

A s s i g n m e n t 1

Title: #MeToo Effectively Utilises Online Networks to Promote Social Change

Name: Ella Taylor

Student Number: 20581624

Unit Name: Social Media, Communities and Networks

Email Address: ellarose72@outlook.com

Date Submitted: April 4th 2022

Word Count: 1964

URL (if applicable):

I declare that I have retained a copy of this assignment. I have read and understood Curtin University policies on Plagiarism and Copyright and declare that this assignment complies with these policies. I declare that this assignment is my own work and has not been submitted previously in any form for assessment.

E.Taylor April 4th 2022

(Date/Signature)

(Typing your name in the space provided is sufficient when submitting online via FLECS-Blackboard.)

Online networks can be utilised to help promote social change. The popularity of social media has grown exponentially throughout the 21st century, with it developing beyond just a way of communication amongst friends. The creation of online networks amongst multiple sites has allowed brands and people grow themselves from the ground up, with some using said social networks to promote social change. #MeToo gripped the world when it started going viral in 2017, calling for those who have experienced sexual violence to post #MeToo in showing survivors around the world that they are not alone while also calling for action to be taken against perpetrators and demanding that culture needed to change. Building a social network on social media, #MeToo has built to become its own organisation, continuing the fight against sexual violence and supporting those as they work to get back on their feet. Successful online networking can see a movement rise from the ground up, creating a call for social change that is impossible to ignore.

The inception of the 'Me Too. Movement' came long before #MeToo went viral. The organisation was originally founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke, a survivor and activist herself and created a vision of helping those struggling in the aftermath of their attacks. When actress Alyssa Milano called for people who suffered sexual abuse to identify themselves with #MeToo, she had unknowingly jumped on the bandwagon of the 'Me Too' movement and thrust the movement into the spotlight. Many A-list celebrities took part in the movement, such as Salma Hayek, Angelina Jolie, Lady Gaga, Terry Crews and the United States Gymnastics team including Simone Biles. The most high-profile headline to come out of the initial wave in 2017, saw Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein arrested and charged with first-degree criminal sexual act and third-degree rape in early 2020, resulting in a prison sentence of 23 years. This event was ground-breaking for the movement, showing that with the power of their voices they were able to put away a dangerous individual, while also sending a message saying that regardless of whether you are wealthy or in a position of power, you are no different to any other person and it can't protect you from the law.

The 'Me Too. Movement' has led to more awareness about sexual violence and is working to change the culture around what is acceptable behaviour and what crosses the line. The movement has now built a social network that is continuing to expand. The 'Me Too. Movement' social media presence continues to build to this day, with people still posting #MeToo. Across their official social media pages, the 'Me Too. Movement' has gathered 98 000 followers on Facebook, 88 000 on Instagram and just under 100 000 on Twitter. #MeToo can also be linked to 3.1 million posts on Instagram and gathered 1.7 billion views on TikTok. This extensive social network has opened the door to further the work of the 'Me Too. Movement' and continue to build the audience which it can reach.

To ensure that the 'Me Too. Movement' continues the fight to end sexual violence and provide support for survivors, an extensive team now works for the movement including a communications strategist, a communications fellow, a chief communications officer and a digital strategist. This show the commitment 'Me Too.' is making to ensuring that continue in the right direction in developing the movement further in the future by using experts who know how to keep people talking and keep the conversation going in a digital environment. This is then able to progress into the physical world and create the desired social change that the movement is fighting for.

The 'Me Too. Movement' has taken longer to take off in some parts of the world as cultural values, traditional gender roles and general tolerance towards sexual harassment is still prevalent in some countries. This shows that there is still a great amount of work that needs to be done. In a 2018 survey by the National Women's Federation at 15 universities in China, 57% of female Chinese college students said that they had experienced sexual harassment, however 56% believed that sexual harassment should be punished (Moy et al., 2022). The Chinese #metoo movement, known as Mi Tu, began to build steam in 2018 after several high-profile cases against celebrities and other public

figures. The Mi Tu movement has also experienced many obstacles that places such as the United States do not have to face. In a nation set of Confucian culture, China as a patriarchal country puts backlash on women who speak out about their experiences. The movement was heavily criticised and similar to other social movements in the country, China tolerated the campaign until social action became a legitimate threat. #MeToo and information about the movement was censored on social media in country as more influential figures were put in the spotlight accused of sexual harassment (Moy et al. 2022). The result in how sexual harassment is viewed by China's youth presents great concern. The survey results listed in this article were conducted in 2018, one year following the initial #MeToo that swept the globe. The issue in China is again in the spotlight after popular tennis player Peng Shuai accused a former Chinese vice-premier, Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault in November 2021, but retracted the claims in February 2022. In this time, Shuai's social media page on Weibo was censored, with posts being removed and comments disabled. All posts on the site that mentioned Shuai around this time were also removed. The legacy of #MeToo was also brought to the surface as there was a call to action against the treatment of Shuai and how the Chinese used their power to silence her online, to the point #WhereIsPengShuai? began trending on Twitter as questions about Shuai's safety started circulated due to her radio-silence following the initial claims. In December 2021, the Women's Tennis Association suspended all tournaments in China, which included Hong Kong, as a result of Shuai's unknown safety status. This suspension has the potential to continue beyond 2022. This whole situation proves that the 'Me Too. Movement' is still relevant and that despite changes occurring in the Western world, other areas still need more motivation to allow social change to occur.

