

Activism: Feminist Activism in a Digital World

Digital technologies and social media platforms have had a significant influence on feminists' ability to organize and advocate across various platforms while simultaneously reaching a large audience to fight against misogyny, patriarchy, and sexism. (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019). Feminist campaigns such as #MeToo, #BeenRapedNeverReported, and Hollaback! represent only a fraction of the numerous digital campaigns that feminists have created to challenge rape culture and to call out other forms of oppression, providing public and easily accessible spaces that can contribute to learning about and challenging misogyny and rape culture (Horek, 2014).

Our team was tasked with analyzing digital campaigns focusing on sexual violence in digital spaces, using social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, and others, including a focus on their popularity, origin, and social media presence and encompassing content review in various languages and countries. We wanted to analyze trends of past and present feminist campaigns, and how they have shaped and are continuing to shape the way forward for future digital feminist activism. Our team further examined the history of digital feminist activism, archiving digital activism, and archiving feminism in order to help fill in the gaps of this research.

Our team's goals with this research were to examine the the positive contributions that digital feminist activism have made to challenging and calling out sexism and rape culture, to explore what is missing in this field of research and how we can contribute to the research through our methodology techniques and coding schemes, as well as to identify the benefits and challenges that coincide with digital activism and archiving.

Lastly, we hope to advance the spaces, knowledge, and research these campaigns are providing, and to provide rich literature and data that future digital activists and scholars can use both to advance digital feminist activism and archiving and to better understand its long term effects and its impact on feminist activism.

Literature Review

Archiving Digital Activism

Throughout literature surrounding the challenges and process of archiving digital activism, it is common to find discussion of the ethical concerns with the archival process, the nature of digital spaces, differences in the usage of digital tools, and the historical narrative developed through an archive (Edwards et al., 2013; Ferris and Allard, 2016; Navarro and Coromina, 2020; Pretlove 2018; Shaw and Zhang., 2018; Uimonen, 2020; Velte, 2018). Ethical issues of collecting social media content was discussed between archivists and activists during the ‘Archives, Activism and Social Media: Building Networks for Effective Collaboration and Ethical Practice’ workshop as documented by Pretlove (2018). One of the key ethical issues discussed was the use of these archives beyond their intended use if made publicly available, specifically mentioning that authorities may search these archives to track down or target certain individuals or groups they see as being subversive to the authorities (Pretlove, 2018). This possibility has already been demonstrated as a reality, for instance in Iran, Bahrain and Syria where regimes are using Facebook to find and expose opposition networks and entrap the activists behind them (Edwards et al., 2013).

As a result, Pretlove states that archivists need to be cognizant about how this may impact people's lives (2018). Further, crowd-sourcing information and presenting this data to the public

was broken down within small group table discussions where participants brought up dilemmas they felt were relevant, however, these issues were not specified further in this article (Pretlove, 2018). Other archivists note concerns with longevity of access to that data, specifically activists' groups' social media where someone had blocked their account or removed access to their content (Pretlove, 2018). Furthermore, within the data collection process, there exists challenges due to the interactive and constantly changing nature of digital media as well as technical changes such as data corruption, and media/software obsolescence (Velte, 2018). This presents challenges for the preservation of these narratives, limiting the ability to create a complete historical record, which Velte (2018) terms as leading to a 'digital dark age.'

Also commonly discussed are the differences in various digital tools, such as photo sharing and microblogging social media accounts/platforms, hashtags, and e-petitions, being used to document online movements (Edwards et al., 2013; Micó and Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Navarro and Coromina, 2020; Shaw and Zhang, 2018; Uimonen, 2020). For instance, one study looking at the '15M Movement' notes that social media platforms, specially Twitter and Facebook, played a key role in the online organization of political activism, (Micó and Casero-Ripollés, 2014) which may impact where information included within an archive is primarily coming from or which sources appear to be most useful during the archival process. Another analyses the use of microblogging in China as a tool to access and discuss queer films with less risk of being erased due to state censorship, specifically with the platform Sina Weibo (Shaw and Zhang, 2018). Findings about the process of documenting digital activism vary from the perspective of researchers themselves (ex. from software and data mining) (Navarro and Coromina, 2020; Uimonen, 2020) to interviews, as within Micó and Casero-Ripollés (2014) work, with activists reporting their own perceptions on the scope, strength and limitations of

digital activism, as well as the media's significance (Lev-On, 2020; Velte, 2018; Yavuz Görkem, 2017). For instance, Navarro and Coromina (2020) documents the reaction that took place on Twitter following the judicial sentence of the La Manada case in Spain using DMI-TCAT software which connects to the Twitter streaming API to collect live Tweets both before and after the sentencing. In contrast, Velte (2018) discusses the ethics of approaching activist social media through utilizing surveys and semi-structured interviews with various archivists.

The mechanisms behind how digital technology operates, including the limitations on visibility with API, and how this connects to the representation of activists and their work is additionally explored (Dobrin, 2020; Neumayer and Struthers, 2018). Dobrin (2020) talks about the archival nature of the hashtag and terms it as a "...space of selective vision, a collage of various perspectives assembled based on a mix of personal recommendations and trending topics defined by Twitter's algorithm." Further examined by Neumayer and Struthers (2018) is processes of over- and under- representation which are not controlled by activists, but rather social media logics: defined as "a form of communication, and the process through which media transmit and communicate information" (Altheide, 2016). As such, the loss of control over an activist's own data may lead to incomplete archives (Neumayer and Struthers, 2018).

