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5.2 #MeToo Movement, Digital Media and the Public Sphere

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Abstract

In this paper we will examine the influence digital media has had on political dialogue in the public sphere. We will explore the phenomenon through an example case, namely the global feminist #MeToo movement which started in 2017. Within the framework of the #MeToo Movement, we introduce and examine the challenges digital media poses to the political dialogue in the public sphere. We start by going through concepts and theories utilized in this research paper. Then we will discuss the relationship between digital media and #MeToo, after which we will assess the negative and positive outcomes of the #MeToo movement. Finally, an overall assessment concerning the movement and phenomenon around it is given. Our main argument is that while making the public sphere more inclusive, digital media has also made public debate and political discussion more polarized and antagonistic.

Keywords: Public sphere, digital media, #MeToo movement, Twitter, social movements, rape, activism, collective action

This study attempts to describe how digital media has affected public debate. We will use the #MeToo campaign as a case example to show the impacts — both negative and positive — that digital media has had on the public sphere. The campaign can be described as a form of mobilization that initially was meant to draw attention to the scope of how much women still face sexual harassment and violence. The aim was to empower women to speak out, so that people would recognize the problem as relevant. Although the campaign succeeded in making women speak up and certainly drew attention to the matter worldwide, the reception was not completely positive. An opposing side emerged that questioned the campaign's endeavour for equality. We will look at the different types of outcomes in more detail in sections four and five.

As a theoretical background we will utilize studies that look into public discussion and the effects on it caused by digital media. We will reflect on the Habermasian public sphere, deliberative democracy and rational communication to see how well the Habermasian ideals of public debate are realized in the age of digital media. In addition, we will look into theories that criticize Habermas and show the difficulties of them actualizing, especially due to the emergence of social media.

Theoretical background — Anniina Riikonen

It is useful to start our examination from Jürgen Habermas to uncover the meaning of the public sphere and deliberation. The ideal state for democracy for Habermas is deliberative democracy. Deliberation is an expression of people, together, contemplating issues that concern everyone, and deliberative democracy depends on this operation as its main principle (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 2). Voting then is not the only form of participation, as deliberation is a key factor affecting voting behaviour through rational communication (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 2). Many of the first theorists of deliberative democracy, most prominently Habermas, have also portrayed deliberation as being rational, free from power relations, aiming for common good, and being open and non-prejudiced towards different participants (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 3, 5). Thus, discussion participants do not blindly follow their own interests, but are willing to change their views. Later on, theorists assumed the debate situation as not being equal but pursuing inclusion of diverse groups (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 4).

A clear definition of ideal debate in deliberative democracy is communicative rationality. Communicative rationality is how debate in liberal democracies should be, and it is communication that forms through open-minded and reasoned discussion among equals (Cammaerts 2007, 3–4).

Deliberation takes place in the public sphere. The form of the public sphere changes in a historical process, wherein society and democracy are in transformation. Habermas describes the transformation of the public sphere during the 18th century as follows. As the economy changed along the emergence of capitalism, so did the social structure (Habermas 1999, 14). Finance shifted to a commercial private sphere external to individuals' households (Habermas 1999, 19–20). At the same time the press emerged, as a participant in commerce, to spread news to the public; and at the centre stood the

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bourgeois class (Habermas 1999, 21, 23). The state, as public authority, had the power to regulate markets. The interplay between the state and markets affected the public, and vice versa. This interplay gave space to public reasoning and critique (Habermas 1999, 24). Between private and public authority was the sphere in which the public sphere formed, containing the press, civil society organizations and public participation in politics (Habermas 1999, 30). Public opinion in the public sphere attempted to find just and right solutions through rational deliberation, and in the background the ideals of freedom and equality were forming (Habermas 1999, 54).

The Habermasian view of communication in the public sphere as being rational, open and aiming at consensus has since been subject to critique. Mouffe for instance (1999) has criticized this view of public debate for being consensus oriented. She points out that the public sphere has never been completely equal, nor free of conflicts — on the contrary, contradictions are part of democratic public debate (Mouffe 1999, 756). The polarization of the debate on sexual rights is also an example of the public not achieving consensus. Habermasian deliberative democracy has also been criticized for overestimating human capabilities for reasoned argumentation (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 20).

