Article

#MeToo, popular feminism and the news: A content analysis of UK newspaper coverage

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Abstract

This article examines the first 6 months of #MeToo's coverage in the UK press, revealing how newspapers played an important role in heightening the campaign's visibility. Using content analysis, our study demonstrates that the press contributed to expanding and reinforcing #MeToo's visibility in important ways. In terms of reach, the UK press has expanded the movement's visibility beyond social media, addressing potentially new and different readerships. This attests to the pivotal role that news media continue to play in disseminating global issues and debates for a national audience. Second, in terms of content, while the news coverage developed and consolidated stories that were originally revealed on social media, it also publicized new stories. However, our study also highlights how the press' role in enabling and expanding the visibility of #MeToo has been characterized by a number of crucial and, we argue, problematic factors. First, while #MeToo was covered positively in all newspapers, there was significant variation within newspapers, which was largely consistent with their traditional ideological alignments. Second, the #MeToo coverage seems to have followed and reinforced familiar patterns with respect to news coverage of both sexual violence and feminism, namely, support of feminism

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alongside a concurrent de-politicization, an individualizing tendency through a focus on celebrity and the cultural industries, and the centring of the experiences of celebrity female subjects who are predominately White and wealthy.

Introduction

On 15 October 2017, American actress Alyssa Milano posted a tweet encouraging survivors of sexual harassment and assault to post #MeToo as a status update. That short tweet sparked a global movement, and, since then, #MeToo has gained international visibility – a visibility that has been largely attributed to the viral fashion in which stories of sexual abuse have spread on digital media platforms. The hashtag is currently circulating in over 85 countries and has thus significantly expanded beyond the global North and the initial impetus for Milano's tweet – namely, revelations concerning movie mogul Harvey Weinstein's years of sexual abuse.[1] Yet, while considerable attention has been given to the role of social media in facilitating the global visibility of the campaign, much less has been said about the ways in which #MeToo has been framed and discussed by more traditional news media in particular national contexts. Indeed, news is increasingly networked, and thus, social media debates, such as the one sparked by #MeToo, cannot be fully understood without considering the role of traditional news (Beckett and Mansell, 2008; Guha, 2015; Russell, 2016).

A number of recent studies have suggested that there has been an actual decline in social media use for news and indicated that people trust traditional news more than social media news (Edelman Trust, 2018; Elvestad et al., 2018; Newman, 2018). Furthermore, notwithstanding the growing popularity and influence of digital media, research continues to underscore the pivotal role played by news media in disseminating global debates and framing them for national audiences (Elvestad et al., 2018; Hayashi et al., 2016; Naylor, 2001; Tanikawa, 2017). In the United Kingdom, despite the decrease in circulation of national titles, newspapers remain an important platform not only for the consumption of news (Ofcom, 2018), with an increasing number of people reading them online, but also for helping to shape the national agenda (Blinder and Allen, 2016; Gavin, 2018).

In this context, and as feminist researchers based in the United Kingdom, we were interested in exploring how the #MeToo campaign has been framed by the UK news. More specifically, in light of current scholarship that has analysed #MeToo as part of the resurgence of feminism in the popular and mainstream media and its growing popularity in public discourse (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2018), and in view of the heralding of #MeToo as reinvigorating feminist goals and activism, we sought to examine the particular characteristics and patterns of the campaign's coverage in the UK press.

The article is organized in four parts. The first section situates our study within current scholarship on the rise of popular and neoliberal feminism as well as in relation to research on the depiction of feminism and sexual violence in the news. Informed by this literature, in the second section, we introduce the key questions our study seeks to

address, namely, has #MeToo been framed in supportive terms? What issues has the coverage focused on? And, what types of solution were offered for the issues that #MeToo has raised? We then discuss the study's methodological design, the coding frame and the rationale for conducting content analysis. The third section presents the key findings. Tying together the strands of the analysis, in the conclusion we discuss the significance and limitations of the coverage of the #MeToo campaign in the UK national press, linking this discussion to wider debates about the current possibilities and challenges facing feminism in a mediated age.