As briefly noted, ethical factors surrounding archiving digital activism as discussed in Velte (2018) and Pretlove (2018), as well as concerns surrounding the mechanisms behind how digital technology operate create a broader challenge creating an accurate narrative and complete archive (Neumayer and Struthers, 2018). In addition, preserving the narrative of marginalized communities which mainstream institutions and media does not always capture (Currie and Paris, 2018; Williams, 2016), also contributes to this challenge. For instance, the #SayHerName

movement emerged out of silence from mainstream new outlets after the murders of 13 black women in Oklahoma City, USA (Williams, 2016).

While the emergence of social media has meant that multiple perspectives and issues are shared online (Pretlove, 2018), the decision for what is included in archive collections has been historically controlled by a small group of individuals (Uimonen, 2020). Currently there is some research on initiatives primarily focused on collecting and preserving the voices of marginalized groups such the First Days Project, focused on the records of South Asian Americans (Caswell and Mallick, 2014), and the Sex Work Database project, preserving the voices and work of politicized sex workers (Ferris and Allard, 2016). However, Ferris and Allard (2016) cautions that archival processes, regardless of good intention, can still fall victim to structures of marginalization and domination. This is an issue we are mindful of as we carry out this work.

Moving forward within archiving digital activism, echoed within the literature is the importance of involving a variety of individuals, including those whose voices have been historically excluded, in order to produce a representative and accurate narrative (Ferris and Allard, 2016; Pretlove, 2018; Uimonen, 2020). As Denver (2017) noted, archives and processes feeding into them are inherently sites of power and privilege.

Archiving Feminism

In recent years, a number of scholars have explored the relationship between archiving and feminism (Dever 2017; Eichhorn 2010; Geiger and Hauser 2012; Mendes 2021; Withers 2015). As Moseley and Whatley (2008) have argued, what gets preserved, where and by whom is most certainly a feminist issue. Feminist archives not only serve to document and historicize feminist activism, but as some have noted, have the potential to dismantle patriarchal, capitalist, heteronormative, and racist structures in society (Cifor & Wood, 2017) through preserving

feminist history that contain acts of violence, strength, and growth. This feminist archiving can further support education, research, and empowerment through participatory and creative development (Ashton, 2017), as well as include women and girls in the process making women visible and recovering women's lives (Hamilton & Spongberg, 2017).

Although feminist archives have the potential to dismantle patriarchal, capitalist, and racist structures in society, there are, however, challenges when collecting feminist archival materials. A major flaw and gap in feminist archiving is the absence and exclusion of marginalized histories, voices, production, participation (Deepwell 2006; Pollock 2007; Wieringa 2008; Hayden and Skrubbe 2010; Dimitrakaki and Perry 2013; Eichhorn 2013; Jones 2016) as cited in (Ashton, 2017). Although many feminists have long called for intersectional analysis (see Hill Collins YEAR), White, Anglophone, Western women's perspectives continue to populate the archives. Indeed, when collecting data, structural and intersecting biases held by researchers influence decisions on what to document, what is considered authentic, valuable, worth preserving, and how it is categorized. This often leads to systematic exclusion of marginalized voices and stories (Ashton, 2017). Excluding or silencing minority and marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, Black histories, LGBTQIA and disability groups in heritage and data collection identifies the power relations, operations, and distribution in society (Ashton, 2017) through what Cifro and Wood (2017) call 'archival silences'.

In order to make marginalized voices heard and include in the archival process, Caswell and Cifor (2016) emphasize the need to shift from an institutional and elitist approach, to a community based user-oriented approach (Caswell & Cifor, 2016 cited in Henningham, Evans & Morgan, 2017). By including marginalized voices and histories, feminism in the archives can

address the intersectional modes in which people identify in terms of gender/sexuality, but also addresses critical structures of power and oppression in society (such as heteronormativism, patriarchy, and capitalism) and create new changes to dismantle them (Ashton, 2017).

Furthermore, ensuring women's participation in the archival process and what the archive will look like can be empowering and women taking control of their lives through skill development and problem solving (Blake 2014, 52 cited in Ashton, 2017).

There are many challenges that coincide when creating an archive(s) such as finding authentic materials and the physical space where material archives have an external location in a site specific building (Ashton, 2017). Availability of archival sources can be difficult to retrieve and collect, and requires large amounts of collaboration and cooperation from many people, such as professionals, collectivists, and scholars in order to create a successful archive (Dever, 2014). Furthermore, another significant challenge with archiving is finding the physical space to hold the archives in site- specific buildings, whether it be institutional spaces, non- for profit spaces, or government funded spaces (Ashton, 2017). To preserve and maintain the archives requires large sums of funding, and the issues of geographical boundaries and barriers (Ashton, 2017). As others have noted, these issues are no less true when it comes to digital archives, as websites, domain names, cloud services, and more need to be purchased and continually renewed to preserve digital materials (see Mendes 2021).

