and resources. Moreover, the limited period allotted to this academic research precluded sufficient training in advanced statistical and software packages that could have enabled a more dynamic hashtag network analysis or a sentiment analysis with a much larger data set via computational methods.

A twitter data analysis also has the limitations that the findings are based only on the actions and interactions in a specific context. The studied tweets could have potentially been influenced by interactions and messages taking place on other platforms as well. But due to limited resources, this was not studied.

### Future Scope

Moving forward, this research leaves a vast scope for further studies. Scholarship on hashtag activism can extend the framework of this study to compare the different feminist hashtag movements that have emerged in recent years. This could give a much better insight into the discourse surrounding feminist issues in contemporary societies and their use of digital technologies. It could also help understand the limitations of these movements in achieving their goals. We need to understand what could be done better to catapult and channelise the action from online social movements into offline spaces.

Future research can also conduct ethnographically informed interviews with #MeToo participants to better understand their motivations, strategies and implications of participation. This would give a much better insight into the impact of participation in hashtag movements on an individual as well as collective level.

The findings of this study can be used to conduct a further study on the framing processes and strategies in the overall #MeToo movement. This could include studying why certain

frames resounded, what were the frame diffusion processes and the socio-political and audience opportunity structures that led to the virality of #MeToo as a movement. Such a study would be able to tap into a wider data set and also conduct a quantitative analysis to substantiate the qualitative findings.

Due to the time restrictions mentioned above, I have only used part of the theory proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2012). But future research can study the collective versus connective action logics in #MeToo and understand the organisational dynamics in large scale action networks and their influence on the co-creation of online communities.

Above all, future research must deliberate upon where such hashtag protests are headed and what will be the political implications of online speech. What will be the impact of these public discussions of sexual violence, how will it change the policy or legal course of actions and will the dominant discourse be subverted by such movements? These questions are particularly important for the #MeToo movement because the movement is still growing in different parts of the world. For example, #MeToo resurfaced and began trending in India in October 2018 and also influenced some activity in Pakistan during the same period. This could also hold scope for an inquiry into how regional cultures influence global movements.

These and many other questions remain to be explored beyond this thesis and are all part of a burgeoning space in feminism and the politics of platforms (Gillespie 2010).

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Code System

The coding manual provided the coder with the necessary information to ensure maximum reliability in the data coding process. The following appendix explains the thoughts behind the chosen categories and makes clear the choices to be made during the coding process.

The tweets were coded into main categories identified by reading through each tweet in the data and classifying them into main categories and sub-categories. The process yielded the following six main categories. The descriptions of the sub-categories are provided in the electronic appendices attached with this thesis.

<b>Main Code Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Personal Experience	Tweets with a personal story, narration or mention of an experience or memory about sexual violence. Tweets in this category employ a personalized action frame to interpret, translate and communicate content
Diagnostic Tweets	Tweets in this category seek to diagnose the problem of sexual violence by pointing out the reasons and people to blame. These tweets engage in identifying and attributing the problem.
Prognostic Tweets	Tweets in this category seek to find and propose solutions to counter the problem of sexual violence.
Motivational Tweets	Tweets in this category express motivational and emotional messages. These can include, but are not limited to, emotions of solidarity, support, belief, hope, anger, calls to arms and action and direct or indirect references to other victims of sexual violence.
Oppositional Tweets	Tweets in this category disagree with the purpose or message of the movement.
Reflexive Tweets	Tweets in this category are reflexive about the #MeToo movement, its influence and its critique.

