Hashtag Feminism in Romania: #MeToo and Its Effects on Cyberspace Behavior

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Abstract: In the recent years, cyberspace has become an incubator for feminist activism. Cyberfeminism has gained momentum through various online platforms, campaigns, movements, and galvanized women (and – to a certain extent – men) to "move beyond the hashtag" and engage in actions meant to drive socio-political change. The Women's March on Washington in January 2016, for instance, was triggered by a Facebook post, and turned into an unprecedented women's activism action, replicating across the globe. A more recent movement, #MeToo, has emerged into cyberspace and raised issues of credibility, as it tapped into a culture of gender inequality and power relations that created and fostered an environment of intimidation and silence. The unprecedented wave of sexual harassment allegations brought to surface countless confessions from regular women and celebrities who have been pivotal in raising awareness on this issue. However, this cyberfeminist movement also intensified the cyberbullying phenomenon, as the mechanisms of storytelling engaged in #MeToo have not only generated a wave of gendered solidarity, but also one of trivializing – even bashing – such stories, and the individuals who reported previous incidents on social media. This paper analyzes the emergence and development of the #MeToo movement in Romania in the fall of 2017, focusing on storytelling mechanisms employed on Facebook and effects on user behavior, an assessment of social media users' navigation of the phenomenon, in terms of solidarity networks and bullying generated by Romanian women's tackling of a cultural taboo.
Keywords: #MeToo, Romania, feminism, social media, sexual harassment.

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Introduction

The history of feminist thought is commonly presented through the progression of *waves*, each wave representing a certain set of claims, activists, debates, and contributions. Current manifestations of feminism are facilitated by technology, by the internet, and especially social media, and substantiated by common experiences that women share across cultures and social fabrics of various societies. Social media has taken feminism from its third-wave orientation towards exploring women's diverse identities to a fourth wave, which provides a space for a large and unprecedented diversity of voices, perspectives, and experiences. Along with technological development came the possibility to create solidarity among women from different parts of the world, of different ages and social categories, and from different professions, based on common experiences. Harvey argues that this recent feminist wave is rooted in practices associated with digital media and emerging technologies, mainstreaming a "feminist discourse returning to the public sphere, conversations about sexualized violence, threats to reproductive rights, the gender pay gap, sexist language and behavior, and the under-representation of women in many fields"[1]. Among these phenomena, #MeToo has become a manifestation of cyberfeminism, of *hashtag* feminism[2], a sort of virtual solidarity translated into activism, enriching fourth-wave feminism with a variety of confessions and understandings of women's experience with sexual abuse and workplace harassment. #MeToo echoed into the global society and across professional areas, enabling survivors to speak up and share their experience, shifting the focus of the feminist movement towards a collective healing approach, based on collective support and restorative justice[3].

Gender, sexual violence, and social media

Social media platforms enable individuals to express self-disclosure on diverse stigmatized issues, such as mental health, obesity, cancer or sexual abuse[4]. Abuse in general is an extremely traumatic experience, one that people are reluctant to admit in public due to the fear of shame, ostracism, exclusion and retaliation. While it is shown that sexual abuse has numerous long term psychological, health and job-related negative effects, self-disclosures of sexual abuse results in a positive psychological effect[5]. Among the most important mental and psychological negative outcomes of sexual harassment, PTSD, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, mood and behavioral disorders, powerlessness, humiliation, and depression are most frequently mentioned[6]. Occupational stress, absenteeism, lower job satisfaction, commitment and productivity, and employment withdrawal are just few of the job-related factors consistently linked with sexual harassment[7].

Sexual abuse is one form of sexual violence, difficult to address both in the online and offline environment. Looking into female political candidates and officeholders, Krook and Restrepo[8] theorize violence and harassment against women in the following categories:

1. physical violence and harassment - bodily injuries;
2. sexual violence and harassment - sexual acts and attempts at sexual acts by coercion;
3. psychological violence and harassment - hostile behavior and abuse intended to cause emotional damage;
4. economic violence and harassment - degradation and coercion through control over access to economic resources;
5. semiotic violence and harassment - abuse and aggression at the level of portrayals that seek to undermine women's gender identity.