Not only have Habermas' original theories been subject to critique, but the very nature of communication has changed with the emergence of new technologies, such as the Internet. Especially social media, which was the platform the #metoo campaign, has changed participation. It can be claimed that participation is now open to a wider audience through the Internet. The new media have increased the participation of even those who did not participate before (Margetts et al. 2016, 157). However, making more people participate does not necessarily mean that communication or methods for communication are any more equal or more reasoned. Also, information is now more easily accessible. Thus, we need to explore more articles that reflect on the impacts of the new media on communication, deliberation and the public sphere. We will look into these theories later in this study, but to give some insight, it is useful to provide some background to the issue already at this point.

Public discussion on the Internet is not in accordance with Habermas' conception of public deliberation, even if it does produce new ways to participate (Dahlgren 2005, 151). As Dahlgren describes the communication patterns on the Internet: "The kinds of interaction taking place can only to a small degree be considered manifestations of the public sphere; democratic deliberation is completely overshadowed by consumerism, entertainment, nonpolitical networking and chat, and so forth" (2005, 151). According to Dahlgren, the benefits of the Internet as a new technology for the public sphere are in its effectiveness in including and forming a variety of interest groups and in that way developing multiple public spheres for public discussion (2005, 152). However, there is a problem with public spheres forming different groups: "...cyber ghettos threaten to undercut a shared public culture and the integrative societal function of the public sphere, and they may well even help foster intolerance where such communities have little contact with — or understanding of — one another" (Dahlgren 2005, 152). This habit of being too close to one's own group without discussing views with people from other

groups is one possible explanation for why the #metoo campaign led to such a polarized debate.

We will come back to the reasons for this polarization later. With the new public spheres there might also be difficulties in trying to maintain a relationship between the multiple discussion spaces and institutions (Dahlgren 2005, 152–153). The impact of the Internet and social media on the public sphere has split theorists into two different camps. On the one hand, the impacts are seen as unimportant and not able to make a real difference to decision making. On the other hand, the impacts are seen as grand, changing the very nature of democracy by altering social structures and power relations in the global arena. (Dahlgren 2005, 154.)

Digital media and the #MeToo movement — Pietari Suomela

This section examines the concept of *digital media* in the context of the #MeToo movement. One of the main points of this section is the notion that technological innovations are always neutral when first introduced. To understand the consequences which technological innovations have, they must be examined in a social context. There is a two-way road between technological innovation and social life, where both have an effect on one another.

The concept of digital society

Simon Lindgren argues in his book *Digital Media & Society* (2017) that we can no longer make the distinction between the concepts of *digital media* and *digital society* (Lindgren 2017, 3). This statement, presumably, can be taken to refer to primarily post-industrial and relatively wealthy nations. Indeed, Lindgren presents a stack of comparable idioms for digital society: post-industrial society, information society and network society (Lindgren 2017, 4). Modern society is so saturated by “digital things” that it is getting increasingly more difficult to make the distinction between the terms *digital media* and *digital society*. However, the fusion of digital media and digital society is not self-evident (Lindgren 2017, 3).

Just like any groundbreaking technological innovation, technology associated with digital media has also influenced societies irrevocably. But it would be misleading to think that the relation between innovations and societies is a one-way road. Kranzberg’s first law, named after historian of technology Melvin Kranzberg, crystallizes this thought. First of all, technology is neutral. Secondly, technology interacts with society so that the consequences exceed the initial purpose of the technology. Thirdly, technology can have different results depending on the context and circumstances in which it is used. (Lindgren 2017, 4).

All three parts of Kranzberg’s first law are consistent with the concept of digital media. Especially the third part about different results of technology can easily be applied here. Digital media was an essential instrument in many of the largest events of the 2010s. The Arab spring started in 2010, Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign, and the

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#MeToo movement started in 2017 were all very different kinds of events in relation to each other, but they were all made possible by digital media.

