The Semiotic Use of Language in the #MeToo Movement: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The paper explores the semiotic use of language in the social media campaign of #MeToo to ascertain how far it contributed to the popularity and transformation of the movement. In doing so, the #MeToo movement will be divided for analysis into three waves (thematic and not chronological), signifying different stages of its growth: from the time of its inception, to its period of extreme popularity, till the present day to examine how media discourse and Hollywood celebrities bore a strong impact upon the direction and development of the movement. The primary objective of the research is to explore and analyze the depiction of #MeToo on social media platforms and the ensuing repercussions: the gradual divergence of #MeToo from its original goal of female empowerment to endorsing celebrity culture and triggering misandrist attitudes. A multimodal discourse analysis was conducted upon a sample of ten internet images and seven tweets denoting the three strands of the #MeToo campaign. Michael Halliday's SFL approach was applied to analyze the three meta functions of semiotic language 'ideational, textual and interactional' as identified in the #MeToo discourse. The findings reiterated the stance that although #MeToo may still be running strong as a purely pro feminine movement against gross sexual (male) misconduct, its projection by social media may have different connotations in that it provokes ideologies that are alien to the spirit of the movement. The movement has been criticized for promoting misandry and a misdirected feminist viewpoint.

Keywords: #MeToo, social activism, celebrity culture, multimodality, sexual misconduct

1. Introduction

The strength of the #MeToo movement lies in the role social media has played in its overwhelming success over the years to the extent that it became a visual discourse of power. The movement is among several other feminist movements that have sporadically emerged on the international

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scenario with the common objective of fighting for the rights of afflicted women. One such example is #Times Up, the post #MeToo movement, initiated by Hollywood celebrities against sexual misconduct. However, the #MeToo movement is unique in that it has outlasted many other contemporary movements and has won unprecedented popularity worldwide. The primary reason being that the people involved in the movement were all high-profile individuals ranging from Hollywood to Washington. Secondly, the movement received a lot of hype on the print and social media. Thirdly, it initiated several other feminist approaches towards debunking patriarchal hegemony through an aggressive feminist stance.

The movement was initiated in 2006 by Tarana Burke (a civil rights activist and sexual abuse victim) on a social media forum, 'My Space' to raise awareness about the growing menace of sexual harassment, particularly in the professional arena or more precisely at workplaces. Other prominent advocates of the movement include Hollywood actresses Alyssa Milano, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ashley Judd, Jennifer Lawrence and Uma Thurman who spurred the movement by relating their own experiences of sexual harassment and raised a nationwide uproar against the crime itself and the alleged perpetrators. Among the accused was Harvey Weinstein, who is usually credited with carrying the entire weight of the movement with his notorious sexual digressions and for introducing a new trend called 'Weinstein Effect'. Although, #MeToo amassed enormous street power in the form of worldwide rallies and protests such as the 'Women's March 2017', the ' Women's March 2018' and the #MeToo Survivor's March, based in countries like the United States, UK, France and Italy, its presence on the virtual social space cannot be undermined. The #MeToo movement took the internet by storm and its logo #MeToo pronounced 'hashtag MeToo' went viral within days of its first public usage and invoked millions of chain responses from celebrity women across the world. Within days, the #MeToo logo disseminated into stark visual representations: pictures, images, posters, celebrity tweets and Facebook posts . The #MeToo movement

continues to dominate social media, not through passive adherence to its original goals but by undergoing major shifts and transformations.

The paper proposes a multimodal discourse analysis of the #MeToo narrative from the time of its inception till the current day by highlighting the three distinct waves of its evolution and development as perceived through its projection on various social media platforms:

1. The first wave of the movement was motivated towards arousing sympathy for the victims of sexual harassment, urging them to speak out and join the community of survivors. At this stage, the movement rose as a purely female voice: promising support, security, and justice for the aggrieved. It was also a strong statement against patriarchal suppression.

2. The second wave brought more fame for the movement as it was already emerging into a fashionable trend involving Hollywood celebrities. Thus, #MeToo was gradually diverging from its native stance of being each woman's voice to becoming a fashion statement of celebrity women whose sexual experiences with rich and famous men instead of creating empathy added unwarranted glamor to #MeToo and its cause. At this stage, #MeToo had become ferocious and vindictive, giving early signs of misandrist attitudes by initiating investigations and arrests of high-profile men accused of sexual misconduct.