The 'Me Too. Movement' did more than just open the doors for survivors to be more open about their experiences and do so on a public platform like social media, it opened up the general public the misconceptions about sexual violence and how social media and social networks in the past has been dismissive of the content they have allowed on their sites. Social media holds great power as a source of information and a source of influence. Cory L. Armstrong discusses how the 'Me Too. Movement' has influenced young people online to stand up to sexual violence and to express their views on rape culture in the media. An important note he makes is that through social networks, social movements are able to gain momentum because they are easy to participate in and is an easy way to recruit more people to a cause. As a result, he argues that the 'Me Too. Movement' is critical in fight against sexual violence. The use of social media as the foreground of the movement, made posting #MeToo personal to the person writing it. Armstrong states that mainstream media attention on sexual violence and knowing someone personally who is a survivor, has increased the chances of someone mobilising against sexual violence (Armstrong, 2020). To know that it is something that everyone is talking about and knowing that there are others that experienced it, made it easier for someone else to speak up as well. By mid-2018, #MeToo had dominated the news cycles and saw 65% of social media users in the United States stating that they were seeing sexual violence related content on pages (Armstrong, 2020). #MeToo was becoming a normal occurrence on social media and built its own social network from the ground up.

Regarding the success of the 'Me Too. Movement' so far, the next step to understand the impacts regarding mental health and the relationships survivors have with others and with social media. As the topic of sexual violence is becoming more open to discussion, the mental impact of the experience is now more under the microscope, in order to assist with survivor's road to recovery. In order to understand for themselves, Morgan E. PettyJohn and his team conducted interviews with survivors and asked about how they felt following their attacks. The data found that survivors saw negative changes in their mental health and their personal relationships, types of content would cause them great distress and in turn, their coping mechanisms for distress, while also discussing

recommendations for clinicians on helping survivors create healthier relationships with social media (PettyJohn et al. 2021). As sexual violence has become a topic that more people are becoming more comfortable talking about, the amount of content on social media relating to sexual violence has seen a dramatic increase within the past five years since the #MeToo went viral. While the positives lie in the fact that survivors are being more open to share their stories, it is important to discuss the potential negatives, most of which consist of survivors constantly seeing media that they can relate to on a traumatic level. While some feel as though seeing this content is empowering, watching others speak their truth about their experiences, there are also others where the emotions are still raw about their experience, and their healing process has not reached the level in which they can view this content everyday on social media. One study discusses how survivors can experience increased activity in the amygdala, the part of the brain that receives fear signals and increased levels of anxiety and hyperarousal when viewing this content (PettyJohn et al. 2021). Most survivors will alter the settings on their social media to remain active. This includes muting certain words and hashtags, changing their location settings, content filtering, and unfriending or blocking certain accounts (PettyJohn et al. 2021).

During their interviews with survivors PettyJohn and his team asked what their recommendations would be for clinicians in helping survivors with their relationship with social media. The top response was that therapists the use of social media and the amount of news their client consumes. This can help create a treatment plan for the client. This could include time limits on social media and using alternative forms of news consumption. They also suggested that therapists remain in the know about trends on social media and what kind of news stories and circulating around. They want therapists to know that social media can be both a positive and a negative, and that having some guidance navigating it will take time but will also be critical in the healing process.

The 'Me Too. Movement' is perfect example on how a social movement can utilise its social network and use it to create social change. The movement has shown how social media can be a valuable tool that can used to great effect in the current landscape of communication and encourage others to voice their stories and their opinions on an issue that continues to this day. That said, the movement is not perfect. If it were, there would be no such thing as sexual violence. #MeToo displays examples in which social networking is helping the issue, but there are also obvious grey areas surrounding the aftermath that need improvement. The social network of the 'Me Too. Movement' needs to start the of healing from these traumatic experiences, because speaking out is only the first step, and admitting that you need help would most certainly be the hardest. Online networking and social change are a combination that work hand in hand, and with continued persistence, could really see the world become a better place.

References

- PettyJohn, M.E., Anderson, G. & McCauley, H.L. (2021). Exploring Survivor Experiences on Social Media in the #MeToo Era: Clinical Recommendations for Addressing Impacts on Mental Health and Relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211055079>
- Armstrong, C.L. & Mahone, J. (2020). #Metoo in practice: revisiting social media's influence in individual willingness to mobilize against sexual assault. *Feminist Media Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1944258>

Mou, Y., Cui, Y., Wang, J., Wu, Y., Li, Z. & Wu, Y. (2021). Perceiving sexual harassment and #metoo social media campaign among Chinese female college students. *Journal of Gender Studies*. 31(2). 178-192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1884848>

Armstrong, K. (2018, May 3). *Celebrities Who Have Joined the #MeToo Movement (So Far)*. Brit+Co. <https://www.brit.co/celebrities-me-too/>

Me Too. Movement. (2022). *me too*. <https://metoomvmt.org/>

BBC News. (2021). *Harvey Weinstein timeline: How the scandal unfolded*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-41594672>

BBC News. (2022). *Peng Shuai: How China censored a tennis star*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/59338205>

ESPN. (2021). *WTA head says suspension of play in China could extend beyond 2022 if concern remains over Peng Shuai's safety*. ESPN. https://www.espn.com.au/tennis/story/_/id/32763277/wta-suspends-tournament-play-china-concern-peng-shuai-safety