

#MeToo Empowerment Through Media: A New Multiple Model for Predicting Attitudes Toward Media Campaigns

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Focusing on exposure level and attitudes of the Israeli public, in the context of gender differences, we look at the #MeToo campaign in social media. To identify whether attitudes toward #MeToo mirror attitudes toward media as a channel of social norms, data were gathered from a survey distributed to 617 participants: 253 (40.9%) men and 364 (59.1%) women, with an average age of 34.5, *SD* 10.83. More than 90% of the participants were familiar with the #MeToo campaign. Most participants supported the campaign and its objectives, while positive attitudes toward the media were significantly related to positive attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign. Significant gender differences were found in attitudes toward the ability of the media to influence social norms and toward the #MeToo campaign. Women have more positive associations with #MeToo than men; hence, the #MeToo campaign is representative of women taking a positive stance toward media and social change. This research offers a new multiple model for predicting attitudes toward media campaigns, revealing that attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign are influenced by perception of the media.

Keywords: #MeToo, gender, campaign, attitudes, social media, Israel

Traditional and social media can be powerful tools in the struggle for gender equality and workplace justice. However, the #MeToo campaign that followed the 2017 sexual harassment exposure of American film producer Harvey Weinstein generated a truly consequential social phenomenon. Women from around the world started to share their own experiences with sexual harassment and victimization under the #MeToo hashtag. The phrase *MeToo* was first used in 2006 by Tarana Burke, a civil rights activist, to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual abuse and assault in society (Gill & Orgad, 2018). The current #MeToo campaign gained social media momentum, powered by revelatory stories of many well-known celebrities (e.g., Alyssa Milano, Rose McGowan, Asia Argento, and Mira Sorvino; Kornhaber, 2018). Not only were painful undisclosed experiences shared and offenders identified (and publicly shamed), but new issues were vigorously debated as well.

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Date submitted: 2019-01-20

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However, #MeToo was not without its critics. Some pundits feared that the campaign was a “witch hunt” (Wright, 2018), while others thought the messaging had gone too far by making severe accusations against men (Astor, 2017). Some characterized #MeToo as a “battle of the sexes” that pits women against men (Fallon, 2018). These negative statements were generally from men and might reflect gender differences in reactions to the campaign. Indeed, men tend to be more tolerant of sexual harassment than women (Russell & Trigg, 2004).

Research conducted in Israel found that, as a result of paternalistic conditioning, there is great tolerance among Israeli men for sexual harassment and sexual objectification of women (Moore & Be'eri, 2012). Therefore, this work focuses on the attitudes of the Israeli public—men and women—toward the #MeToo campaign. To investigate gender attitudes toward the campaign, we tested whether attitudes of Israeli men and women toward the campaign could be explained by their attitudes toward media as a tool for social change. The goal of the current study is thus to better understand how attitudes toward the power of the media affect attitudes toward a campaign agitating for social change.

This study contributes to the emerging social media literature by means of a comprehensive and quantitative assessment of gender-based differences in attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign. Moreover, a unique multiple model for predicting consumer attitudes toward media campaigns is presented. The findings generate meaningful insights into an overall understanding of the value of viral messaging of topical current issues conveyed by digital and traditional media.

Social Media Campaigns

Media campaigns are used to affect various social behaviors in mass populations. They can function through direct and indirect pathways to change behaviors of entire populations (Hornik & Yanovitzky, 2003; Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, 2010). Studies show that media campaigns—both in traditional and social media—exert great influence on media consumer behavior (Allara, Ferri, Bo, Gasparrini, & Faggiano, 2015; Kuipers, Beard, West, & Brown, 2018).

Many campaigns aim to directly affect decision-making processes and invoke cognitive or emotional responses. Anticipated outcomes include decreasing obstacles to change, influencing adoption of healthy social norms (or recognizing unhealthy deviations), and associating valued emotions with achieving change. These changes strengthen intentions to alter conditions and increase likelihood of forming new behaviors (Hornik & Yanovitzky, 2003; Wakefield et al., 2010).