Although there are many benefits to digital archiving, such as providing wider access to historical sources (Hamilton & Spongberg, 2017) and allowing immediate access to already there feminist archive materials and related materials (Dever, 2017). However, there are implications when digitally archiving, like the concerns that digital archiving does not create the same intimate experience compared to material archiving where archivers can see the objects in

person, touch, smell, and use their sensory to further analyze the object and use their sensory to highlight what has been lost and the object's authenticity (Hamilton & Mary Spongberg, 2017). The mass digitisation of archiving has created new methods of analyzing, organizing, and reading in revolutionary ways that grieves the loss of traditional material archiving (Hamilton & Mary Spongberg, 2017).

Additionally, concerns regarding access to digital archives is discussed amongst feminist scholars with the concern being that access is primarily granted to first world language speaking countries with internet access, in which many of those countries take for granted now (Hamilton & Mary Spongberg, 2017; Mendes 2021). Feminist scholars worry that this access to technology and digital knowledge reinforces inequalities that exist globally between class and races, and if using a 'progress narrative' is accurate (Hamilton & Mary Spongberg, 2017). Lastly, the technologies that support digital archives are not fundamentally stable and create a false impression of secure preservation (Mendes 2021). Due to constantly changing technologies and data bases, archivists struggle to solve how to best secure and safeguard these resources on these digital platforms (Hamilton & Mary Spongberg, 2017).

Archiving Digital Feminist Activism

While there exists a substantial body of literature on the strengths and weaknesses of using digital technologies and forms of digital feminist activism, such as hashtags and images, as tools to archive offline forms of feminist activism (Clark, 2016; Harp et al., 2017; Matich et al., 2018; Thrift, 2014), there is a notable gap in the academic literature surrounding the methodological benefits and barriers to creating an archive of digital feminist activism.

While, to our knowledge, there has yet to be an academic publication based solely on the process of and challenges to creating an archive of digital feminist activism, a number of

feminist scholars have alluded to methodological challenges in archiving data for a single feminist hashtag, including the hashtag movements #MeToo, #WomensMarch, #FreetheNipple, and #WhyIStayed (Linabary et al., 2020; Matich et al., 2018; McDuffie and Ames, 2021; Uimonen, 2020). For example, McDuffie and Ames (2021) note the emergence of hashtag variants, the use of images in hashtag activism, and the suppression and resurgence of hashtags following social and political developments in regard to the digital activism of the 2017 Women's March.

However, McDuffie and Ames (2021) do not reflect upon how the aforementioned phenomena made an impact on their digital archival process, for example, how to trace the origin of hashtag variants, how to archive digital images, and how to document the ebb and flow of hashtag popularity. Moravec (2017) comments on the vanishing nature of digital archival environments, where digital footprints may disappear, stating that digital materials have the right to be forgotten and the right to drop out of public circulation.

Moravec's perspective offers an interesting point of inquiry: is the disappearance of, or limitation to how digital feminist activism is traced inherently problematic, or is the ability to have one's digital footprint vanish a right we ought to respect. While there is minimal academic literature that addresses the archival process of digital feminist hashtags and campaigns and the challenges that may accompany this process, it is precisely this gap in the literature that we seek to address.

A Lack of Literature (French, Hindi, Mandarin, Spanish)

As our team began the search for campaigns using academic journals and news articles, in most cases, the information provided was insufficient to create a robust and meaningful dataset. While the depth of information provided varied - for example, academic scholarship on

multiple campaigns vs. those that focused only on one - we could often obtain a campaign name, description, and notes on its emergence, with some exceptions to non-English campaigns. Not only was there a lack of academic publications on digital feminist activism, the existing body of literature was dominated by both English speaking and Western nations, making the creation of a robust global data set challenging.

For example, academic publications in French remained centered around movements occurring in France and Canada, excluding movements originating in French speaking countries in Africa. Similarly, it was much easier to find academic publications in English for movements originating in India, despite Hindi also being an official language. When collecting data in Mandarin, our team relied on the researchers social networks to uncover digital feminist movements from mainland China, while Hong Kong and Taiwan presented more difficulties due to a lack of academic publications. In the Spanish movements as well, the majority of available literature was centered on movements originating in Spain and not Latin America. As our goal in this research project was to create a rich global data set, the lack of academic literature on digital feminist movements, and the Western dominance of the publications made this task very difficult.

As digital studies are a newer and growing field, our team encountered challenges finding academic literature that was published on digital activism from the early 2000s or earlier. Neumayer and Rossi's (2016) study describing the discourse in academic papers related to technology and digital activism from 2000-2015 illustrates a possible reason for this challenge. In 2000, when the internet began to rapidly expand and become more accessible, it became essential to study it more as it grew to have a greater influence on our social lives (Wellman 2004, as cited in Neumayer and Rossi 2016).

In 2008, the academic literature on digital activism began to grow, showing how the internet was becoming an important element when studying activism (Neumayer and Rossi 2016). In addition, there was a gradual increase of studies over this period focusing on specific platforms rather than the “Internet” in general. In particular, social media studies became more relevant beginning in 2010 (Neumayer and Rossi 2016). Neumayer and Rossi’s (2016) study shows the progress of this growing field. Thus, it follows that we encountered this challenge when attempting to look for literature, and track earlier forms of digital feminist activism.