3. The third and final wave was an entropic fusion of all the earlier goals of the movement plus all that the media was feeding into it in terms of negative exploitation of feminism, publicity stunts by the rich and the resourceful, thus creating a misandrist sentiment among the masses.

In view of the above context, the paper will explore the language of the #MeToo discourse as it emerged through its different phases of development by using the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach in conducting a multi modal discourse analysis or simply the SF-MD approach. The systemic functional (SF) approach to multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is concerned with the theory and practice of analyzing meaning arising from the use of multiple semiotic resources in discourses

which range from written, printed and electronic texts to material lived-in reality (O'Halloran, 2008).

2. Literature Review

The #MeToo movement, ever since its popularity in the year 2017 has become an interesting topic for researchers of feminist activism. It has in turn greatly benefitted from the extensive literature produced upon it. Since the movement is primarily concerned with winning women's rights and bringing about 'change' in terms of ending patriarchal oppression and sexual misconduct or to put it differently, 'empowerment through empathy', it was immediately taken up by the media to become "one of the most high-profile examples of digital feminist activism" (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2018). #MeToo thus became an icon of liberation from injustice. Much of the existing literature and research on #MeToo is about the philanthropic nature of the movement. It is seen as a powerful female narrative and one of the most vocal feminine voices of modern times, a change inducing platform and more decisively it is vastly perceived as "the trajectory of healing" (Gieseler, 2019). Although #MeToo was hailed for its profound humanitarianism reflected mostly through Burke's assertive statements such as #MeToo being "about survivors" and bigger than the people who pioneered it : "bigger than me and bigger than Alyssa Milano" (See Hillstorm, 2018) and although Burke and other activists conceptualized #MeToo "as part of a broader counter-white-supremacist-patriarchal movement" (See Rodino-Colcino, 2018) , the movement nonetheless created a negative impact upon the socio cultural sensibility of the masses which was indeed a detrimental factor to its rising popularity. There was a growing fear that the central message of the movement ,'bringing change to black and brown communities' maybe lost in the shimmer of high profile men and women. #MeToo was thus tagged as a white celebrity movement with racist connotations since it served as a "reminder for people of colour that silence is harder to break for those who are marginalized" (Harris & Morris, 2018). For many critics , #MeToo was not merely a vulnerable social media campaign but a dense discourse which did not allow for "an overly

optimistic and simplistic rendering" since there was needed "a much more nuanced and critical unpacking of the movement" to realize its connections to the more dynamic disciplines of "gender, sexuality, race, geography, law, politics and history" and for grasping its "disruptive potential" (Fileborn & Howes, 2019). Among other disruptive potentials, was the growing fear regarding the 'misandrist sentiment' that #MeToo was apparently breeding by "exposing the pervasiveness of sexual violence and holding abusers accountable". The movement was accused of encouraging women to make false allegations against men with the serious repercussions of damaging their professional careers and creating uncertainty about the "boundaries of acceptable [sexual] behavior" (Hillstorm, 2018). There was also a widespread speculation about the consistency of #MeToo and the role of Hollywood celebrities in its durability which gave rise to such questions as: "Has it failed to include more marginalized groups? Will it be abandoned when Hollywood moves on to its next cause?" (Eboch, 2019). The popularity of #MeToo rested primarily on social factors: its perception and reception by people. However, its cumulative impact was of a more intellectual nature in that it reformulated and restructured many conservative notions of modern living. The most prominent restructuring rendered by #MeToo was the reconceptualization of feminism, its rubrics and parameters which triggered another debate, one related to the issue of cross-cultural female inclusiveness and identification with the #MeToo discourse: what was the criteria and the eligibility standard for women to be a part of #MeToo? Statistical analysis revealed the cross sectional inclusiveness of #MeToo in that females of different age groups and classes: Caucasian, Black, Heterosexual and LGBTQ + women identified with the movement (see Armstrong-Parham, 2020). Just as #MeToo may have re shaped and restructured the notion of gender roles as embedded within the larger concepts of patriarchy and feminism, it also exacerbated debates on how to define 'sexuality' and all that it entails. #MeToo was criticized for 'its more politicized engagement with matters of sexual politics" and for rendering many areas of immediate concern "invisible and unintelligible: such as domestic violence, harassment beyond the workplace and issues related to under privileged and disabled women etc. (see also Gill & Orgad, 2018). #MeToo activism had far reaching implications since it initiated narratives that went much beyond focusing on the more generic aspects of the movement such as its pros and cons, the debate on feminism and patriarchy and of course the concept of sexual