However visible violence against women may be when its subject is a public person, the psychological effects may be as dramatic in cases of workplace or domestic violence. Sexual harassment is one of a range of abusive or counterproductive workplace behaviors, including sex-based harassment, such as verbal put-downs, abusive remarks and marginalizing, racial harassment, bullying, mobbing, or exclusionary behaviors based on gender[9]. It is usually based on hierarchical power relations and has an explicit sexual dimension[10]. Fitzgerald, Swan, and Magley[11] define sexual harassment as "unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding her resources, or threatening her well-being."

Sexual harassment comes in many forms and is usually perceived on a continuum "from non-physical behaviors, such as: sexual teasing, jokes, remarks and comments, displays of offensive sexual materials and intrusive questions about private life, sexual matters or appearance, gestures, to sexual coercion, including offers of rewards, or sexual threats (withdrawal of financial or other entitlements, reductions in work hours, dismissal etc.), to physical expressions of behaviors, such as: kissing, cuddling, massaging, touching, pinching, grabbing, biting, bra-flicking, hitting, licking, groping, undoing clothes, spitting and attempted rape"[12]. Scott and Martin[13] developed a framework model accounting for five main strategies harassers use to damper the outrage, namely: 1) cover up, 2) devaluation of the target, 3) reinterpretation, 4) official channels, and 5) intimidation and bribery.

Four theories have been found to guide sexual harassment research[14]:

1. *natural-biological model*[15] states that SH comes from natural sexual desire of men towards women;
2. *sociocultural model of asymmetrical power relations between men and women*[16] argues that SH results from gender roles of men as sexual agents and women as sexual objects;
3. *the organizational explanation of workplace sexual harassment*[17] focus on three factors prompting SH: the organizational culture (characterized by co-worker solidarity, supervisor harmony, workplace anonymity, and physicality of the work), the gendered nature of the individual's work group and the differential worker power that makes men hierarchic superior to women;
4. *theories of legal consciousness*[18] emphasize the three-step process of naming (perceiving SH as detrimental and making a claim, blaming (hold someone responsible for the injury), and claiming (express grievances and ask for a solution).

Sexual harassment is often met in the medical field, as given the history of male domination and a hierarchical structure with strong power differentials, factors correlated with the incidence of workplace sexual harassment[19]. In a 2014 survey on academic medical faculty (clinician-researchers), Jagsi *et al*.[20] found that 30% of women reported having experienced sexual harassment compared with 4% of men, in the form of either: generalized sexist remarks and behavior, inappropriate sexual advances, subtle bribery to engage in sexual behavior, threats to engage in sexual behavior, or coercive advances. Recognizing sexual harassment is important because perceptions that such experiences are rare may, ironically, increase stigmatization and discourage reporting.

More importantly, sexual harassment empirical research quickly entered feminist and equality of employment opportunity discourse, and translated to laws and practices in different cultural, legal, and political contexts around the world[21]. Translation into practices may be more visible now due to social media and the way it facilitates sharing best practices, as well as boosting women's self-disclosure regarding such experiences and contributing to safer work environments.

Social media platforms are revolutionizing the way users communicate by increasing the exposure to highly stigmatized issues in the society. Sexual abuse is one such issue that took over social media via attaching the hashtag #MeToo to the shared posts. The reaction to this movement depends upon the positioning of the content creator as a perpetrator/enabler, a sufferer or a mere bystander, usually varying from total denial to acceptance, ironic comments, sharp satire, or outrage[22]. Social media sites can be both venues where feminist counterpublics can garner support and solidarity to fight rape culture, as well as spaces where rape culture can be performed and enabled[23].

The #MeToo Movement

The spring of the #MeToo movement is attributed to the activist campaign led by Tarana Burke to support marginalized women of color who experienced sexual assault, more than one decade ago[24]. Yet the movement only gained momentum when the actress Alyssa Milano re-popularized the hashtag *MeToo* on Twitter, therefore bringing it into the spotlight of the social media after accusations of sexual harassment and assault were leveled against the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. In February 2020, he was found guilty of two life felonies and was sentenced to 23 years in prison[25].