Lindgren also discusses the concept of media. This is an essential part of his argument, because digital media and digital society are redefining the concept of media. Furthermore, to grasp his argument about digital society fully, it is necessary to acknowledge the strong link between media and society. According to Lindgren, media is at the center of interaction between individuals and society and therefore it is quite easy to accept the fact that media plays an essential role in people's life and in the formation of an individual's self-portrait (Lindgren 2017, 5). Media structures, including languages and ways of thinking constrain and enable human interaction and should be studied if one tries to understand the so-called social reality (Lindgren 2017, 5-6).

Lindgren gives an illustrative example on how new communication technologies shape and define society: Just like the innovation of writing about 5000 years ago changed society dramatically and far beyond writing's initial purpose, so is digital media now (Lindgren 2017, 6-7). It is important to note that in both cases the road goes both ways: Communication technology shapes society, and individual behavior, just like the use of those technologies by individuals, shapes technology (Lindgren 2017, 7). Research that tries to explain how new communication technologies impact social lives and society as a whole are vitally important. A proper understanding of this is important especially in the early phases of new technologies, such as digital media. This is because it is in those early stages that individuals and societies integrate new technologies into their everyday lives (Lindgren 2017, 7). If we lack an adequate understanding of the ways digital media has impact on our society, the consequences might be unpredictable and undesirable.

Social media can be understood as a subcategory of digital media. In essence it is a new kind of social dimension made possible by digital communication technologies. A logic called *networked individualism* is a good way to describe interaction through social media: Networks through which people interact are individually centered, looser, more open and more diverse than before, and digital media enables interaction between individuals in those networks. (Lindgren 2017, 27-28).

Digital media and the #MeToo movement

The #MeToo movement, started in 2017, can be described as a social media campaign that successfully raised awareness and mobilized people in matters of gender, power and violence (Lindgren 2019, 2). What this section sets out to investigate is the role that social media had on making the movement possible. The aim is not to assess whether the movement or social media are good or bad, but rather to shed some light to the mechanisms behind social media movements in general.

First of all, it is good to remember that social movements are not new phenomena. What is new is that with the emergence of digital media and digital society, the blueprint of social movements has changed significantly. For example, the ways in which movements are actualized and people are being mobilized have radically changed along the emergence of a digital society. A general consensus among online social movement

researchers is that the impacts of online movements are to be evaluated on case-by-case basis. The reason for this is that communication technology as such has no universally predictable consequences (Lindgren 2019, 3). The diversity of consequences is most easily understood when comparing two separate events in which social media campaigns played an essential role: the Arab spring in 2010 and #MeToo in 2017. The former resulted in regime changes in Arab countries, while the latter led to a widespread discussion about gender equality.

#MeToo is an example of hashtag activism which has been visible in political activism starting with the 2010s (Lindgren 2019, 4). Twitter as a real-time and global forum is the main platform of “hashtag-mediated public sphere”, and hashtags themselves are tools to frame certain phenomena (Lindgren 2019, 4). For example, #MeToo is not just a reference to a phenomenon but also an indication of meaning and a term that frames the issue at hand. #MeToo has a semiotic function as defining a social phenomenon that would be hard to define or to name without using the term #MeToo.

In a way, digital media offers new tools to construct social life not just as a platform, but in more fundamental ways. Digital media influences directly how people act in public and even to some extent in private. Digital media and #MeToo question the distinction between private and public, and in this sense has a substantial influence on public discussion, individualism and privacy. The question of the relationship between private and public, a fundamental question in feminism, is probably one of the reasons why #MeToo has had a dividing effect.

Lindgren identifies three challenges for the #MeToo movement and social media movements in general: (1) noise and dilution, (2) hate speech and trolling and (3) clicktivism and disengagement (Lindgren 2019, 2). The #MeToo Twitter discourse became noisier and more off topic as it went on. This is not a surprising result as it is in line with both pre-digital and social medias’ logic, in which focus on one particular topic is brief and quickly replaced by new topics (Lindgren 2019, 10).