harassment. Much of the post #MeToo research was concerned with studying the effects of the movement upon specific environments: cultural, domestic, pedagogical, and institutional (See Goncharenko, 2019; Veissière, 2018 ; Ross & Bookchin, 2020 ; Alvinius & Holmberg, 2019). There is also a vast body of research that focuses on the psychological and behavioral impetus of #MeToo (See Kovach, 2020; Hegarty & Tarzia , 2019) in exploring how sexual violence affects gender roles, mental health, workplace discourse and the power relations between the victims and perpetrators .

Although, these different approaches to #MeToo have contributed immensely in the understanding and perception of the movement and for giving it more strength and vigor, there is still much to discover about #MeToo.The paper argues that the #MeToo narrative is distinctly divided into three categories:
  1. #MeToo behind the scenes: the non- profit organization
  2. #MeToo of the intelligentsia/academia: a fertile ground for multidisciplinary research
  3. #MeToo of the social media: an internet sensation

The current research is therefore unique in its attempt at assessing how the external features of #MeToo reflected its core objectives such as those which make the movement accessible and tangible to the common masses. In other words, how far does the the semiotic portrayal of #MeToo harmonize with its other conceptualizations: the social welfare, the intelligentsia, and the internet?

2.1 Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study
In the initial period of its advent, #MeToo was specifically aimed at healing oppressed women and becoming a colossal voice against social injustice. Soon after, it began to be identified as a forum for the rich and resourceful with little or nothing to offer to the truly aggrieved non elite women. A serious concern regarding the increasing popularity of this movement is its use of manipulative language to encourage social inequality through

marginalizing the common woman, glamorizing the concept of sexual harassment, and encouraging misandry.

The study is significant in investigating the powerful influence of semiotic language upon social media movements such as #MeToo. It is also important in assessing how #MeToo discourse can be deconstructed tracing linguistic patterns in the social media representation of the movement through different stages of its growth and development. The dissemination of #MeToo discourse on social media forums has been so varied and diverse that it has transformed into a complex and intricate narrative which cannot be approached from a single vantage point. The paper examines the different linguistic modes: text, colors, pictures and images used for #MeToo projection to examine how semiotic language influences social and cultural ideologies through a reassessment of conservative channels of thought, concerning issues such as feminism, patriarchy and appropriate sexual conduct. The study may prove useful in understanding how a multimodal discourse such as #MeToo can influence social attitudes and create new avenues of thought about sensitive and stigmatized subjects by mitigating or exacerbating hostile responses towards the same. In other words, the study incites heterogeneous approaches to the social media representation of #MeToo by highlighting its three prominent strands.

2.2 Aims & Objectives
1. To explore the semiotic use of language in the #MeToo Movement.
2. To highlight the role of print and social media in the overwhelming popularity of the #MeToo campaign.
3. To assess the gradual divergence of the #MeToo social media campaign from its original motive of supporting sexually harassed females to endorsing a celebrity culture, triggering misandry, and distorting the concept of feminism worldwide.

2.3 Research Questions
1) How is the #MeToo movement being projected on print and social media in terms of its goals and objectives**?**
2) How does media language reflect the growth and digression of #MeToo?