Methodology

To achieve our objective of creating an archive of digital feminist campaigns, movements, and initiatives which targeted sexual violence, we drew from (digital) ethnographic and archival approaches. Ethnography studies social meaning behind people's interactions in occurring settings or fields by observing and taking fieldnotes (Brewer, 2000). Digital ethnography is the “[studies of] digital culture with specific epistemological claims” (Varis, 2014). Digital ethnography is a useful method/approach for digital studies because it helps us make sense of social events that often now exist online and offline (Hine 2000; Atay 2020). According to Murthy (2008), with digital ethnography we are still focused on telling social stories. This also means that we must continue to be reflexive throughout the process as one becomes both part of the physical and online environments (Postill and Pink 2012).

Digital as archive is one mode of digital ethnography, which documents the ex-posted digital interaction (Akemu & Abdelnour, 2018). Digital data archiving is the preservation of research resources online for current analysis and potential usage, which includes “acquisition, preservation, documentation, processing, cataloguing, disseminating and supporting use of data” (Corti, 2012).

Digital data archives should be in a long-term accessible format with adequately described in trusted digital repositories without legal and ethical concerns (ibid.) Much of the available literature on archiving social media and born-digital content focuses on larger institutional archives (Costa, Gomes, and Silva 2017; Fondren and Menard McCune 2018; Ogden 2022; Vlassenroot et al. 2021). Some of the key highlights of the methodology when collecting born-digital content arises from selecting, archiving, and preserving (Ashton 2017; Costa et al. 2017; Fondren and Menard McCune 2018; Ogden 2022; Vlassenroot et al. 2021). In particular, what should be archived is a common question. Ogden (2022) suggests that what is selected is based on the institutional culture and value-judgements.

In addition, the amount of time the researcher has and the available infrastructure to collect and save the data pose constraints that prevent archivists from saving everything. Instead, archiving projects often focus on specific events, people, hashtags, or themes for their selection criteria (Costa et al. 2017; Vlassenroot et al. 2021). Ashton (2017) also contributes to this conversation when creating feminist archives, suggesting that archiving selections are not neutral, and therefore there should be a collaboration between researcher and participants to choose what is valuable and possibly provide new ways of thinking about the material.

Storage and preservation of content is also a problem when collecting mass amounts of data. Vlassenroot et al.'s (2021) study showed there was a lack of standardization in the field in the format of stored content; however, Costa et al. (2017) did note that an effort was being made to use more common formats. Finally, studies like Fondren and Menard McCune's (2018) illustrate how institutions have had difficulties in the past with storing social media content like Twitter posts, and that it may take some creativity to think outside the usual methods used for physical archives to store, organize, and preserve digital content.

There are some common benefits and disadvantages of digital ethnography that were addressed in the literature. Specific to this study, Murthy (2008) notes two relevant benefits: a) can find a high volume of content even for harder to find groups; b) the ethnographer can observe online interactions ‘undetected’ from users. Hampton (2017) also notes that pure digital ethnography can fail to acknowledge how fluid the line between offline and online life is, and this can take away from the understanding of culture or context. Another disadvantage of this method relates to our study and the following of a hashtag in order to track particular movements. Hashtags that are analyzed in digital studies tend to be those that are successful or trending, so the activities that occur under these hashtags may differ from those which did not trend (Tufekci 2014). Besides, digital ethnography is “physically invisible”: a digital ethnography researcher can be a passive, lurking observer without overtly interacting with individuals, which leads to ethical concerns, including consent, privacy, and boundaries between private and public space (Murthy, 2008).

To conduct a digital archive, six research assistants were also hired and trained on how to collect and categorize data using an excel spreadsheet that captured information such as the campaign name, start and end dates (if known), if the campaign was ongoing, where it originated, if it had a global spread, the language it operated in, names of any identifiable leaders. We also asked research assistants to note how they found the campaign - for example through academic journal articles, a social media search, or mainstream news. We then asked them to record any social media accounts they used, the date this was last active, and how many followers they had, and the number of engagement with their last post. Out of the six researchers, two were hired to collect English language data, and one each to collect Spanish, Hindi, and

Mandarin. Although we had originally put out calls to hire research assistants with fluency in Arabic, Portuguese, and Russian, we were unable to find suitable candidates in our time frame.

In addition to documenting the digital feminist campaigns, all researchers were asked to engage in ‘memoing’ of their experiences, noting any challenges they faced as they collated data. The research team met weekly and discussed a wide range of challenges. Drawing from techniques put forward in Braun and Clarke’s (2006) discussion of how to conduct thematic analysis, we organized these challenges into seven key themes, which we present below. Some challenges were experienced across all languages, while others were unique to certain languages, in part due to regional and sociocultural influence.

Although we identified a whole range of issues, we below focused on the following seven key issues either because of their prevalence, or because of the important insights they provide to those seeking to conduct transnational projects such as this. The seven issues include: 1) lack of literature; 2) inactive web links; 3) identifying the campaign start/end date; 4) issues stemming from government led campaigns with authenticity and accessibility; 5) censorship; 6) what ‘counts’; 7) and deciphering campaign hashtags with multiple meanings. While we discuss these issues individually, many of these challenges intersect with and build off of one another, overall influencing the amount of information we were able to find for each campaign.