In the last decade, many media campaigns gravitated to social media, which has emerged as a key player in modern life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). By using the Internet, actors can distribute their messages accurately and target their audiences directly. Although concerns about user privacy and content control issues related to the centralized nature of social media providers (such as Facebook or Twitter) exist, media consumers are involved now more than ever in cocreating messages using online social networks. They are actively engaged in communicational processes (Fernando, Suganthi, & Sivakumaran, 2014; Roth-Cohen & Lahav, 2018). As a result, the Internet, and particularly social media, has become the communication channel of choice for political and social actors who consider themselves marginalized or silenced by

mainstream media (Lev-On, 2018). At the same time, it can redefine the power balance between media and its consumers. Social media and online forums foster collaborative environments.

Media Consumer Participation

Media convergence has been hailed as creating a “cultural shift” that has realigned the roles of audiences and producers in profoundly new ways (Bird, 2011), as media consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content (Jenkins, 2006). In the emerging digital environment, the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory mode. This breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers, instead enabling all participants to be users as much as producers of information and knowledge—or what can be described as *producers* (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006). Convergent media can and has transformed the traditional “audience” experience, where many people are taking advantage of multiple media platforms to create and convey messages. Media participation produces very different contexts, but they all focus on the distribution of power within society, ranging from the macro to the micro level (Carpentier, Dahlgren, & Pasquali, 2013).

The power of the public as an initiator in the communication process is reflected in social media activism. Many studies demonstrate that the Internet has become a major tool for social movements (Cammaerts, 2012; Juris, 2012; Margetts, John, Hale, & Yasseri, 2015; Valenzuela, 2013), offering significant social media resources for activists. The Internet often functions as the “glue” that binds together members of networks (Bennett, 2003; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). Thus, as a result, media consumers can exchange information, coordinate actions at far lower costs, and link local protests to a global agenda, consequently creating a “scale shift” of global activism (Lev-On, 2018).

Activism has great news value to drive the communications industry. To disseminate ideas and enlist public support, protest movements need the media. Social media provides a broad and robust infrastructure for the expansion and strengthening of political, economic, and social protest activities such as #MeToo. The abundance of new media channels may have a positive influence on civic activism (Bennett, Wells, & Freelon, 2011), empowering individuals to influence positive social change (Van Laer, 2010) and strengthening the sense of belonging. Alternatively, this information flood may confound citizens and prevent real action (Johnson & Kaye, 2003).

Feminism and the #MeToo Movement

Social media is a broad and effective platform for discussing sexual assault and rape culture, and it provides space for the creation of feminist discourses and identities (Mendes, 2015). Yet not only has there been an erasure of feminist activism over time, but feminist discourse has become both depoliticized and deradicalized since the 1960s and can now largely be considered neoliberal in nature—a problematic construction for those seeking collective social change (Mendes, 2011, 2012). The development of social media has led to a new kind of feminist discourse on sexual harassment and rape culture. Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2018) found that digital mediation enables new connections previously unavailable to girls and women, allowing them to redraw the boundaries between themselves and others. Digital platforms enable new kinds of intersectional conversations against sexual violence that emerged long before #MeToo (e.g., #YesAllWomen, various memes).

As Baer (2016) puts it, "The increased use of digital media has altered, influenced, and shaped feminism in the twenty-first century by giving rise to changed modes of communication, different kinds of conversations, and new configurations of activism across the globe" (p. 18).