3. Conceptual Framework

The figure shows the roadmap of the movement, its progress and direction. The first box shows the cause and origin of the movement: to provide a safe platform for aggrieved women, specifically in cases of sexual misconduct. Also, to encourage women to raise their voice against patriarchal suppression. The second box shows how #MeToo acquired a face through social media, semiotic representation, and the intrusion of Hollywood celebrities. The third box shows the apparent shift in its stance from being an entirely pro feminine movement to becoming an intimidating discourse with diverse connotations. The fourth box shows the nature of the data used for analyzing and assessing the various stages of #MeToo's development and digression. The data comprises of visuals and images and therefore the research framework chosen for analysis is Multimodal Discourse Analysis described as follows:

> "The analysis and interpretation of language use is contextualized in conjunction with other semiotic resources which are simultaneously used for the construction of meaning. For example, in addition to linguistic choices and their typographical instantiation on the printed page, multimodal analysis takes into account the functions and meanings of visual images, together with the meaning arising

from the integrated use of the two semiotic resources" (O'Halloran , 2004).

Language is then " just one among the many resources for making meaning" and "the aim of MMDA is to elaborate tools that can provide insight into the relations of the meanings of a community and its semiotic manifestations" (Kress, 2013). Since #MeToo is largely defined by its social media thrust , MDA was believed to be the best approach towards deconstructing its semiotic resources: art, images, backdrop, colours and text . Its compelling imagery and captivating language provide a keen 'insight' into the 'meanings of a community' as to how the movement was percieved and what significance it held for the communities among which it grew and flourished.

4. Methods and Materials

The research will utilize the qualitative research design. Data will be collected from internet sources: Google Images and Twitter. The study chose Postmodernism as the broader paradigm in keeping with the research objective of deconstructing the #MeToo discourse. The #MeToo movement is a very dense and prolific discourse having layers of meaning and many interwoven concepts that add to its appeal and impact. It has been interpreted multifariously by the individual, by social and religious cults, by institutions and organizations and has contributed substantially towards redefining sexual oppression, feminism and gender bound power relations. In being multi-dimensional, #MeToo resists a singularity of purpose and perception and offers boundless opportunities for debunking the grand narratives of traditional thought. One of the major reasons for the success of the movement is that it is in harmony with today's postmodern world which negates the existence of an absolute truth or reality. It is a world where reality is socially constructed and where no text (written, oral or visual) can have a single interpretation. Multiplicity of meaning and fragmentation of reality are the key norms in art, literature and cinema and the construal of meaning depends on a postmodern approach to life. #MeToo, thus remains the most vibrant and articulate statement of the postmodern era through its powerful media depiction and its open-ended discourse.

The sample will comprise of ten images / pictures and seven tweets depicting various aspects and stages of #MeToo, obtained from different internet sources as mentioned above.

Since the research is using qualitative research design, no formal and sequential data collection framework will be adopted. Data will be collected through a careful sample selection from internet sources, keeping in view the research questions and other prerequisites. The findings will be based on the measurement of variables. The independent variable (#MeToo movement) will be expressed through the dependent variable (language of the movement) which is constantly influenced by the intervening variable (external / social factors). In other words, #MeToo is treated as an independent variable, whose reception, direction, and sway (intervening variables) will affect the dependent variable (#MeToo language). As mentioned earlier, the research uses the SFMD approach for analyzing data. According to Halliday (1978), Systemic Functional Linguistics recognizes the powerful role language plays in the meaning making process as 'language shapes, and is shaped by' its social context. SFL also identifies three abstract functions of language called 'meta functions' : 'ideational, interpersonal and textual' which are reflected in every spoken word of our speech and which bear a strong connection with the context in which they appear ((J.Schleppegrell, 2013). The current research will attempt to deconstruct the #MeToo discourse using the multimodal approach to SFL with special focus on the three meta functions of language.

Figure 1:   Framework for Analysis

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┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Multimodal Discourse│ ───▶ │  Michael Halliday   │ ───▶ │ Data: visuals and   │
│      Analysis       │      │        SFL          │      │ images taken from   │
│                     │      │                     │      │   the internet      │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│                     │      │ Measuring Variables:│      │                     │
│                     │      │ Independent variable│      │                     │
│ Sample: Ten images  │      │ : The MeToo movement│      │ Analysis : Multimodal│
│ denoting the three  │ ───▶ │ : concept and       │ ───▶ │ Discourse Analysis  │
│ strands of the      │      │ ideology. Intervening│     │ using the SFL       │
│ movement            │      │ Variable: Public    │      │ approach            │
│                     │      │ reaction and the    │      │                     │
│                     │      │ general sway of the │      │                     │
│                     │      │ movement. Dependent │      │                     │
│                     │      │ Variable: Language  │      │                     │
│                     │      │ employed to project │      │                     │
│                     │      │ the movement        │      │                     │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Theoretical         │      │                     │      │                     │
│ Framework: Postmodern│ ───▶ │     Findings        │ ───▶ │    Conclusion       │
│ Theory              │      │                     │      │                     │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘
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4.1 Limitations of the Study