Challenges in Our Research:

What Defines a Campaign

A prominent issue that nearly all research assistants experienced early into the data collection was the ambiguity surrounding what defines a ‘campaign,’ and more specially what defines a ‘sexual violence campaign’ as well as a ‘digital campaign.’ This in part was due to the fact our team deliberately began the process with loose definitions to cast the net wide and see

what we uncovered. Yet, without clear guidelines, it was challenging at times to distinguish the boundaries between a campaign, organization, group, or simply an incident that had sparked digital media attention. For instance, the global White Ribbon Campaign appears to have begun as a campaign in response to the École Polytechnique massacre in 1989 in Montreal, however, it has since expanded into a larger group more reassembling a non-profit organization. The campaign/organization now organizes ‘sub-campaigns’ such as the Composed campaign which focuses on abolishing the widespread gender norm that men and boys showing emotion is a sign of weakness. While more overtly a campaign, Composed targets a gendered issue, rather than explicitly sexual violence. This leads into the challenge of determining how focussed a campaign must be on sexual violence in order to ‘count’. Aside from gendered issues, we also came across campaigns targeting issues such as human trafficking, consent and sexual boundaries, domestic abuse, women’s rights, and adverse childhood experiences. Campaigns focused on these issues often had some element of anti-sexual violence campaigning, however, the degree to which the campaign must be focused on these elements made it difficult to decide whether it should be included.

Distinguishing between digital and traditional/physical campaigns, also brought about challenges during the data collection. For instance, some campaigns operate mainly in a physical space but rely on digital technologies, social media platforms, and online forums to continue and expand discussion. Where a campaign with some degree of a digital presence first emerged, either online or offline, also became another aspect to consider. For example, the Paint Me Red campaign emerged as a petition and street protest in Nepal but soon sparked discussion online with people using the hashtag #PaintMeRed to raise awareness about sexual abuse of women and advocate for the removal of the statute of limitation of rape and sexual violence. The magnitude

and activity of a campaigns' online presence further clouded the boundaries between a primarily digital/online campaign and a physical/offline campaign. In other words, determining how big is 'big enough' of an online presence for the campaign to be considered digital.

Although formulating one all-encompassing definition for a 'digital campaign against sexual violence' may be challenging due to its varying interpretations, it may help increase the rigour and reliability of the research conducted. Furthermore, even having a broad set of guidelines to reference during data collection may ensure greater internal consistency both within each individual researchers' data set, and the entire data collection within the research assistant team at large.

Inactive & Blocked Links

A second common issue across all languages was the prevalence of inactive, blocked, and broken web links, particularly when looking into a relatively older campaign or academic article. This was the case for the Australian campaign, See, Hear, Speak, in which we were unable to find data on its start/end date and overall social media presence due its inactive website. The amount of data we were able to find for each campaign varied and at times was limited to the campaign name alone. As will be discussed further on, this issue was further exacerbated with our Mandarin and Hindi language campaigns due to issues of censorship and governmental control as to what is visible to the public. Yet, for all languages, limited accessibility due to inactive/blocked links was common for campaigns that were no longer active or had slowed down in activity. It may be worth noting that many campaigns, while they may be still ongoing, had a noticeable time of rapid growth and momentum where online engagement was highest, which ranged depending on the campaign and its popularity. This was especially true for campaigns that emerged in response to a specific incident such as the campaign

#FlipTheSwitch, started in 2018 by USA gymnast Aly Raisman to prevent sexual abuse among young athletes. Raisman began the campaign after former USA gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar was accused of sexually abusing several of the athletes he worked with, to which Raisman was one of his victims. While the campaign and hashtag are still active to date, much of its initial momentum within the media has appeared to slow down.

Collecting data, particularly through using web links, often led to a ‘dead end’ in which the trail of digital footprints of that campaigns’ progression and contribution to the greater sphere of digital feminist activism against sexual violence had been either erased or hidden. For instance, this was the case for the 2001 Voices Not Victims campaign led by University of California Davis Campus Violence Prevention Program. The campaign was identified through an academic paper (Potter et al., 2009), however, the only remaining online trace of the campaign is an old news article (Agronis, 2001). Both the referenced link in the academic paper and the campaign website itself is no longer active. In some cases, there was partial visibility of a campaign where, for instance, the campaign website is still active, however, links to other digital webpages (i.e. related campaign websites, news articles, social media pages) on the website are not and instead often lead to an error message.

For example, the home website for the now inactive 2013 UK based campaign, Everyday Victim Blaming, is still easily accessible but contains several embedded links which lead to an error page. Similarly, the website and accompanying TV ad for the Not Ever campaign launched by the Rape Crisis Scotland organization in June 2010 are still available, however, their Twitter account, @Not_Ever, comes up as suspended. These issues were further experienced by all members of the research team, as is the case with the French campaign #PlusJamais (Never Again) which was launched with an active website but no indication of what social media the

hashtag was used on. Due to the vague nature of the hashtag itself, it was challenging to determine when it was actually being used to reference the campaign and further gauge the scale of the movement.