Milano's post was followed by more than 60,000 comments, and in the first 24 hours alone, the hashtag was used 12 million times. According to Facebook data, almost half of U.S. users are friends with someone who posted a message about such an experience[26]. Soon, millions of people shared their own experiences of sexual abuse on either Facebook or Twitter using the #MeToo. The unprecedented attention drawn by the movement has set the workplace sexual harassment on the map of researchers around the globe. Following this plethora of public reactions, the event also sparked scientific debate, generating various research endeavors surrounding the #MeToo movement in several professional areas. Comparing tweets via #MeToo on Twitter with posts shared on the #MeToo subreddit, Manikonda *et al.* found that Reddit posts are focused on the sexual assaults within families and workplaces while Twitter posts are on showing empathy and encouraging others to continue the #MeToo movement[27]. Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller studied lived experiences of posting on anti-rape hashtags, leading campaigns and participating in feminist movements against sexual violence, as well as developing online feminist networks. They found anxiety and fear of being attacked for their feminist views among their participants, while also finding that digital feminism can be experienced in a positive way "in generating community, connection, and support for feminist views, and solidarity in calling out rape culture"[28]. Online platforms were perceived as virtual spaces that make it safe and easy for women to engage in feminist activism. What is more, Twitter users were found to reflect on the prevalence of violence in society, acted as advocates, called attention to survivors' experiences, or used it in a way that distracted from the real issue[29].

Social media has made it that this deeply culturally embedded phenomenon is now so visible and discussed, that it can no longer be denied or trivialized. What is more, the #MeToo movement has even brought to light male victims sharing their stories, adding depth to understanding how structural barriers shape women's - and vulnerable group members' - lives at work and how class hierarchies are maintained[30]. As a movement based on the idea of empowerment through empathy, #MeToo aimed to enable survivors to feel whole and gain agency to expose "systems of oppression and privilege of which sexual harassment and assault are cause and effect"[31]. #MeToo is also studied as discourse in and of itself, one that speaks about how society and organizations are structured and organized to engender inequality[32].

Methodology

Since the #MeToo phenomenon expanded with impressive speed, we conducted an **exploratory study** to see how this is reflected in the public sphere of Facebook and social networks, in Romania.

Research questions

1. How is the #MeToo phenomenon presented on Facebook in Romania?
2. What types of narratives dominate?
3. What types of abuse and harassment are most common?
4. How are women and men presented in the #MeToo narratives?

Results

We extracted 70 public posts that used the #MeToo hashtag and were published by Romanian users, using the snowball techniques, starting with our Facebook accounts, identifying opinion leaders coming from academia, advertising, and communication, creative industries mainly, psychologists, activists, and politicians. We applied a content analysis on public posts from Facebook, extracting the first reactions to the spring of the #MeToo movement in October 2017. A total number of 100 public posts were analyzed, under the consideration that these posts have the highest visibility and the ability to mobilize and influence users' views, that of the victims of abuse. From the 100 posts, 70 were published by women, and 30 were posted by men. The content analysis grid was elaborated taking into consideration the following variables: *who the victim is, who the aggressor is, the age of the victim, the location of the aggression, the type of aggression, the type of abuse, the context of the narrative, the tone of the message*. The coding and analysis were done manually, thus subject to inherent errors, involving potentially subjective human decisions and insight, and the dataset not being scalable.

For each content analysis category, we selected the most co-occurring words from the Facebook public posts, from the most used to the least. Using the most frequently occurring keywords in these corpuses, we dig a little deeper to understand how users label sexual abuse through the words associated with these categories.