As far as hate speech and trolling are concerned, conversation around the movement became more antagonistic, aggressive and negative (Lindgren 2019, 13). Political discourse is usually adversarial, but it seems that Twitter as a platform takes this antagonism further, making it difficult to have a sound political dialogue on the platform.

As time went on, there was a clear decrease in active participation in the #MeToo conversation on Twitter. However, participation activity in the #MeToo conversation still exceeded the activity of normal (non #MeToo or other campaign-like use) of Twitter use (Lindgren 2019, 15).

Positive outcomes of the #MeToo movement — Susanna Kupiainen

The #MeToo-campaign is a very visible example of a phenomenon described as “hashtag-mediated public sphere” (Rambukkana 2015, 4). Political activism has taken to Twitter, likely because it is a global, real-time social media (Lindgren 2019, 4). The #MeToo followed the footsteps of #BeenRapedNeverReported (Mendes et al. 2018) and developed into a huge and controversial campaign that was widely covered by traditional

media and noted at the highest levels of governance, with the Finnish parliament and president Trump, among others, voicing their opinions on the campaign. The purpose of this section is to examine the positive outcomes of the movement.

Hashtag-mediated public sphere

Combining hashtag-mediation and the public sphere for the concept of hashtag-mediated public sphere suggests that hashtag-oriented Twitter has become a new sphere for public discussion. The #MeToo campaign started by trending on Twitter, and soon spread into other social media as well. While Twitter is recognized as a hostile and aggressive environment particularly for feminist women, many feminists found participating in anti-sexual violence campaigns easier online than in their day-to-day lives (Mendes et al. 2018, 243–244). The ability of Twitter to support discussion and activism of these sensitive issues is a positive development.

Offering the possibility for anonymity behind a username, Twitter and other social media channels seem to be becoming increasingly important scenes of the global public sphere in western societies. Participating in these campaigns was not easy, but thousands of women and victims of sexual violence were given a voice and activism was celebrated by traditional media, bringing it to the attention of a much wider audience than only those on Twitter (Mendes et al. 2018, 244). The voice of women was heard loud and clear, considering that the topic was soon discussed even in the Finnish parliament across the Atlantic, with the Minister of Justice commenting that Finnish law condemns all sexual harassment, but people's attitudes and actions may not (Konttinen 2017). It was also suggested that the legal definition of rape should be changed to lack of consent, rather than defining it along the use of violence (ibid.).

Twitter as a public sphere for deliberative democracy seems to have done its job in this regard. Traditional news media understood that something was happening that many citizens wanted to change and started reporting it to those who do not use Twitter. Media coverage helped decision makers estimate the importance of the issue to citizens, fulfilling the democratic ideal of listening to the voices of the oppressed as a basis for decision-making.

Media has immense power with regard to setting the agenda and consequently determining what the public deems important. It can therefore shape preferences and opinions, and influence what people consider worthy of public discussion, or which social problems need to be solved (Flew 2018, 11–12). This was a huge part of the positive consequences of the movement, as they took place offline. Social media was the starting place for activism, but the societal change preceded online communities. The campaign was framed by the media mostly, especially in the beginning, in a positive way that supported the victims and raised concerns about the amount of unreported sexual violence in western societies where women are often thought to be quite safe.

The culture of silence surrounding rape

Speaking out about sexual abuse “exposes the pattern of abuse, warns those who might become victims, and encourages others similarly situated to come forward with their own claims” (Prasad 2018, 2509). There has long been a culture of silence surrounding sexual abuse, which is made possible by the shame the victims feel for what happened and can be made worse by officials such as police suggesting that the victim was at fault too, since they should not have been drunk or dressed as they were. Many victims are afraid to report the abuse, as the campaign #BeenRapedNeverReported proved. The spreading of the campaign encouraged one person after another to be brave enough to make their painful experience public, which encouraged more people in return. The amount of people having suffered from sexual violence that were ready to go public with it was the basis for the campaign’s powerful effects.