The study could not present the data in a chronological form because there was no means to record the precise date and time of the internet postings and all the tweets used as the sample set. This is partly due to the fact that the #MeToo repertoire does not exist in an organised and structured form on the internet.

5. Analysis and Discussion

As stated above, the # MeToo discourse will be analyzed from three different perspectives or meta functions of language.

1. The ideational meta function: It is the 'content function' of language, how language makes the world tangible to the reader and listener. It highlights the events, entities, actions, and processes that make up the physical world. The semiotic language of the #MeToo campaign is a vivid and powerful portrayal of the social world and thus it possesses the ideational meta function.

2. The interpersonal meta function: how language creates an interactive bond between the speaker and the listener. The #MeToo language creates a very compelling link between the body of the movement: concept of female empowerment and the victimized women.

3. The textual meta function: how language is cohesively structured: lexically, semantically, pragmatically, and stylistically to create meaning. The semiotic, media, verbal, and visual language of the #MeToo Movement is highly effective and forceful. It establishes a strong link between the listener/spectator and the context in which the language is being used.

Data will be divided into three sections in accordance with the three waves of #MeToo . Each section consists of a descriptive analysis followed by a figurative representation of the three linguistic meta functions of the #MeToo discourse.

5.1. First Wave: Empowerment through Empathy

Since the first wave of #MeToo focused on repairing and healing, the language employed to do so was a blend of support and sympathy for the aggrieved. The depiction on social media varied from colorful art to gloomy real-life pictures. The purpose being to shock and attract people into acknowledgement and awareness of the social cause at hand. The following sample consisting of four images denotes the language of the first wave of #MeToo:

Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

shutterstock.com · 782759239

Image 4

we believe you
you're not alone
you're not to blame

#MeToo

women's aid
until women & children are safe

www.womensaid.org.uk

The prominent themes that emerge from these images are philanthropy, equality, solidarity, and communal healing. Image 1.0 does not use any verbal language apart from the hashtag statement and the entire effect is

carried through colors, gesture, and the general demeanor of the picture. The dark background, the hand covering the face, and the palm reading #MeToo create a solemn picture, arousing sympathy and expressing the need for immediate action.

Image 2.0 and Image 3.0 carry the common themes of togetherness and equality. The emphasis is on 'the color of the skin' not being a hurdle in the way of justice. Image 3.0 shows three women joined in cross cultural bonds. The brown woman in hijab, the colored woman with tight curls and the fair skinned woman with bob hair are all shown holding the same placard reading #MeToo. Religion and nationality are thus exempted from the #MeToo cause.

The outstretched hands raised in the air, project the same message of unity and solidarity as was conveyed in image 2.0 with the emphasis once again on a 'common cause' and a 'common voice'. The symbol of hands of so many different colors raised in unison reiterates that #MeToo looks beyond racial and religious discrimination in its efforts to heal humanity. Raised hands symbolize another motto of the movement: the need to acknowledge societal brutality and to acknowledge one's status as a 'victim' and a 'wronged individual'.

Image 4.0 is more articulate in expressing the developing aspirations of #MeToo. It is related to the first wave of the movement because at this stage #MeToo was in its preliminary phase of instilling hope and courage among victims, specifically women. This image also shows #MeToo as evolving into a specifically feminine movement. The language of first wave #MeToo is placid, reassuring and comforting. As to the use of colors in #MeToo art, pink remains the customary color for highlighting female issues like the pink ribbon denoting breast cancer awareness. The language of #MeToo is disseminated according to the SFL model as follows:

Figure 2: Meta functions of language in First Wave #MeToo:

Ideational : #MeToo is introduced through the high notions of equality, human rights, solidarity, compassion and support . Images and pictures show people of all nations joined in a common cause irrespective of race and color. The first wave focuses on human suffering and community healing

Interpersonal : #MeToo created an instant bond with the affectees and the general public through an empathetic attitude, urging the victims to speak out, words of encouragement. This was done partially to gather support for the still young movement and more importantly to relocate #MeToo victims.