Social media has mobilized feminism, building on the important work of preceding feminist social movements (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Keller et al., 2018). According to Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018), #MeToo is a feminist campaign, perhaps one of the highest profile examples of digital feminist activism. Its intersection of sex and power has framed major concerns of social justice and has galvanized organizational, legal, policy, and cultural changes (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

The #MeToo cause originated in 2006 as an effort to support victims of sexual violence (Shugerman, 2017; Xiong, Cho, & Boatwright, 2018). The movement went truly viral after several high-profile celebrities publicized their experience of sexual assault and violence (Xiong et al., 2018), especially accusations against U.S. film producer Harvey Weinstein in October 2017. The media gave this scandal saturation coverage on traditional and social media, encouraging women with similar experiences of abuse to use the #MeToo hashtag on a variety of platforms (Zarkov & Davis, 2018).

The #MeToo movement energized social media, raising awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual harassment and violence. In addition, many victims were speaking up, finding strength, and beginning the process of healing. With #MeToo, victims could share their individual stories, enter into solidarity with other victims, bring about change, and encourage accountability (Walsh & Gates, 2018). Engagement thus shifted from concern with sexualization to a more critical and political focus on the intersection of sex and power, and the implications of this shift (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

A gender-based analysis of #MeToo as a persuasive campaign (in addition to its power as a social movement) can add value to the strategic communications profession. It can furnish practitioners with actual tools for approaching female and male target audiences, providing them with insight into gender differences on new media platforms.

As such, the research hypotheses are:

H1: The Israeli public will have a high exposure level to the #MeToo campaign.

H2: There will be a positive correlation between attitudes toward the power of social media and attitudes toward #MeToo, so that the more positive the attitudes toward the power of the social media, the more positive the attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign.

H3: There will be significant gender differences in attitudes toward the power of social media to make social change toward the #MeToo campaign, so that women's attitudes will be more positive than men's.

Based on subject responses, a model will be constructed to analyze the extent to which the variables examined in the study affect the attitudes and perceptions toward the campaign.

Method

Participants

A total of 617 respondents participated in the study, 253 men (40.9%) and 364 women (59.1%). The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 67 ($M = 34.56$, $SD = 10.83$). The participant religious affiliation was as follows: 98.2% Jewish, of whom 61.7% were secular, 17.2% traditional, 18.2% religious, and 3% ultra-Orthodox. Participant education ranged from 10 to 23 years of study ($M = 14.9$, $df = 3.32$).

Tools

The study was conducted as a quantitative survey, using three questionnaires:

1. *Demographic questionnaire and questions on exposure to the #MeToo campaign.* The questionnaire consisted of five demographic questions on participant gender, age, religion, level of religiosity, and number of years of education. Participants were also asked three questions on campaign exposure: "Was it through traditional media; social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; or talking with friends (e.g., offline interpersonal communication)?"
2. *Questionnaire on attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign.* The questionnaire was developed by the researchers for the present study. The questionnaire examined participants' attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign to learn whether they think the campaign is justified and important and may contribute to reducing the phenomenon of sexual harassment. It consists of nine statements on public attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign. For example, "This campaign is very important since it attests to the power of women, which has long been silenced and weakened," and "One ought to feel sorry for all those men who have been accused of sexual harassment 15 years after the fact. These accusations are for the sake of ratings." Three of the questions were inverted to increase the reliability of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of the statements on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). The questionnaire was scored by averaging the responses of each participant. A higher score indicates a more positive attitude toward the campaign. Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.874 reliability.
3. *Questionnaire on attitudes toward the power of social media in influencing social norms.* The questionnaire was developed by the researchers for the purpose of this study. It consists of 11 statements on participant attitudes toward the power of social media. For example, "Actions on the part of social media to raise awareness of social distress are welcome in my opinion," and "The enormous power of the social media is destructive in my opinion." Five of the statements were intended to increase the reliability of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each of the statements on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

The questionnaire was scored by averaging the responses of each participant. A higher score indicates that the respondent regards more positively the ability of social media to influence social norms, and values social media as a tool for bringing about positive social change. Cronbach's alpha reliability of the questionnaire was 0.868.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Ariel University.¹ The quantitative convenience study was conducted through an online questionnaire distributed on social media from March through July 2018. The study was distributed through WhatsApp and Facebook groups. An effort was made not to distribute the survey among Facebook groups focusing on aspects that may bias the research results, such as groups dedicated to feminist discourse.