After a sexual assault, it can be easy to buy the silence of the victim with a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), especially in the United States. The victim feels alone, humiliated and scared that someone will find out, so they may be inclined to sign the immoral NDA, thus having to stay silent forever. The #MeToo campaign, and the women who spoke out about abuse despite having signed NDAs, have broken this silence induced by shame and fear. Speaking out instead of remaining silent was found so necessary that many states in the US started preparing bills that would limit the use of NDAs in sexual violence cases to let the victims speak out about them. It was also considered something the public should know about, to avoid being able to repeat the abuse in silence (Prasad 2018). Since the campaign, sexual harassment has been discussed more often and more openly, with many employers changing their harassment policies. For example, the congress of the United States added training, updated their complaint and counseling practices and increased the rights of unpaid interns (Prasad 2018, 2522–2523).

Effects on rape culture

The #MeToo-movement was utilized not only to encourage women to speak up about sexual abuse, but also to attempt to make a change in toxic masculinity with regard to sexual violence, referred to as ‘rape culture’. Rape culture is an attitude surrounding sexual abuse, characterized by silently accepting, excusing or even supporting acts of sexual assault (Pettyjohn et al. 2019, 1–2).

After the #MeToo-movement, several male-dominated hashtag campaigns were also started, with the hashtags #ItWasMe, #IHave and #HowIWillChange (Lindgren 2019, 3–4). The campaigns were a consequence of a shift in philosophical perspective on sexual violence, claiming men’s responsibility in prevention of sexual violence (Pettyjohn et al. 2019, 2–3). While the backlash of the campaigns was very harsh and many found them ridiculous, there were still thousands of men genuinely reflecting on their toxic behavior, promising to be better in the future and most importantly, discussing how they can teach their children to be better (Pettyjohn et al. 2019, 3–8).

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The narrative around the responsibility of those who may have not harassed anyone, but have silently accepted harassment, is a rather new one. “Locker room talk”, a term used by Donald Trump to justify offensive comments, has also been connected to toxic masculinity and rape culture by objectifying women and normalizing harassment-related speech. The narrative is a means towards a culture where offensive talk is not brushed off as ‘boys will be boys’, and men also have to take responsibility for their possibly innocent yet harmful words. Language is a consequence of attitudes and reshaping the next generation’s way of thinking begins with changing attitudes. These men-oriented hashtags show a valuable change in the attitude towards harassment and are valuable for the movement as such.

Challenges and negative outcomes of #Metoo movement — Anni Juusola

This section addresses the challenges and negative outcomes of digital feminist activism and the #MeToo movement in particular. As the goal is to understand how digital media has affected the public sphere, the main focus is on the complex and problematic nature of the digital environment and the experiences of those who act within it.

Firstly, the impact of digital media on collective behavior is discussed from a critical perspective. The question of how the Habermasian public sphere and deliberative democracy are challenged by the digital revolution is tied to research on social movement. Finally, online abuse and the negative experiences of women who engage in digital feminist activism are examined.

A critical perspective on social movements in the digital age

Research on social movements tries to answer the question of why social movements, such as the #MeToo movement, succeed or fail. Usually it is difficult to find a direct causal relationship between attempts of collective behavior and the final outcome (Carty 2015, p. 28). Indisputably, the #MeToo Movement gained substantial attention from mainstream media but researchers still know little whether or how this kind of hashtags can actually produce social change (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller 2018, p. 237).

In spite of these difficulties in analysing the outcome of the #MeToo Movement, it is clear that digital media offers new possibilities for all social movements. These days, activists can use social media platforms to raise awareness and organise events. They can reach large amounts of people quickly and challenge predominant views on an issue with their message.

Still some scholars are skeptical about these new possibilities created by digital media. It is claimed that people tend to interact with like-minded people online which can lead to fragmentation and polarization (Bimber and Davis 2013, p. 245). Carty (2015) refers to these phenomena as “cyber-balkanization” and the “echo-chamber” effect (p. 30). In other words, digital media and the Internet create small groups whose members share similar interests and despise outsiders with different views. These claims are contrary to the idealistic notion that digital media could potentially create “virtual public

spheres” where people develop a sense of community regardless of physical distance (Kahn and Kellner 2003, p. 14).