## Appendix 2: Example of Data Set

time	from_user_name	text
17/10/17 9:04	SkyeRenaee	Laws need to change. A person can rape another and not get charged. Why does having power give you the RIGHT? Together we stand ! #MeToo
17/10/17 9:05	alyhass_	Being stuck at a job with the person who sexually assaulted you. #MeToo
17/10/17 9:05	Jadesid	Something has to change. Not just for women but for men as well. #MeToo #MenToo
17/10/17 9:06	TweedCladShibb	By witnessing harassment & not always calling people out or being to cowardly to, you might state others are at fault, you can blame #metoo
17/10/17 9:10	FionnualaGreene	How many men know of friends or ppl who know of the behaviour the #metoo hashtag speaks of say nothing and could hashtag #iknow or would??? Is there any man who has been raped by a girl? No? So men is the problem we have to kill them , except me of course. #MeToo
17/10/17 9:11	No_users	Yes, it's happened. Maybe, to every girl. That's how serious this thing is. #MeToo
17/10/17 9:11	UnknownDee9	at the very minimum everyone has faced some degree of street harassment or unwanted attention and bullying from a smitten man #MeToo
17/10/17 9:14	TheBismatKhan	I wonder if the authority figures that sexually harassed me while I was under age feel some type of way about this me too movement. #metoo
17/10/17 9:20	Bee_Ridge	Was sexually, physically and emotionally abused by stepfather. Fortunately, he died while I was young but the trauma lives on. #MeToo
17/10/17 9:20	GRiverside09	I struggled with #MeToo Was I really harassed? Hadn't I been asking for it? It was guys being guys when they touched me. But yeah #MeToo
17/10/17 9:21	AgreeableMiffy	I mean, yeah #MeToo, but I want better for our daughters' daughters. #MeToo #ButNotThem
17/10/17 9:26	CaithlinMercer	Its my honor to tweet in your name Sir #LiaquatAliKhan .... Thanks for your all efforts for us... for #Pakistan for #Islam for #MeToo
17/10/17 9:26	me85231	I once got forced into anal sex by my bf although I said no #MeToo
17/10/17 9:26	Asunasan_88	The whole #metoo should open our eyes, this is real. It happens everywhere weather u r living in developed or developing country
17/10/17 9:27	mubinabaig	If I could go back in time I would tell myself to stop making excuses for people disrespecting and mistreating me. #MeToo
17/10/17 9:29	kattism	Before being a woman, I'm a human being with thoughts, feelings and DIGNITY, respect it! #MeToo #StopIt
17/10/17 9:30	Spo_o_cky	The 1st guy that raped me, was my much older boyfriend who told me it was my fault because he liked me so much. #MeToo
17/10/17 9:35	Nursey_Ally	Thank you to those people who inspired me to say #MeToo I look forward to a day when I don't have to feel on guard around men
17/10/17 9:37	ChristinaCandia	But it doesn't excuse the fact it has happened to #metoo
17/10/17 9:37	danibambi	I don't know. I'll delete these in the morning probably. But ha #MeToo
17/10/17 9:38	RileysAMess	It happened to #metoo, it is about 40 years ago, but I haven't been hitchhiking alone since then.
17/10/17 9:38	wamkat	towards you makes you feel uncomfortable your response to turn away and tell them to stop is not an overreaction. (3/4) #metoo
17/10/17 9:42	planksofreason	I question whether now is the time for men to be telling their #metoo stories. Trust me, I've got stories to tell, but this isn't about us.
17/10/17 9:49	Markouchino	In school. At university. Walking down the street. #metoo #b
17/10/17 9:52	HandyGlance	Was threatened at knifepoint w/ rape & death. Reported it. Was told this is why women shouldn't be in this job, we just cause trouble #MeToo
17/10/17 9:52	NJAK18	half of me really wants to talk about my experience but I really just can't #metoo
17/10/17 9:53	celestialgrimes	Don't blame the player when misogyny's the only game in town. #MeToo
17/10/17 10:00	ChuckCash	I missed being online during #MeToo tweets. Just saw few of them and they are so sad that heart cries to know how such human even exist.
17/10/17 10:01	rutaagayire	Most of these 'stories' are from women who have never been touched in their lives, the last to be picked for any activities... x. #MeToo
17/10/17 10:03	Cosmopoleton	1. Men are shocked at the level of abuse suffered by women. So here is where to start with ending it #MeToo
17/10/17 10:09	Danoosha	My best friend's 11 year old daughter takes karate lessons so she can defend herself from sexual predators. She shouldn't have to. #MeToo
17/10/17 10:09	gwynaver	Bit of a shame that it's more accurate to assume that #metoo has happened to everyone, rather than no one
17/10/17 10:10	handaisyXO	Desperately longing for a future where my beautiful tiny daughter doesn't have a #metoo to post. Let's make tomorrow better than today.
17/10/17 10:12	snailsarah	Men have put their hands, eyes, and words on me in ways I did not ask for or consent to #MeToo
17/10/17 10:14	caseyharr	Wasn't sure about saying anything, but I think it's important for guys to see, so... #MeToo Long time ago, my first ever real boss.
17/10/17 10:22	Ironwrites	wasn't sure if my experience w/ sexual harassment would be enough of a reason to post this, then I realised that's part of the problem #metoo
17/10/17 10:24	shukiest	You are not alone. There is a community of women and men who support you. ❤️ #metoo
17/10/17 10:25	Amanda_Brown	Who sinned first in the Adam and Eve story?? Yes. It was the woman. Is that why men think they can sin forever more? #MeToo #Atheism
17/10/17 10:27	doorklala	You don't have to believe me. You dont have to know my story. Support those who say #metoo
17/10/17 10:31	abbv_oone_awol	

## Appendices 3-5 on CD\*\*

## Statutory Declaration

I hereby declare on oath, that I authored this thesis independently and that I did not use any sources other than the ones cited in the list of references – especially no other Internet sources that have not been mentioned.

The thesis has not been submitted to any other board of examiners before and has not been published yet. The printed hard copy is consistent with the electronic version. Direct or indirect quotes from other works are clearly marked, indicating the source.

I hereby agree that my thesis is made available for later inspection in the library.

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Place & Date

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Signature