Out of the 70 posts, 32 refer to **women's characteristics,** such as**:** exaggerated, victims, alone or fearful. The positive characteristics of women - being kind, compassionate, wise, strong, self-confident, decent, modest, successful, courageous, radiating, deeply connected, feminine - are surpassed by the negative ones: ridicule, lost trust, defiant, not daring, self-marginalized, auto-isolated, ultra-censorship, giddy, bloody, terrorized, "big girls," of mild morals, crazy, pregnant, a prey, vulnerable, sucker, cry much, born to serve. They tend to be seen as not having sexual initiative, not able to understand a joke or to get a compliment, unable to sexually satisfy the other.

Category	Keywords:
Women	exaggerated, victims, alone, fearful
Men	aggressors, lecherous, idiots, frightening
Victims	mostly women
Women status	student, schoolgirl, adolescent, girlfriend
Men status	professor, director, manager, colleague, worker
Type of abuse	sexual abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, physical abuse
Location of abuse	at faculty, on means of transport, on the street, at home
Actions of harassment	rape or rape attempt, hands over the bottom/ touch under the skirt, catcalling/obscene language, threats (with death, firing)
Emotions	fear, shame, anger, pained/afflicted
Actions against abuse	need for public discussion about abuse, need for education, need for legal means against abuse, need to talk with abusers
Message tone	tone of awareness, call to action, emancipation, ironic

Table 1: Semantic and syntactic co-occurrence patterns from posts. Keywords are the most frequent words. The right column shows the most co-occurred words/actions associated with left.

The other half of the posts refer to **men's characteristics**, usually labeled as aggressors, lecherous, idiots, misogynists, dangerous and frightening. Positive characteristics, such as smart, chivalrous, thoughtful, good father, sensible, altruistic, admirable, moral, are mentioned, as well as a wide array of negative traits: beasts, exhibitionists, rapist, superficial, hegemonic masculinity, monster, complexed, frustrated, disgusting, or misogynist.

Out of the 70 cases, only four refer to a male victim, the rest are all women. The **age** at the time of the abuse ranges from 5 years old to 56, with a mean age of 19. The most frequently mentioned women **statuses** include being a student, schoolgirl, wife, or girlfriend. The abuse is pervasive, as different professional statuses are listed: actress, politician, journalist, teacher, assistant, careerist, worker, or prostitute. The abuser is usually male, either a professor, a manager or director, a colleague, worker on site, employer, lover, artist, stranger, politician, policeman, or journalist.

More than two thirds of the abuses are sexual, followed by verbal, physical, psychological, semantic or economic abuse. The **context** of the abuse is either personal (at home), public (in the means of transportation, in parks), in the educational environment (in high school, tutoring, in the university) or at work. Several locations are mentioned, like at college, in the means of transport, on the street, at home or at work. The **actions of assault** also vary from rape or rape attempt, hands over the bottom/touch under the skirt, catcalling/using obscene language, threats (with death or firing), stalking, or force use: fights, spanks, punches, force, power use, ripped clothes, being dragged, forcefully kissed, hugged, rubbed, touched, constant calling or screaming.

Women's **reactions to harassment** are highly dispersed. Ranging from **s**ilence and isolation reactions ("self-isolation, shut my mouth, didn't want anything, keep the story for myself, suicide attempt"), to fighting ("throw away with jars, fight like a man, I grabbed his collar, I shouted as loud as I could"), coming to terms with the abuse ("minimizing the aggression, accepting the abuse for money, cars and jobs, blaming on me, I asked for it"), or acknowledging its long-term harmful effect and deciding to talk about the trauma, by sharing the stories of abuse either with friends and family, or on social media ("we are on your side, we can do much more, be aware of aggression, write more about #MeToo"), and last but not least asking for professional help by going to therapy.

Most of the posts mentioned the need to take action in order to reduce the devastating long term effect of the abuse. The need for public discussion is followed by the need to educate young girls, informing them of the legal means against abuse, learning from the past, unmasking the abuse and the abuser, the need for protection and for self-care. About half of the posts are intended to call for raising awareness about the abuse. Some of them also include a call to action, emphasizing the need for the emancipation of women and for equal rights. All of them can be empowering for the victims of abuse and contribute to the idea of solidarity in a safe space, where one can share the burden and overcome the trauma.