The #MeToo Movement has been criticized by some as a “battle of sexes” which pits men against women (Kunst et al. 2019, p. 1). Unfortunately, there is still little knowledge why some groups perceive specific social media campaigns significant, while others find them harmful (Kunst et al. 2019, p. 6–7). Based on the findings of cross-cultural study on the underlying factors affecting men’s and women’s attitudes towards the #MeToo Movement, one way to reduce the polarization might be to highlight that campaigns such as the #MeToo Movement, raise awareness about sexual violence experienced by both men and women (Kunst et al. 2019, p. 20). Considering the framing of the campaign carefully might help to avoid the negative counter-reactions towards feminist digital activism.

Within a broader theoretical framework, these concerns give us some insight as to why digital media poses a threat to the Habermasian public sphere and deliberative democracy. Habermas has argued before the emergence of the new ITC that the mainstream media has had a negative impact on the public sphere. According to him, public opinion, which was once based on the outcome of debate and reflection, is now constrained by media experts who construct the public discourse to those themes they approve of (Carty 2015, p. 31). It could be argued that the rise of digital media and its negative side effects, like the “echo chambers” of the Internet, continue this trend.

Habermas also uses the concept of “ideal speech situation” in which communication is not controlled by political or economic forces and everyone participates in public debate on equal terms. Applying the ideas of Habermas, skeptical theorists think that virtual relations in cyberspace do not fulfil the conditions of the ideal speech situation. (Carty 2015, p. 31–32). For example, everyone does not have digital skills or access to technology to participate and the owners of the digital platforms also have their own economic and political interests which might prevent a truly equal public debate.

Women’s experiences of engaging in digital feminist activism

The rise of digital technologies has also enabled online abuse against girls, women and some men who participate in digital feminist activism. According to Citron (2014) some of the Internet’s key features, namely anonymity, mobilization of groups and group polarization, make it more likely that people will act destructively. At the same time certain features, such as Google bombs, enhance the destruction’s accessibility, making it more likely to inflict harm (p. 57). As interacting online can lead to fragmentation and polarization of opinions, it is no surprise that expressing feminist views may trigger vulgar counter-reactions.

Since 2014, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2018) have studied the experiences of organizers of feminist campaigns and those who have contributed to them by using hashtags, such as #MeToo and #BeenRapedNeverReported. Their approach to studying

digital feminist activism is rather unique because they combine the perspective of how digital tools are used and the experiences of the users.

Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2018) have focused on Twitter as a platform which also happens to be one of the main digital tools of the #MeToo Movement. Their findings indicate that negativity, hostility or trolling in response to expressing feminist views online is a common experience. Within their study of 46 active Twitter users who self-defined as “feminist activists”, 72% of the respondents had experienced online abuse. These experiences included a wide range of practices starting from mean comments, such as “you are ugly”, to multiple attacks on the activist’s Twitter feed or graphic rape and death threats. Notwithstanding the online abuse, most participants persisted in their digital feminist activism and developed strategies to cope with harassment. (Mendes et al. 2018, p. 242–243).

It is important to note that engaging in digital feminist activism can create mixed feelings among participants even though they would not encounter online abuse. The #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag trended in 2014 and it was in many ways similar to the #MeToo hashtag. It was used by girls and women to share stories of sexual violence and why they did not report the assaults to authorities at the time. (Mendes et al. 2018, p. 237).

After analyzing hundreds of tweets with the hashtag #BeenRapedNeverReported and interviewing girls and women who had used it, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2018) found that participating in the #BeenRapedNeverReported hashtag was both a comforting and triggering experience. Many participants described how the hashtag evoked difficult and upsetting emotions although they also emphasized the importance of the support of other women and girls. (Mendes et al. 2018, p. 238). It is very likely that the user experience of the #MeToo hashtag would be very similar. Thus, it can be concluded that digital feminist activism has a complex nature and it is often challenged by misogynist views. Women, girls and men who engage in digital feminist activism are at risk of online abuse. Sometimes the activism itself might evoke consuming and difficult emotions.