As noted earlier, the issue of inactive or blocked links generated a greater impact in the ability to find data for campaigns in Mandarin and Hindi. Through comparing campaigns that had inactive links, with their start date and status (ongoing or not), inactive links within English campaigns may be primarily due to the campaigns themselves having ended and the web domains no longer being maintained. However, inactive links discovered while exploring Mandarin and Hindi campaigns may be in part due to issues of censorship and government led/controlled campaigns, which both may restrict the amount of information made accessible within a public digital space.

Defining the Start and End of a Movement and When it is No Longer Active

Linked to the previous issue of encountering inactive links, a third key challenge experienced by all members of the research team was deciphering a campaign's clear beginning and end or whether it was ongoing. Throughout the process of collecting and analyzing our data, our team consistently struggled to decipher the clear beginning and endings of the campaigns we found, as well as the fact that many - if not the majority - of these campaigns did not specify specific start and end dates, nor did they identify how or where they began. This was a particular issue when it came to predominantly social media campaigns or those revolving around hashtags, such as Stand Up Against Street Harassment, a social media campaign created by Hollaback and Loreal Cosmetics, Fedoras of OKCupid (FOOK) a Tumblr account, #20MinutesOfAdvocacy, and #HowIWillChange, all of which were English hashtag campaigns on Twitter.

Other campaigns in different languages that were challenging to find its start and end

were #JusticialPatriarcal, and La Manada in Spanish, and #MiTu in Chinese. Lastly, Safestreet (Safe Women) and Operation Romeo were difficult to find its beginning and end dates, in particular the latter due to the fact that it is a government run operation and becomes inactive for long periods of time, and then reactivates sporadically.

This is attributable to many of the campaigns originating from hashtags from social media accounts that do not track or save specific dates, people, or places affiliated with the campaign. Due to these restrictions we were not able to find the origins or creators of some campaigns or we would only be able to give an approximation of its origin or creator. Furthermore, campaigns would attain rapid popularity during a period of time, and then would diminish in popularity just as rapidly, leaving unclear and vague information about the campaign, such as the month and year the campaign started. Campaigns that gained rapid popularity that quickly diminished consisted of social media and hashtag campaigns such as #NotOkay, Red Flag Campaign, #nigerianyouthagainstrape, and She Is Someone for the English campaigns. #PrimAcoso, #MadridNecesitaFeminismo, and #Lastarria in Spanish, and the campaign Chained Woman in Xuzhou, China.

Although it was challenging determining the campaigns' start dates, it was even more difficult to decipher when campaigns ended. This led us to having to estimate the ending of many campaigns, basing it loosely off the last time the hashtags had been used or the last time their social media accounts were active and they had posted about said campaigns. Using this tactic lead us to approximate the months and year that a hashtag or campaign had dissipated, but it failed to provide us with a definitive answer of whether or not a hashtag or campaign was still being used or had ceased to exist, and we had to assume based on the (in) activity of the campaign.

Such campaigns that did not have definitive end dates and we had to estimate were both digital and non-digital campaigns such as It Stops Now, a PSA digital campaign, Abusers Always Work from Home, a social media campaign started by the National Center for Domestic Abuse in the UK. Furthermore, Selfies to support survivors, a social media campaign started by a Avalon Sexual Assault Center. #HowIWillChange, #Mooreandme, #WhoWillYouHelp, and #ThisIsNotConsent are various social media hashtag campaigns in English, #NoBastan3Causales, a Spanish campaign, and #MiTu in Mandarin.

Furthermore, we found that certain hashtags that were in the context of sexual violence were also being used in a casual way with friends, both in English but in other languages such as French. The hashtags #PlusJamais, #TenezVosPromesses, and #StopCaSuffit are vague hashtags in French that had double meanings representing sexual violence campaigns, but were used for multiple other reasons in casual ways that were irrelevant to our research. For example, these hashtags would be used on social media unrelated to the hashtag campaigns, and used on individuals personal posts that were meant to be humorous and applicable to said individuals post, but caused confusion and difficulty when sorting out what posts were relevant to the campaign, and what were being used for personal social media use.

This made it difficult to differentiate how recent the hashtag campaign was, its popularity in regards to its context as a sexual violence campaign, and when it began and ended. Furthermore, this made it difficult to do further research on the hashtag and to find the relevant and necessary data needed to code it.

Government Led - No Proper Digital Platform

Searching for campaigns within the Indian state has been quite a challenge due to largely government backed origins of many campaigns. Throughout the data collection process, it

became clear that government organizations were responsible for many of the more visible campaigns across India. Originators often included the Ministry of Women and Children, the Ministry of Health, Women's Safety and other NGOs supported by the ministries.

For example, we found one Indian Anti-Rape Campaign dating back to the 1920s-1970s that has persisted. Although a long-lived campaign, its digital presence emerged is hard to track due to the common word used for the campaign as mentioned in the fourth challenge. These campaigns have made their digital debut by establishing the Government Ministries' and other NGOs social media accounts, National Council for Indian Women(National commission for women), along with Indian National Congress, although the role varies due to the time period and other important events such as independence of India and partition. Furthermore, the movement has been used in other instances to promote the existing parties' laws and ideas.