Textual : Powerful social media representations , captivating colors, catchy slogans, emotive language, heart breaking pictures of victims. A cohesive bond created between the speaker, the spectator and the context. #MeToo in its first wave was motivated towards healing, sheltering and supporting victims. At this stage, it's stance was a defensive rather than aggressive .

5.2. Second Wave: Female Empowerment and Celebrity Involvement

By the time #MeToo entered its second phase, its language was already reflecting the growing momentum of the movement. The prominent social media themes of this #MeToo phase focus on female emancipation and the need to curb patriarchal domination. The social media depiction of #MeToo at this stage consisted of vivacious images of processions and rallies, smiling and confident women holding banners and placards displaying bold statements as seen in the images below:

Image 5

Image 6

#MeToo depiction on social media moved from visual art to factual representations of a movement which was swiftly becoming more concrete and physical. The implications of second wave #MeToo were far greater than those associated with the first wave in terms of social media output. Dismal and bleak backdrops transformed into bright and sunny ones, terrified faces now bore smiles and the soft tone gave way to menacing statements as seen in Image 5.0 and 6.0. The words 'Don't', 'I can' and 'Powerless' show a defiant and vindictive stance which is in complete contrast with 'you are not alone' and 'we believe you'. The facial expressions of the pink capped women add to the intensity of the pictures: fear is replaced by courage. No more face hiding, no more outstretched palms. The message rings loud and clear. The social media representation of #MeToo was boosted by Hollywood intervention and at this stage there was another major shift in the language of the movement. #MeToo discourse was invaded by celebrity tweets, stories, and posters. With celebrity intervention, there was another shift in #MeToo focus, yet again. Social media was teeming with celebrity news, scandals, sympathy posts and supportive tweets and this added a new dimension to #MeToo: the dimension of glamorized sexuality which in turn took the movement further away from its core agenda: rescuing the unprivileged victims of sexual assault. The

support and popularity which #MeToo received from Hollywood was mostly in the form of sensational stories of famous showbiz women splashed on social media pages. These stories were bold confessions of traumatizing sexual experiences at the hands of predators whose identities were exposed by most victims. The basic distinction between the First Wave #MeToo and Second Wave #MeToo was that while the former was more focused towards pulling victims out of the stupor of sexual abuse by offering a healing hand, with little or no emphasis on storytelling and identifying or accusing the predator, the second wave was more vindictive and judgmental in encouraging women to demand justice and to raise awareness about sexual misconduct. Let us assume, for the sake of comparison that Image 7.0 symbolizes the original (or black) #Metoo and Image 8.0 symbolizes the transformed (or Hollywood) #MeToo. This comparison can further illustrate the development of #MeToo which began as a single woman's struggle for the millions of faceless and voiceless black women and later evolving into a global celebrity movement projecting white faces with ringing voices. Image 7.0 shows Tarana Burke's silhouette, while ignoring the minute details of the face but with obvious stress on the skin color. At this stage, the social media representation of #MeToo was that of a philanthropic movement for the marginalized women of color. The emphasis was on healing rather than speaking and thus the total absence of the voicing organ, the mouth in image 7.0. On the other hand, image 8.0 shows a completely diverse aspect of the movement in showing smiling, confident, glamorous, white women. #MeToo at this stage was no longer the colored woman's cry for justice but a trend setter for glamorous sex.
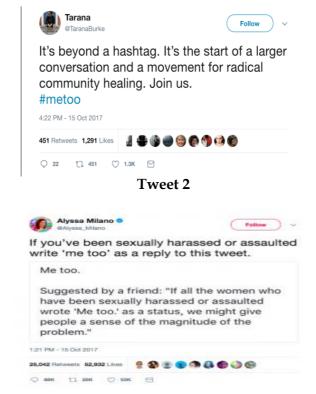
Image 7