Overall achievements of the movement in terms of social capital formation — Eleanor Suovilla

This part of the essay will discuss the overall achievements of the movement in terms of social capital formation. The focus is on trying to reflect whether digital networks can affect social capital formation offline.

Collective and connective logic of actions

According to Bennet and Segerberg (2012), when communication becomes a prominent part of the organizational structure there are two underlying logics of action: collective and the connective. The collective logic of action emphasizes how it makes no sense for a rational individual to contribute towards resolving a common problem if the final result is unclear or if there is an opportunity for free riding. The logic also requires more efforts in achieving a collective identification which in turn demands resources and a more

extensive formal organizational structure. Out of the two logics this is the traditional one which is challenged by the logic of connective action.

The connective logic of action according to Bennet and Segerberg (2012, p. 11) “applies increasingly to life in late modern societies in which formal organizations are losing their grip on individuals, and group ties are being replaced by large-scale, fluid social networks.” The core of this logic is *digitally networked action* (DNA) which highlights the significant role that personalized action has in post-industrial democracies. People want more direct opportunities of engaging and self-expression while simultaneously detaching themselves from formal organizations, ideologies or political parties. Grossi brings forward his definition of a democracy of the individualized citizens which is characterized as a “intertwining and permanent conflict among social systems and worlds-in-life, between government and cultures of civil society, institutional power and individual empowerment” (2015, p. 28-29). An interesting question is whether networks that are built according to a connective logic could still enhance the level of social capital offline even when the logic itself does not require the construction of a unified “we” online (Bennet & Segerberg, 2012).

Bennet and Segerberg (2012) underline that the connective logic is about personal expression achieved by sharing. The formed connective networks place technology at the core of their function as they see digital media as their organizing agent. The individualized citizen of the 21st century according to Grossi therefore utilizes these technologies as the basis of citizenship, the argumentative-deliberative discursive located online (2015, p. 28). Therefore, democracy is no longer about searching for consensus but rather about contention and self-empowerment. In a sense the entire online network that the #MeToo campaign has produced could be analyzed by placing the communicative processes at the center of attention as the #MeToo movement became globally known once the #MeToo campaign went viral on Twitter.

According to Blaschke, Schoeneborn and Seidl (2012) there is an alternative method of trying to understand what organizations are, what the role of communication within them is and how they construct meaning. They introduce the approach of *communication constitutes organizations* (CCO) in comparison to network analysis which puts individuals at the center of attention. The CCO is best suited to elucidate the meso or translocal level of organizations. By using this approach one can study how an organization emerges on the local level and becomes a larger entity on the translocal level by examining various communication episodes. Essentially the approach highlights communication as the constitutive part of an organization as it has the ability to bring forward the processual, historically situated and politically contested character of organizing (Blaschke, Schoeneborn & Seidl 2012). The notions above could be combined with the thoughts of O’Hallarn (2016) when thinking about the link between social capital generation, Internet technologies and communication processes as the building blocks of a network. O’Hallarn (2016) mentions that one way of thinking about the construction of social capital is to see it as a result of the digital, connected network itself. Gibson, Howard and Ward add that social capital can be measured “either by studying the

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aggregate levels of association in a population, or by fully enumerating the density and reach of a particular individual's network of associations" (2000, p. 5).

Social capital formation

When it comes to the #MeToo movement it becomes challenging to understand if the communicative processes in the digital environment have managed to increase social capital offline. Sajuria, vanHeerde-Hudson, Hudson, Dasandi and Theocharis (2015) study in their research whether social media has led to the formation of bridging and bonding capital. They present in their article Putnam's objections for such a process as he saw that social capital cannot be fostered in a digital environment. The authors conversely claim that social media could serve as a platform which would lower initial limits to communication such as gender, race or disability. Gibson, Howard and Ward (2000) echo accordingly that an increasing level of women have moved on-line in the UK and USA since 1998. Sajuria et.al respectively argue "that Twitter and Facebook discussions create social networks, operating under norms of trust and reciprocity, that are able to mobilize resources and information" (2015, p. 712).