Still, some academia members issue a warning, stating that for the last 25 years, nothing significant has been done to remediate the problem in Romania. As Mihaela Miroiu (Romanian professor, public intellectual, feminist paragon) states: "*Organizations like FILIA, SEF, FRONT, ALEG and many others have conducted research and have tried to convince politicians, police, and other officials to draw prevention programs, educational policies and legal sanctions. Well-balanced, reasonable, science-based. What is the result of their honest and huge amount of effort? Nothing at all.*"

The pairwise word relationships shown in Table 2 for the most frequently occurring keywords suggest that some of these societal entities such as men are aggressive and violate certain aspects, whereas women are associated with being intimidated and publicly humiliated. Whenever users are mentioning the personal experiences (narrative), it is highly correlated with words such as heartbreaking, frightening, terrifying, horrifying, awful etc. Alongside, most of the other keywords (such as sex, rape, victims etc.) are similarly associated with a vocabulary that is mostly negative. However, the users are also recognizing that these issues should be addressed immediately (see keyword times up) and are slightly on an encouraging side, compared to other keyword relationships. Words such as movement are co-occurring with words such as hysterical, nonsense and, in some instances, it is not very clear if users are mocking the #MeToo movement.

Category	Keywords:
men	aggressive, pigs, socialized, violate, proclaim, educated
story	heartbreaking, frightening, terrifying, horrifying, awful, painful, triggering, insightful
assault	prevention, policing, devaluing, mishandling, payouts, regrettable
sex	perform, oral, consensual, date, violent, nonconsensual, harassment-misconduct, rampant, ubiquity, experiencing, assaults, secrecy
#metoo	#spite, #mentalhealth, #gossip, #sexpredator, #activism, investigative
movement	travesty, witch-hunt, hysterical, concerns, nonsense, ridiculously, damaging
Times up	oprahs, deathknell, globes, gowns, attendees, #golden, staged
woman	single, unconscious, humiliated, dragged, publicly, qualified, intimidated, backed
abuse	exploitation, stigma, secrecy, psychological, admitting, harassment, severity
victims	survivors, condemning, offenders, assistance, minimize, pedophiles, bystanders, prevent, suffering
rape	attempted, kits, marital, molestation, hookup, aggression, shame

Table 2: Semantic and syntactic co-occurrence patterns from posts. Keywords are the most frequent words. The right column shows the most co-occurred words/actions associated with left.

While most of the female posts share their personal stories regarding different types of harassment, the male posts range from sustaining the #MeToo campaign to mocking the victims of abuse. Several calls to action are raised by the men posting using the #:

> "It is equally our responsibility to get involved, sincerely, in this campaign, because we all have wives, girlfriends, mothers and daughters".
>
> "The #MeToo campaign is one of the coolest campaigns. Crazy gathering of forces and display of the power "to say". The world is slowly becoming a better place."

Some acknowledge the strength it requires to speak up*:*

> "So humbling to see so many strong and brave women standing up, even if sometimes it's with tears in their eyes. I stand with you."

For others, it is important to define the terms correctly. Some feel the need to emphasize the distinction between harassment and physical abuse. Others argue that there is a strict line between "seduction (allowed almost all the time, between boundaries and in an informal setting) and harassment, definitely a sign of mental impotence and a filthy soul that nothing can redeem."

The long-term effect of the campaign is also brought into discussion. Even though the #MeToo movement has been a very powerful one, some consider it to be just another passing wave, a topic that will soon be forgotten.

> "Besides the horrible stories on #metoo, even more disturbing were the comments of people saying that this campaign is not going to make an impact, that it will be forgotten within a week and that nothing is going to change in Romania. It seems like people are expecting an external solution, as if someone is going to come up with a miraculous answer, is going to do something, to show figures and results. The impersonal "it is going to be done". There isn't such a thing. There isn't such a person. The authorities are not going to solve this."

Authorities have long discussed the statistics of violence and abuse in Romania; therefore, some men say that the campaign was of no surprise for them.

