

email mailing lists, and other online media for protest communication are significantly positively correlated with each other. Note that the respondents were activists, so these results say nothing about the role of social media in inhibiting or supporting the mobilisation of protestors. They rather show that Occupy activists tended to make use of multiple forms of online and offline media for communicating about the protests with other activists, and that these forms of protest communication tended to complement each other.

These empirical results deconstruct the myth that the Arab Spring, Occupy movements, and other protests and movements were Twitter revolutions, Facebook rebellions, social media revolts, or revolution 2.0. Social media and the Internet played a role as one among several media (especially interpersonal communication), but empirical evidence does not sustain the assumption that social media were necessary conditions of revolutions and rebellions. The Arab revolutions and other protests (such as the Occupy movements) were not tweeted, blogged, or liked. Social media played a role in protest communication, but it was one role among different media types.

#MeToo

The #MeToo social media movement against sexual harassment emerged in autumn 2017 at a time when numerous women accused film producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual abuse. In 2020, Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison for sexual assault and rape; and in 2023 to a further 16 years.

In reaction to the Weinstein scandal, actor Alyssa Milano tweeted on October 16, 2017:

If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.

Me too.

Suggested by a friend: "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem."

(https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976)

On April 1, 2020, this tweet had achieved 50.8k likes and 22.4k re-tweets, and had resulted in 63.3k comments. A wide public debate about sexual harassment developed and #MeToo became a widely used Twitter hashtag. Twitter has been the key medium of communication for this movement. Public debates and offshoots of the movement developed around the world in many countries.

Aside from the film industry, the public debate also focused on other sectors of society, including education, the fashion industry, the finance industry, journalism and the media, medicine, the military, the music industry, the porn industry, politics, religion

and churches, sports, and the tech industry. Related hashtags started to be used in numerous languages. The result was an international debate on the causes, realities, and consequences of sexual harassment and a strengthening of public awareness.

#MeToo, for example, unveiled sexism in Silicon Valley's tech industry, especially concerning managers in companies such as Uber and Google. In the autumn of 2018, thousands of Google employees walked out of their offices to protest against sexual harassment in the tech industry. The protest followed the revelation in *The New York Times* that Google had paid US\$90 million as an exit package to Andy Rubin, a former senior vice president who had faced accusations of sexual harassment (Wakabayashi and Benner 2018).

#MeToo is a movement that has organised itself as a digital public sphere. Twitter played a key role in its development and public communication practices. #MeToo also shows the social media power of celebrities and other highly visible public personalities. In 2023, Alyssa Milano had around 3.5 million followers on Twitter. Other actors, such as Ashley Judd, Jennifer Lawrence, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Uma Thurman, joined the #MeToo campaign. The example shows that in the attention economy, where visibility and attention are scarce resources, creating a highly visible campaign or social movement requires influencers who have a high number of followers.

8.5 Uncivil Communication on X/Twitter

Online Hatred and Online Violence on Social Media

Social media is also a space where hatred is expressed. Think, for example, of online bullying, fascism and racism online, or how terrorists use social media to spread propaganda. In this section, we will discuss some examples.

In August 2014, the Islamic State (IS)/Daesh released a video on the Internet that showed one of its members beheading the American journalist James Foley, who had been kidnapped in Syria in 2012. IS has published and distributed images and videos of such killings online and has for this purpose not only used YouTube and X/Twitter, but also platforms such as justpaste.it, an image- and text-sharing platform. Panos Kompatsiaris and Yiannis Mylonas (2015) show that the Golden Dawn also uses social media for Goebbels-style Nazi propaganda. Right-wing movements are no less active and capable of using social media than left-wing ones. There have been repeated reports about misogyny against women and hatred and threats against minorities on X/Twitter. The rise of the alt-right, false/fake news, and new nationalisms have reinforced the colonisation and instrumental character of the digital public (see Chapter 9 in this book for a more detailed analysis).

The Islamic State/Daesh has actively used social media to spread propaganda and to recruit terrorists. In 2016, Twitter announced that within one year it suspended "over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to ISIS" (Twitter 2016).