The topic of the study was introduced as follows:

At the end of 2017, in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein affair, who was suspected of molesting many Hollywood actresses, a campaign called #MeToo was launched. As part of the campaign, women worldwide shared posts on social media exposing sexual harassment under the hashtag #MeToo. In Israel, too, the campaign gained momentum on social media. Many women, including many celebrities, posted the words "Me too" and revealed that they were victims of sexual harassment, in a sign of solidarity with the struggle. Below are several questions regarding your opinions about the campaign.

It was clarified that there were no correct answers to questions in the questionnaire and that participants were asked to express only their opinions. It was also stressed that the questionnaire was anonymous and intended for research purposes only. Participation was voluntary, and participants could stop answering the questionnaire at any stage.

Because of the sensitivity of the questionnaire's topic, the following concluding note was added: "Sexual harassment is a common phenomenon in society, leading to mental distress among its victims. If in the past you have been a victim of sexual harassment, we recommend that you contact assistance centers for victims of sexual assault in Israel." The relevant phone numbers were listed.

Findings

First, in accordance with the first hypothesis, participants were asked whether and where they were exposed to the #MeToo campaign. Study findings show that 83% were exposed to #MeToo by traditional media, 78% were exposed to #MeToo by social media, and 63% talked with friends about #MeToo. Only 6.5% ($n = 40$) answered all three questions in the negative, meaning that they had not been exposed to the campaign at all.

¹ This study is part of a broad research of Israeli public attitudes toward sexual harassment, with the relevant section on attitudes toward the media presented here.

These subjects were removed from the statistical analyses, so that all analyses were conducted only on the study participants who were exposed to the campaign.

The focus of the study was the examination of public attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants' responses, in percentages, to each statement in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Distribution of Participant Attitudes Toward the Campaign in Percentages (N = 577).

Statement	High and very high level of agreement %	Moderate agreement %	Low level of agreement or no agreement %	Average (SD)
The time has come for the stonewalling and silencing of men and women who have been sexually harassed to end.	81.0	12.2	6.8	4.28 (1.02)
Men need to know that the rules of the game have changed, and they can no longer do with a woman as they please.	73.8	13.8	12.4	4.06 (1.19)
The campaign is a kind of educational undertaking that will help young girls understand that they must not remain silent about sexual harassment of any kind.	66.2	18.8	15.0	3.83 (1.19)
This campaign takes advantage of the power of social media and its ability to disseminate information on the Internet quickly.	63.7	20.2	16.1	3.79 (1.26)
This is a legitimate and welcome revolution aimed at reducing the phenomenon of sexual harassment in Israel and around the world.	61.8	22.3	15.9	3.80 (1.22)
This campaign is very important, and it attests to the power of women, silenced and weakened until now.	59.7	19.7	20.6	3.61 (1.25)
It's a pity that this campaign "killed romance," and all romantic courtship is gone because of men's fear of being accused of sexual harassment.	20.2	18.8	61.0	3.69* (1.30)
This is an unnecessary persecution of men, most of whom are innocent, just to provide voyeuristic headlines in the media.	11.9	15.7	72.4	4.02* (1.13)
One ought to feel sorry for all those men who have been accused of sexual harassment 15 years after the fact. These are accusations for the sake of ratings.	9.7	11.7	78.5	4.21* (1.14)

* Average following the inversion of the answer scales.

Table 1 shows that most respondents support the campaign and its goals and believe that the campaign is important for reducing the phenomenon of sexual harassment. More than 90% of the sample agreed with the statement, "The time has come for the stonewalling and silencing of men and women who have been sexually harassed to end." Accordingly, only 9.7% of the participants believed that one ought to feel sorry for those men who were accused of sexual harassment 15 years after the fact. Nevertheless, many participants (about 40%) expressed concern about the death of romance and the disappearance of courtship because in the wake of the campaign, men feared possible illegitimate sexual harassment charges.