> "I long knew that the great majority of women in Romania are facing sexual aggressions on a regular basis."
>
> "If you're surprised how often this is coming up, you have probably never asked your female friends about sexual harassment."

Most of the men insist on presenting their own version of the story, setting the attention towards their upbringing and the influence of socialization.

> "My father told me that if a woman does not like it, you have to take over the reins and show her who the man is."
>
> "It is not like you had sexual intercourse!"
>
> "This shouldn't be about women who are victims, but about men who admit being aggressors."

The male posts had an average of 73 likes, 21 comments, and 7 shares. The ironic ones were more shared than the supporting posts, and not surprisingly, the posts of celebrities received more attention. For example, a well-known Romanian comedian had a mocking post that received 6000 likes, 987 comments and 37 shares.

Unlike the female posts, the male ones do not discuss the long-term effects of abuse. Most of them refer to sexual harassment as incidents, not as a phenomenon. Their perspective usually falls either under the sociocultural model of asymmetrical power relations between men and women, or the naming-blaming-claiming theory of legal consciousness.

Media interviews with experts

Three media interviews with experts have been analyzed, namely with: Andreea Bragă, president of feminist NGO FILIA, Oana Băluță, academic & feminist, and Laura Ștefănuț, journalist. All three interviews have been shared via Facebook through their public profiles, therefore we have included them in the analysis. Their definition of the #MeToo campaign

is similar. "#MeToo is a step of solidarity that we have not witnessed on such a large scale. It is a necessary and symbolic step, a highly welcomed campaign" (Laura Ștefănuț). Oana Băluță sees it as "a long awaited and needed campaign" and "an avalanche of experiences of sexual harassment that women have shared on social networks," while Andreea Bragă refers to it as "the result of an organic movement for women's rights, built on the facilities offered by social media, of instantly sending information to the public, and worked under the snowball effect. Increasingly more women had the courage to open up and narrate their sexual harassment or violence experiences."

While Laura Ștefănuț looks at the problem from a journalistic angle, signaling that it is "a distorted representation of sexuality that pressures men and affects women emotionally and, many times, physically," Andreea Bragă believes that

> "sexual harassment is the result of manifesting unequal power relations between women and men. We are socialized both in the family and at school or among friends that men are superior to women, that they hold the power, and violence is a manifestation of power and confirmation of this power. Since childhood, we see around, women who take care of the house and family and are less present in the public space, in politics, and decision-making roles. [...] We see on TV women featured as objects, humiliated in public, women who are being harassed live on screen and we laugh, just like we laugh at jokes about rapes and sexist jokes. These uneven power relations translate into aggressive behaviors, that try to control women."

All three agree that the movement would not havebeen possible without the solidarity of women sharing similar traumatic experiences. As Andreea Bragă puts it:

> "The feeling of solidarity among women was generated based on lived experiences, and this exposure to sexual abuse boosted other women to write about what they went through. Through creating this online space of self-exposure and solidarity, a safe space was created, in which women who went through sexual harassment no longer felt threatened by public shaming or victim blaming." Oana Băluță considers that "what happened at Hollywood, what investigative journalists have done to bring to light abuses in that area, has contributed to building such a space [...]. Now, victims of sexual harassment benefit from legal strings. However, at the same time, they need a safety net."

Often, women do not report sexual harassment because of the "fear of losing a job, fear (and shame) to be blamed for what happens to them [victims], fear that lawmakers won't take them seriously. Fears as legitimate as they can be" (Laura Ștefănuț).

The need for prevention programs is raised by all three experts. Andreea Bragă believes that

> "[#MeToo] can become an annual information and prevention campaign if adopted by employers, universities, decision-makers, and transformed into a prevention program against sexual harassment, as well as a way to convey that sexual harassment is not tolerated there." This would diminish the otherwise pervasive phenomena of sexual harassment. As one of the posts mentioned, "If all the women who have ever been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote "Me too" as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

The solutions to this whole problem revolve around educating people from an early age on gender equality and

> "learn as early as possible that we, girls and boys, women and men, are equal, and that we deserve respect. To learn to recognize various forms of violence inflicted especially on women and girls, including sexual harassment, and to learn what we can do, what are the steps we can take to file a report. At this moment, the school curricula are missing information on gender equality, how we recognize various forms of violence, and what we can do if we face sexual harassment or other types of violence."