Thus, #MeToo language in the second wave became egotistical, accusative, and slanderous. The human cause and the philanthropist spirit affiliated with the first wave was lost to the new environment of hostility and anger. Following is a comparison of First Wave and Second Wave #MeToo Twitter:
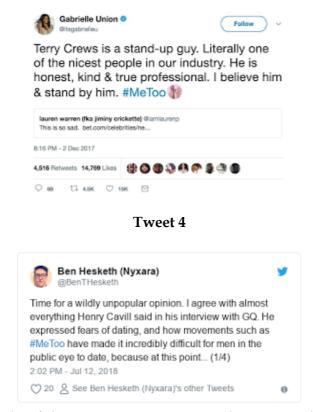
5.3 First Wave #MeToo:

Tweet 1

Tweet 2

5.4 Second Wave #MeToo

Tweet 3

Gabrielle Union
@itsgabrielleu

Follow

Terry Crews is a stand-up guy. Literally one of the nicest people in our industry. He is honest, kind & true professional. I believe him & stand by him. #MeToo

lauren warren (fka jiminy crickette) @iamiaurenp
This is so sad. bet.com/celebrities/he...

8:16 PM - 2 Dec 2017

4,516 Retweets 14,769 Likes

68   4.5K   16K

Tweet 4

Ben Hesketh (Nyxara)
@BenTHesketh

Time for a wildly unpopular opinion. I agree with almost everything Henry Cavill said in his interview with GQ. He expressed fears of dating, and how movements such as #MeToo have made it incredibly difficult for men in the public eye to date, because at this point... (1/4)

2:02 PM - Jul 12, 2018

20   See Ben Hesketh (Nyxara)'s other Tweets

Since the weight of the movement, in its second wave mostly consisted of celebrity narratives, it created a conflict between different social cults regarding the parameters pertaining to sexual misconduct. At this point in time #MeToo (on social media) appeared divided in its mission. The first two tweets represent #MeToo in its true spirit: the use of words such as 'beyond', 'radical', 'healing' and 'magnitude' show a selfless and altruistic spirit. On the other hand, Tweet 3.0 and 4.0 reflect the repercussive effects of the movement which entailed backlash and criticism of those involved and the movement itself.

Figure 3: Meta functions of language in Second Wave #MeToo

Ideational: The #MeToo discourse became more glamorous and captivating with the involvement of Hollywood : pictures and posters featured celebrities and movie stars rather than common women. It acquired power and influence. #MeToo language became controversial and engaging . A strong bond was created between #MeToo and the elite. A social reality was constructed: #MeToo is for the rich and famous!

Interpersonal:Second Wave #MeToo language was bold and provocative. It became more verbal and vocal. Real life incidents of sexual misconduct appeared on social media accounts of celebrities. Sensational language was used for the purpose of making headlines and triggering controversy. Motivational and supportive slogans were replaced by celebrity statements.

Textual: Second Wave #MeToo language was structured towards making the movement 'celebrity oriented'. It was used either as a statement of solidarity on social media or attached to harrowing accounts of harassment and abuse recorded by men and women, especially in the film industry – and the most prominent voices belonged to famous actors.

5.4 Third Wave: Backlash and Speculation

The language of #MeToo in the third and present stage of the movement is an ambiguous blend of its seminal objectives, the pervasive influence of external agencies and the postmodern perception of its ideals. The third wave of #MeToo took the world by storm: triggering misandrist sentiment, redefining the entire concept of sexual misconduct and raising serious concerns about male rights. The language of third wave #MeToo has witnessed a massive shift from the earlier two waves in its social media projection. There are implications that perhaps #MeToo needs to stop. There is also a strong feeling that #MeToo has been blown out of proportion and is being misused to serve purposes quite foreign to the movement's original goals. The following sample consists of images and tweets reflecting #Third Wave MeToo with its retaliatory tone:

Tweet 5

Candace Owens ✓
@RealCandaceO

Biggest problem with the #metoo 🙄 movement is that it turned sexual assault into a trend and simultaneously drowned out the voices of real rape victims— who deserve to be heard.

I will speak about all of this at #YWLS2018 in a few days.

It's time for real women empowerment.