In accordance with the second hypothesis, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between attitudes toward the media and attitudes toward the campaign. The analysis found a positive, significant, and strong correlation between attitudes toward the media and toward the campaign ($r = .692, p < .001$), so that the more positive the attitudes toward the influence of the media, the more positive the attitudes toward the campaign. That is, respondents who believe in the power of social media and consider its influence to be good are more likely to believe that social media can achieve social change.

Demographic Variables

Table 2 presents the gender differences in the study variables. The table shows significant differences in all variables, with women holding more positive attitudes toward the campaign and toward social media than men. These findings confirm the third hypothesis of the study.

Table 2. Attitudes Toward Social Media and #MeToo Campaign by Gender, Means, and Standard Deviations (N = 577).

	Overall <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Male <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Female <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>
Attitudes toward social media	3.27 (.78)	2.99 (.77)	3.44 (.73)	6.85***
Attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign	3.92 (.78)	3.48 (.90)	4.22 (.64)	10.59***

*** $p < .001$

Because of a negatively skewed distribution of attitudes, variables were exponentially transformed. Beyond gender differences, we also examined the relationship between the research variables and the age of the participants, the number of years of study, and their level of religiosity. A Pearson correlation test found a significant positive but weak correlation between the age of the participants and their attitude toward the media ($r = .11, p < .05$). The older the subjects, the more positive their attitudes toward media power. In other words, older people are more likely to believe that social media can achieve good social change. No significant correlation was found, however, between age and attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign ($r = .01, p > .05$).

A similar trend was found regarding participants' number of years of study. A Pearson correlation test found a significant positive but weak correlation between the number of years of study and attitudes toward the media ($r = .10, p < .05$). That is, the more years of participant education, the more positive

their attitudes toward the media. Thus, educated people value social media more as a tool that can bring about positive social change. However, no significant correlation was found between participants' education and their attitudes toward the campaign ($r = .02, p > .05$).

A significant negative correlation was found in the Spearman correlation between level of religiosity of the participants and the research variables, so that the less religious the participants, the more likely they were to support the campaign ($r = -.27, p < .001$) and the more positive the attitudes they displayed toward the media ($r = -.26, p < .01$).

Multiple Hierarchical Regression to Predict Attitudes Toward #MeToo

Step 1 consisted of gender (1 = male, 0 = female), age, years of education, and religiosity (1 = secular, 0 = nonsecular). Step 2 included attitudes toward the media (Table 3).

Table 3. Multiple Hierarchical Regression for Attitudes Toward #MeToo (N = 577).

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Step 1			
Gender	-32.31	3.23	-.41***
Age	0.04	0.16	.01
Years of education	0.10	0.53	.02
Religiosity	18.00	3.31	.20***
Adj. R²	.18***		
Step 2			
Gender	-19.01	2.60	-.21***
Age	-0.09	0.13	-.02
Years of education	0.09	0.42	.01
Religiosity	6.75	2.74	.06*
Attitudes toward the media	32.60	1.78	.63***
Adj. R²	.50***		
F(5, 611)	122.72***		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The regression model was found significant, with 48% of the variance in attitudes toward #MeToo being explained by the study variables. Background variables explained 18% of the variance, and attitudes toward the media added 32%. The results revealed that women, as compared with men, and secular participants, as compared with religious participants, were more likely to hold more positive attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign. Furthermore, positive attitudes toward the media were significantly related to positive attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign.

Discussion

Our research showed that exposure to the #MeToo campaign was very high. More than 90% of participants were familiar with the campaign. Therefore, H1 was fully supported. The intersection of

traditional and social media used in disclosure of sexual harassment experiences may have generated an enhanced emotional effect tied to sharing highly affective personal information with a largely sympathetic online community. #MeToo posts written by well-known celebrities (e.g., America Ferrera, Reese Witherspoon, and Lady Gaga) attracted massive viewer attention. The sharing of deeply personal and often traumatic experiences using storytelling resulted in high levels of exposure.