Discussion

Social media turned out to be a catalyst for a new fourth-wave-feminism movement, one in which sexual abuse or harassment survivors disclosed these events that they had to face, in many cases years and decades before. Since the #MeToo movement sparked at the end of 2017 and the wider MeToo movement generated by Tarana Burke one decade before, millions of individuals – women and, to a smaller extent, men – are using online forums as a channel to disclose their experiences and create solidarity. #MeToo was followed by the Time's Up campaign in the United States, and these were all fueled by Donald Trump's 2016 election, following substantiated campaign claims of past behaviors related to sexual harassment.

However, sexual abuse is far too prevalent across the globe, and this *hashtag feminism* managed to generate a global sisterhood. The use of social media as a channel for delivering the message of a survivor has gained collective force and generated collective healing, across borders. Sexual abuse survivors or targets of sexual harassment have found a voice through social media, after extensive periods of keeping silent and being silenced. They turn to social media when institutions that should keep them safe fail them, or before they even try to obtain a sense of justice. Cultural patterns focusing on victim-blaming and protecting the rights of perpetrators should be tackled in future research.

As shown above, based on the Romanian case, women in this country are not strangers to sexual abuse or harassment, and they face similar issues to those reported in the United States or other countries. Attempts to trivialize their experiences are common, and some men's attitudes toward their narratives

contribute to this phenomenon and to keeping silent. As emphasized by the gender experts interviewed in the Romanian media, this type of research should have policy implications. Education and justice are pivotal in creating a safer environment for girls and women, and the top risk factors for sexual violence should be more harshly addressed in order to achieve this. Consistent with Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2018), our study shows that digital feminism is able to create a safe space for self-expression, to generating community, connection, and support for feminist views, and solidarity in calling out abuse. Last but not least, more caution is needed in empirically tracing the cyberbullying phenomena in Romania, as various other gender and social media related aspects could be found as enhancers: the backlash against political correctness, the anonymity provided by social media platforms, their potential to feed sexist attitudes and behaviors in digital groups and forums, right-wing rhetoric, anti-gender campaigns etc.

The #MeToo campaign in Romania managed to elicit public statements from political actors (such as representative Florina Presadă), awareness actions from state institutions such as the Romanian Police Department, as well as various disclosure statements and solidarity posts reverberating on social media sites from individuals from all walks of life. This research merely shows a portrayal of a convenience sample of 100 posts to unravel subjects' characteristics and audience reactions to public disclosures, doubled by expert analyses on how #MeToo unfolded in Romania; to obtain a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, more thorough analysis, on various platforms, including more diverse subjects, would be needed. The present research could be a relevant and suitable starting point to continue the investigation on how this specific campaign gained traction across Romania, across industries and subjects. Narratives echoing the MeToo hashtag could be further explored using quantitative and qualitative frameworks.

Future research should pursue a more inclusive approach, pursuing the voice of male survivors of sexual abuse, and the way they use social media as a channel for sharing their narratives related to sexual abuse. Movements such as #MenToo in India or #HimToo in US, that originally began as a way to share their experience with sexual assault are now seen more as reactionary responses to #MeToo and could provide a well-rounded image of the phenomenon. Intersectionality is also one aspect to be considered for future research: additional identity layers of ethnicity, sexual orientation, social status could play an important role in the likelihood and the experience of sexual violence. The gender lens is certainly one pivotal perspective to explore when tackling violence-related phenomena, but a more inclusive approach would engender a humanist lens aimed at mapping all layers of discrimination experienced today. Certainly, sexual violence and harassment, or any type of gender-based violence, should be investigated using more qualitative research techniques, to obtain comprehensive accounts and contribute to the authenticity of narratives.

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