Another trouble with having too many campaigns launched by the government is the lack of identity. Unlike other nations in which campaigns or initiatives are given names, campaigns in India are often named after the target practice they are trying to combat, followed by the Ministry launching it. So far, the digital footprint of campaigns seems to be a response to events (hathras gang rape) or just through increased online traffic and discussions about the laws implemented by the government that may be harming the rights of people or just restricting them (banning specific clothing, curfew laws for women) (Gangoli,2016)

Furthermore, the other side of this search is the visibility of specific campaigns; some campaigns are not in the view of the ordinary public on the social domain. This is either due to a lack of likes, posts, the targeted perpetrators or simply the lack of people's response due to the nature of the campaign For example, Thangjam Manorama targeted the Indian Army (Chakravarti,2010) has persisted since 2004. Created in response to the assault of a tribal woman, Thangjam Manorama, by Armed soldiers who suspected her as a militant. The following

picture went viral on social media, showing tribal women storming the gates of army quarters naked and holding a banner saying, "Indian Army Rape us."



This 17-year-long protest has met with harsh regulations by the Indian Army, making these regions and inhabitants more militarily supervised and under constant suspicion of being anti-national. The use of social media is highly prominent on Twitter in the Indian context.

Twitter is a social media platform that government candidates heavily use. Such as the massive use of twitter platform in the 2019 election, with reported 396 million “conversations” alone by government candidates. Again, restricted by several other laws, for it has made it difficult to be seen as an authentic/trustworthy site for the public.

Additionally, many of the campaigns launched are simply awareness campaigns, with the ministries concluding that they aim to spread awareness around the issue. Which brings in the question of whether these campaigns are genuinely campaigns? Campaigns include 'Campaign to end Caste-based sexual violence,' Honour for Women National Movement, Anti-Rape Campaign, and Campaign Against Sex Selective Abortion.

Lastly, it could be argued that some campaigns arise to spread propaganda. Multiple governments across the globe have used this practice (Peterman, Palermo, et al., 2011). The propaganda often aims to divide or target a specific community, gender or age group. For example, Indian government history is filled with extreme party conflicts, such as the communal

violence between Hindus and Muslims in 1969. In this conflict, it was argued that sexual violence against Muslim Women was instigated through propaganda against them. Hindus were incited through speech, rumors and other forms of media. The propaganda against Muslims encouraged sexual violence towards them while simultaneously using this to portray them in an anti-national image.

The propaganda was to establish dominance over the other religious and socio-economic groups in the mirage of protecting their own people from others. (Kumar,2016)

The incidents are unclear due to the complicated nature and lack of concrete evidence.

Nevertheless, the following makes it harder to trust the campaign's authenticity, work, and impact on society.

Censorship

Censorship is the biggest challenge while archiving digital feminist campaigns in mainland China. Private Internet providers edit, filter, and delete online messages to comply with the government censorship guideline (King et al, 2013); Internet police and 50 cents party monitor¹ online content 24 hours a day from central to local scale. Terms like "feminist", "feminism", and "campaigns" are considered sensitive in Chinese (Sun&Yin, 2022), so the related information disappeared quickly.

Due to the censorship, operating digital feminist campaigns in mainland China is challenging, and feminist leaders are often in danger. For example, Haiyan Ye was arrested for leading a feminist campaign against the rape of six female students by the Principal at Hainan Wanning City No.2 Elementary school. On May 31st, 2013, one day after Haiyan Ye went to jail, Professor Xiaoming Ai protested the same sexual harassment case and requested releasing the

¹ Internet Commentators who censor the content online and post political propaganda on social media

arrested feminist leader Haiyan. Professor Ai posted her topless photo on Twitter and her blogger. In that photo, she wrote, "Principal, get a room with me/ Release Haiyan Ye" on her breast and held a scissor in her hand (Zeng, 2014). Several followers joined this digital campaign by posting a similar slogan on social media. However, Weibo censors soon deleted the related discussion by Professor Ai and her supporters. Because of the high risk of being arrested, Chinese feminists are cautious of their actions online, so digital campaigns can be hard to find.



The great firewall of China bans access to mainstream Western Websites and Apps, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Google and YouTube. Weibo and WeChat are the two primary social media in mainland China. The functioning of WeChat increases the level of difficulty of our documenting. For the WeChat public account, only the account owner can view the subscription number. WeChat users can only view their friends' profiles, likes, and comments, so the exact viewing number and likes are ambiguous on WeChat.

Unlike documenting digital feminist campaigns in other countries which can be more easily found through searching academic publications, news, and social media, collecting digital feminist activities data from Chinese social media are not that easily accessible (Zhang, 2019). Our team relies on personal experience and networks. Having personal connections with Chinese feminist was essential and identifying the visible and hidden digital feminist campaigns. During

the research process, we learnt about digital feminist campaigns, such as Feminist Voice², #FreeBeijing20Five³, and the promotion of *The Vagina Monologues*⁴ by Chinese Universities students online by asking Chinese feminists. Yet, finding Chinese digital campaigns is slightly easier done outside of mainland China. A Google search, which can only access outside of mainland China due to the fire wall, often stores second-hand data (screenshots, pictures, and messages) of those deleted digital feminist activities.

However, while this tactic was useful in identifying digital feminist campaigns in China, government censorship and the quick deletion of many campaigns means it is very difficult to establish their influence or spread. The more historic the campaign, the more difficult to uncover and document. This suggests that searching for digital campaigns through digital technologies is unlikely to present the full picture of digital feminist campaigns in China, and other techniques such as oral histories and interviews are likely needed to fill in important gaps.