Sajuria et al. conducted research on the "online social architecture of networks of Twitter connections and conversations" in order to find evidence for patterns of bridging and bonding social capital (2015, p. 735). They found that ICTs have the potential of forming bonding capital but bridging capital formation did not seem to form organically. They did point out that there is an element of intentionality that is required in bridging the social capital of online environments. People from within the networks need to engage as brokers in order to produce bridging ties between networks. They did highlight that further research is necessary in order to understand whether the content of those networks and connections can provide evidence of social capital formation offline (Sajuria et al., 2015). The question of whether online connectedness has effects on social capital formation and political activity in the real world is a very complicated one which cannot be answered in this part of the essay.

The #MeToo campaign certainly raised the public consciousness regarding sexual violence as the collective communication flows happening online had a spillover effect bringing the topic into national arenas of discussion and ultimately taking the discussion to a global level. There have been several positive outcomes worldwide as mentioned in the previous section. The individuals of the #MeToo campaign network therefore were the brokers of bridging social capital but the question that remains open is whether the content of their communicative processes furthered the bridging of social capital. In other words, according to Sajuria et. al (2015) a distinction has to be made "between the thinner, transactional view of connective action and the thicker, transformational view of social capital". This essay does not have an answer to whether the #MeToo campaigns communication network succeeded in bridging social capital offline. That being said, the campaign certainly serves as an interesting object of study in terms of conceptualizing how the connections may have the potential of forming positive externalities in the form of social capital (Sajuria et.al, 2015).

Conclusions

Section two examined the relation between technological innovations and society through the example of digital media and the #MeToo movement. Just like with every technological innovation, digital media should also be examined as a part of society, not as a separate phenomenon. Digital media allowed the #MeToo movement to create and define a new social and political discussion. The fact that the #MeToo movement was created on social media is an essential part of the overall effects of the movement. The medium through which a discussion in society takes place has an effect to the final outcome.

As social activism, the #MeToo movement developed into a major campaign and discussion beyond Twitter and the Internet itself. Traditional news media helped spread the discussion across western societies. The movement had multiple positive consequences, as discussed in section three, mostly with regard to the culture of silence and rape. People speaking up about abuse encouraged other people to speak up, leading to a cycle of breaking the silence surrounding rape. The issue was taken seriously; several laws were proposed to be changed (in the U.S. alone), while many employers checked and updated their procedures on handling and reporting sexual harassment. The effects on rape culture were based on confronting men not only as abusers but also as silent bystanders. Many men also realized their own harmful ways and appeared dedicated to teach their children about the concept of consent.

Today, all social movements are faced with new challenges created by digital media and technology. Thus, the #MeToo movement also had its negative outcomes. Section four addressed the whole social movement critically. Within a broader framework, the question of how the Habermasian public sphere and deliberative democracy had been challenged by the digital revolution was also contemplated.

It could be concluded that certain features of the Internet enhance online abuse. Online interaction may also lead to fragmentation or polarization of opinions which might explain why digital feminist activism often encounters vulgar counter-reactions. Considering the framing of social movements, such as the #MeToo Movement is crucial in order to reduce the polarization of opinions and online abuse towards participants.

The fifth section reflected on whether the content of the communicative processes of the #MeToo campaign could create bridging capital in the real world. Even though an answer to the question is beyond the scope of the essay, it presents an intriguing topic of research. According to O'Hallarn (2016) the first step would be to identify if the public sphere can be proved to exist in digital environments in the first place. Further research could take place in order to identify if social capital offline could be created by the online public sphere. Next, it would be beneficial to determine if political activity directly results from the digital public sphere or if political activity has alternatively required the formation of the by-product of an online public sphere operating under the logic of connectedness, namely social capital.

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Part VI

Democracy, Communication, Algorithmic Governance



6.1 Ideals and Agency in the Fight Against Misinformation on Online Platforms

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