Another explanation for the high exposure is multichannel use, combining traditional and new media. Although the campaign effectively began with traditional media reports of sexual harassment, it truly became viral on social media such as Twitter and Facebook. This demonstrates how convergent media can and has transformed the traditional "audience" experience, where many people take advantage of multiple media platforms (Jenkins, 2006). As noted, social media is characterized by instantaneous communication, massive audience reach, and low cost. This makes it an increasingly popular form of communication and an ideal platform for social justice causes such as #MeToo (Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017).

The high exposure of #MeToo illustrates how the abundance of new media channels has a positive influence on civic activism (Bennett et al., 2011), strengthening individual ability to influence positive social change (Van Laer, 2010) and strengthening sense of belonging. As Bird (2011) suggested, "Although the vast majority of *produser* activity seems to be directed around entertainment genres, perhaps the most exciting possibilities lie in the opportunities for active engagement with crucial issues of citizenship" (pp. 510–511). The shared information within social media is then passed along through multiple connected individuals, eventually leading to a critical mass (Rogers, 2010), thus explaining the high levels of exposure of the #MeToo campaign.

In addition, H2 was confirmed in the success of the proposed model for explaining the strong relationships among the research variables. It was found that 18% of differentiation in attitudes toward #MeToo was explained by demographic variables, and an additional 32% by attitudes toward media power. Thus, attitudes toward media power and its effect constitute a significant filter for the public in evaluating a media campaign. That is, attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign are influenced not only by its core messages, but also by perception of the media.

As mentioned, this can be explained by Bruns's (2014) claim that at a time of relative media technology abundance, we are more able than ever to make our own media, and this is borne out by the rapid and transformational rise of user-generated content. The media innovation in the current age is largely a story of cocreation of products, platforms, and practices in collaboration between users and producers (Bruns, 2008) that enables all participants to be users as much as producers of information and knowledge, or what can be described as *produsers* (Bruns, 2008). The profusion of new media channels encourages civic activism and strengthens individual sense of belonging and ability to influence media (Van Laer, 2010); this is due to the user's engagement with his or her own created content through continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement (Bruns, 2008). The media thus serves the personal and social needs of the individual, and this dynamic accounts for positive consumer attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign.

The positive perception of #MeToo can thus be attributed to a recognition of the consumer's own empowerment in message dissemination. Even so, without the existence of platforms for active social media connectivity, consumer voices would be muted and critical mass never achieved.

Consequently, our findings are consistent with H3, supporting the claim that gender differences may reflect the desire of women to use the power of media to strengthen their social status. In our case, the #MeToo campaign is representative of women taking a positive stance toward media and activism. Many studies have focused on the power of the media to not only form public opinion (Bronstein, 2005; McCombs, 2002; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Stockmann & Luo, 2017), but also instigate major social change. Even though women's status is constantly improving in modern life, Israeli society still maintains pockets of patriarchal power where men determine the social and public agenda (Clatterbaugh, 2018; Yoon et al., 2015). For women, media can be used as a channel for leveraging social change into social equality (Bronstein, 2005; Mendes, 2012). As such, positive attitudes of Israeli women toward the #MeToo campaign are not surprising. #MeToo represents a challenge to the highly individualized nature of many current gender inequality discussions related to the rise of confidence culture (Gill & Orgad, 2015). According to Gill and Orgad (2017), confidence works as a technology of self, exhorting women and girls to act upon themselves, reconfiguring feminist concerns. Other feminist scholars have made similar points in relation to postfeminism (Gill, 2017), popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018), and neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018).