Hashtags with Multiple Uses or Meanings - Vague Hashtags or No Hashtags

Throughout the process of collecting data we found one issue emerged specifically in relation to hashtag campaigns. The issue here is that the hashtag was used in contexts that were disconnected from its the anti- sexual violence campaign. For example, in Spain, the hashtag campaign #LaManada, translate to English meaning #Wolfpack started out as a hashtag campaign to raise awareness concerning sexual violence against women in public spaces, but prior to this campaign was used as an informal hashtag used by people when posting pictures with friends (both in Spanish and English). Additionally, There was also an album entitled La

² Feminist Voice was an online influential feminist activism account on Weibo and WeChat aiming to promote gender equality, which was banned in 2018.

³ #FreeBeijing20Five was a digital feminist campaign on 2015 via Twitter which requested releasing five feminists – Li Tingting, Wu Rongrong, Zheng Churan, Zheng Churan, Wei Tingting and Wang Man- who were detained by police for planning feminist activities.

⁴ Students from Beijing Foreign Studies University were calling for the improvement of women's self-awareness and sexual freedom by promoting the feminist drama, *The Vagina Monologues*, online.

Manada by Argentinian/Spanish musician Ariel Rot which was released the same year and was also promoted via Twitter. This made it more difficult to find the beginning of the movement and when it started trending because at that point the hashtag had various meanings.

#LaManada had many challenges when seeking out further information on the hashtag campaign, as it would lead to many unrelated and irrelevant posts on social media, and made it very difficult to filter out and find the relevant posts in order to analyze them. In particular, if a campaign had been dated back several years, it made it even more difficult to find the relevant hashtags of that campaign since many recent posts on social media used the hashtag, but for different purposes, or created similar hashtags with a vague but similar wording associated with that hashtag.

Another obstacle we faced, particularly for the English researchers, was the noteworthy similarity of many hashtag campaigns on social media. Various hashtag campaigns would use very similar wording when advocating against sexual violence, such as #NotOkay, #ThatsNotOK, #NotOK, and It's Never Okay, and the difficulty encountered with having such similar campaigns was being able to correctly catalogue them, to identify that a certain campaign had already been counted, and to recognize that each campaign had its own meaning and significance that should not be minimized in its importance and contribution to digital activism.

One of the main challenges our researchers faced in the non-English portion was the changed meanings and uses of hashtags, especially in Chinese due to government censorship and the need to protect oneself online. In analyzing recoded hashtags, such as #ricebunny in Chinese or #LaManada in Spanish, as well as several others, our researchers had to decode the double meanings and ensure that those hashtags had originally been representing sexual violence

campaigns. These hashtags were known by niche groups to have been encoded, but being unaware of the double meanings to the general public raised concern of how people would interpret and understand these hashtags. In China, #MeToo became #MiTu (米兔/咪兔) due to the fact that online activists had to adjust and encode campaigns in order to keep the campaign active due to rigorous online censorship subject to blocking and taking down these campaigns (Zeng, 2019). These encoded hashtags made it difficult to track the hashtag and how (and if) it was still being used, by whom, and the effect that changing the hashtag into a vague term had in regards to its activism.

Additionally, when analyzing the differences between an English movement being translated into another language, it was difficult to decipher whether or not a new movement had emerged from the English translation, or if it was actually a direct translation and we were replicating our data, for example #MeToo translate to #MoiAussi. It is not always clear when academics are discussing hashtags in their pieces, whether they are referring to the original campaign in English, or using the English campaign directly translate, such as #MoiAussi. Our team experienced this while researching, and would encounter authors referencing in particular the #MeToo movement by directly translating it to French, #MoiAussi.

However, along with this difficulty our team also found that the hashtag #MoiAussi had become its own hashtag campaign on social media, independent of the translated version in English. This however, created much confusion when our researcher had to decipher between the original English movement being discussed in papers, and when a new separate campaign was being discussed. Furthermore, this created difficulty when looking for the creators, start and end dates, and popularity of translated campaigns. In regards to #MoiAussi as an independent

campaign, the creators were unable to be identified, but were able to identify it had grown in popularity in Quebec.

Conclusion

It is evident that digital feminist activism is increasing in tandem with the rise of digital technology, allowing feminists to create and disseminate to a wider audience than ever before an online safe space that can educate and challenge rape culture. However, due to the novelty of digital activism, feminist scholars are still researching the long term impacts, benefits and challenges that coexist with digital feminist activism and digital archiving, including such challenges as censorship, government control over digital spaces, hashtag ambiguity, and inactive and blocked links.

By analyzing the patterns of digital campaigns, we were able to examine the trends and impact of digital feminist campaigns, as well as their strengths and weaknesses and their ability to contribute to digital feminist activism, allowing us to better understand how digital feminist activism is creating a new form of activism to challenge sexism and rape culture around the world. Although there is still much research yet to be completed on digital feminist activism and archiving, we hope that our contributions with this paper will help scholars and others to understand the history, challenges, benefits, and pathways where digital feminist activism is heading, create new methods of archiving and activism, and the significant influence it has had on individuals' ability to speak out and on feminists' ability to network, organize, and challenge misogyny, patriarchy and rape culture.

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