5:06 PM – 11 Jun 2018

1,595 Retweets 6,619 Likes

○ 257   ↻ 1.6K   ♡ 6.6K

Tweet 6

Ben Hesketh (Nyxara)
@BenTHesketh

Time for a wildly unpopular opinion. I agree with almost everything Henry Cavill said in his interview with GQ. He expressed fears of dating, and how movements such as #MeToo have made it incredibly difficult for men in the public eye to date, because at this point... (1/4)
2:02 PM - Jul 12, 2018

♡ 20   See Ben Hesketh (Nyxara)'s other Tweets

Image 8

Image 11

Social media representation of theThird Wave #MeToo mirrors the movement's segmentation into different ideological and social sects. It also expresses the mistrust in the movement and the realization that #MeToo was diverging into a 'trend' and was 'drowning' the ' voices of real rape victims'. Secondly, a misandrist element was surfacing which met with strong

resistance from the male quarters . Third Wave #MeToo had made dating 'incredibly difficult' for ' men in public eye', reads a celebrity tweet. It was at this provocative stage that #MeToo triggered #HimToo, " a short-lived Twitter-backlash to #MeToo…[which] flourished and floundered [igniting] debates about connectedness on social media, gendered patterns of social media use (and abuse), and the role of social media in a highly polarized political climate in the USA" (Boyle & Rathnayake, 2019).

The force of Third Wave #MeToo lies mostly in the print and broadcast media: celebrity interviews, tweets, press conferences, newspaper headlines, live coverage of celebrity trials as for example the Weinstein trial and conviction. #MeToo, has emerged as an intellectual and discursive discourse challenging and modifying the accepted norms of gender equality, feminism and patriarchy and more simply, the freedom of expression.

Figure 4: Meta functions of language in Third Wave #MeToo:

Ideational: revolutionizing the concept of sexual harassment by sensitizing and broadening it to include transformed notions of feminism, patriarchy and sexual misconduct

Interpersonal : connecting with public through Hollywood appeal . Social media representation of #MeToo was now detached from its original objectives and was tilted towards glamorizing the concept of sexual harassment

Textual: There was a radical shift in the textual representation of #MeToo: defamatory, slanderous and accusative language was being used to promote misandry and to speculate on the usefulness of the movement

The paper in tracing the social media journey of the #MeToo movement attempted to explore the semiotic language of the #MeToo discourse and the implications thereby regarding the goals and objectives of the movement. The findings betrayed major shifts in the portrayal of #MeToo on social media from the time of its birth till the present day. The percieved transition in the #MeToo stance owes largely to the language employed in its social

media construction which for its distinct traits enabled a three fold division of the #MeToo body. The social media representation of the movement unfolded its development and digression during its formative and maturer years through visible changes in the language of its projection. #MeToo being a social media movement is largely tangible to the masses through its language and portrayal. The current research was motivated towards assessing the linguistic shifts in the #MeToo discourse in harmony with its sway and social demand.

6. Conclusion

#MeToo exists as a powerful social media movement with multiple dimensions and manifestations. During the period of its evolution till the time of its utmost popularity, it has experienced radical shifts and digressions in terms of its manifesto, objectives, and projection. The paper attempted to explore the use and role of media language in the social representation of #MeToo with specific focus on the semiotic use of language in its media campaign. For this purpose, a multimodal discourse analysis of #MeToo campaign was conducted using the SFL approach of disseminating the three meta functions of language (Halliday, 1961) as observed in the #MeToo discourse. The findings revealed three distinct strands in the #MeToo discourse, each representing different notions of feminism, patriarchy, sexual misconduct, human rights, and female liberation. Since #MeToo is an all-inclusive movement, it is socially stratified into different communities of affectees based on gender, class, age, and profession. The multifarious perceptions of the movement owe largely to its diverse representations on social media and the ensuing construction of multiple social realities by the public. The findings reveal the influence of the independent, intervening and dependent variable upon each other: as to how the body and content of #MeToo was affected by the language of its depiction and the attitude of the general public which in turn affected its substance and reputation. The paper rests the fame and durability of #MeToo on the larger paradigm of postmodernism with its distrust of stable theories and its insistence upon multiple realities. The #MeToo discourse as reflected on social media testifies to the fact that the movement resists stereotypical dissemination and is prone to constant change and fluctuation.

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