Our prediction in H3 was that gender differences in attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign exist. We posited that women will have more positive associations with #MeToo than men, and this claim was supported. One explanation can be found in the survey population search process. In an effort to achieve gender parity in the sample, the survey was distributed through social media. Interestingly, women were quick to take the survey, whereas men were quite difficult to find. It could be argued that men may have refused to participate in the research as a sort of symbolic protest against the #MeToo campaign, which they may believe endangers male status or even serves as an intimidation tactic against men. They may subscribe to these beliefs because of the nonstop media coverage of the campaign and the central role given to primarily women sharing sexual harassment complaints against men. This accords with Gunther and Storey (2003), who claim that individual perceptions of social reality can influence behavior, regardless of perceptual accuracy. Therefore, it may be cautiously suggested that men were more likely to become anti-#MeToo as a result of the overwhelming directionality of many accusations—women accusing men of sexual harassment.

In addition, men and women react differently to gender role portrayals in communicational messaging because of differences in processing strategies. It was found that women process communicational information more comprehensively and more elaborately than men, who are selective information processors (Eisend, Plagemann, & Sollwedel, 2014). In the case of #MeToo, men may have been intimidated by the possible consequences of the campaign on their current and future personal relationships. Relatedly, our findings also show that attitudes toward #MeToo are significantly influenced by general attitudes toward the media. More positive attitudes toward media power and influence are correlated with a more positive association with the #MeToo campaign as compared with those who hold negative attitudes. Women, therefore, were found to be more positive about media power than men. The #MeToo message, although containing harrowing stories of abuse and harassment, was ultimately about portraying an image of strong and independent women. Media effectively communicated this message, demolishing well-known traditional gender stereotypes (e.g., women

as weak, domestic, and dependent; Collins, 2011). The media is a key shaper of a new symbolic image—modern women unafraid to speak out against sexual harassment. This dynamic informs the positive attitude of women toward media power and, therefore, to the #MeToo campaign as well.

Conclusion

This research focused on public perceptions of an informal media campaign that produced groundbreaking and international results, in turn receiving its own extensive media coverage. A great deal of scholarly interest exists in using traditional and social media for feminist activism, but few studies have examined gender differences in attitudes toward the power of the media to spark social change (Freeman, Potente, Rock, & McIver, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). By using the #MeToo campaign as a case study, this research offers a new multiple model for predicting attitudes toward media campaigns. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind to analyze gender attitudes toward risk behaviors such as sexual harassment. We examined the attitudes of public opinion on the power of media as an influence on media consumers processing feminist messages.

The #MeToo campaign phenomenon illustrates Bird's (2011) claim that "We should never be looking only at online practices, but always at how those intersect with the realities of the offline world" (p. 512). And, indeed, the exponential visibility of #MeToo in the contemporary moment illustrates how online media and reality intersect. Going forward, #MeToo should expand to encompass other populations with stories of sexual harassment victimization, such as the trans community. However, these campaigns should mainly target secular women because they were found to be more likely to hold more positive attitudes toward #MeToo.

Because a positive and strong correlation was found between attitudes toward the media and the #MeToo campaign distributed via social media platforms, campaigns informed by social values may help to strengthen media credibility and improve its image in the public eye. The effectiveness of this pairing may be attributed to the powerful messaging involved in sharing deeply personal and emotionally traumatic experiences. Social campaign managers and social activists should not ignore that women were found to be more positive about media power in general than men.

It is also important to note some limitations of this research, which derive in part from the survey population. Great effort was made to achieve gender parity in the sample. After 8 months of surveying, the final sample consisted of 59.1% ($n = 364$) women and 40.9% ($n = 253$) men.

Research on the #MeToo campaign can be extended into cross-disciplinary work, focusing on the relationship among media campaigns, gender, religiosity, and risk behaviors. To gain a deeper understanding of activism campaigns that fuse traditional and online media outlets, future studies should examine long-term campaign influence to assess if actual social change occurs in society and to learn more about how digital platforms function as sites of empowerment and identity formation.

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