Popular feminism, sexual violence and the news

Popular and neoliberal feminism

The past few years have witnessed the increasing visibility of feminism across an array of media. Celebrities such as Beyoncé, Oprah Winfrey and Miley Cyrus, high-powered women in the corporate world such as Sheryl Sandberg, movie stars like Emma Watson and the new Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, are the new faces of feminism. If just a decade ago, prominent feminist scholars were writing about the coalescing of a post-feminist sensibility and the renunciation of feminism in the mainstream and popular media (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009), today, by contrast, the cultural landscape seems to be characterized by the widespread embrace and popularity of feminism. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018: 8) has even suggested that '[t]he question du jour for female (and some male) celebrities has become, "Are you a feminist?"' Moreover, recent accounts have shown that a dominant strand of feminism circulating in mainstream and popular media, particularly in the Anglo-American world, is one that encourages women to focus on their personal empowerment and aspirations (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2018). Indeed, championing gender equality and identifying as a feminist have become a mark of pride and source of cultural capital for many high-profile women. The UK press has been a central site in which this type of 'popular' (Banet-Weiser, 2018) or 'neoliberal' (Rottenberg, 2018) feminist discourse, which tends to obscure structural critiques of gender inequality, has been disseminated and, thus, gained prominence.

At the same time that the resurgence of popular feminism has promoted the individualization of women and the elision of structural critique, there has also been a surge of mass feminist protest in many countries in recent years. While large-scale feminist organizing has continued to exist in the margins for some time (e.g. Million Women Rise), highly visible, transnational feminist organizing (e.g. Slutwalk) has resurfaced on a scale not seen in decades. More recently, in the wake of Donald Trump's election and the reappearance of a shameless sexism and a culture of impunity in the Anglo-American public sphere, we have witnessed historic mass mobilizations, such as the 2017 Women's March and #MeToo. Today's large-scale feminist mobilizing, however, is not only a reaction to particular social or political events but also inextricably linked to the wider context of social media. Scholars have demonstrated how the scale and transnational nature of this activism are enabled by the affordances of digital media (Mendes et al., 2018). Projects like #everydaysexism, #freethenipple, #yesallwomen and #BeenRapedNeverReported have become international viral movements, and these novel digital feminist activist spaces have provided fertile ground for the emergence of #MeToo.

News and feminism

Research has, for many years now, documented and highlighted the ways in which news is profoundly gendered (Carter, 2005; Gill, 2007; Ndangam et al., 2015; Ross, 2017; Ross et al., 2013). Since 1995, The Global Media Monitoring Project has been central to the investigation of gender and the news, revealing the persistent gendered dimensions of news media reporting. The Project has found that since 2010, 'the rate of progress towards gender parity has almost ground to a halt' (Ndangam et al., 2015: 8). In this context, it is hardly surprising that feminism – a political movement whose fundamental goal is to eradicate discrimination against women and gender inequality – has been continuously belittled, de-legitimized and de-politicized in mainstream news, albeit – and paradoxically – often while ostensibly being supported and celebrated (Mendes, 2011).

Kaitlynn Mendes' (2011) study of the UK and US press coverage of feminism from 1968 to 2008 offers the most comprehensive account of the key patterns and shifts in news portrayal of feminism to date. Mendes found that from 1968 to 1982, the height of second-wave feminism, coverage was, on the whole, fragmented and contradictory. On the one hand, just over half of the articles in this period included supportive frames, constructing the feminist movement as necessary, liberating and struggling for worthy goals. On the other hand, Mendes shows that an almost equal number of articles sought to de-legitimize feminism by defining its agenda as 'radical' and unacceptable. Thus, even during the height of the woman's movement, the coverage was almost evenly split between support and detraction. In addition, in this earlier period of coverage, Mendes identifies the emergence of neoliberal and postfeminist discourses that place blame for the failure of achieving equality on individual women rather than on unequal structural conditions.

Mendes (2011) also found that three decades later, in 2008, this time during the height of postfeminism, there was a substantial decrease in the coverage of feminism. Nevertheless, when feminism was mentioned, the coverage was often surprisingly positive. This support, however, was typically defensive, seeking to refute attacks on feminism, which speaks to the success of oppositional voices attempting to undermine its relevancy and even legitimacy. Furthermore, in the coverage of the first decade of the 21st century, Mendes (2011) identifies a very clear shift towards what she calls the 'life-styling' of feminism (p.10), whereby feminism is associated with the expression of personal identity, primarily through consumer choice – a construction that has come to be associated more broadly with 'choice feminism' (Budgeon, 2015). For example, feminism was frequently framed in individualizing ways, focusing on 'softer issues such as fashion, leisure, and popular culture' rather than on organized social mobilization (Mendes, 2012: 565, 560). This shift, which corresponds with the overall decrease in coverage, contributes to the de-politicization of feminist goals (see also Dean, 2010).

News and sexual violence

Given that research on the representation of sexual violence against women in the news is copious, it is beyond the scope of this article to summarize all its complex findings. However, five trends, which have been repeatedly documented by scholars, seem particularly salient for our discussion in this article. First, the news' interest in sexual violence stories has notable commercial drivers. As Kitzinger (2004) has argued, sexual

violence is considered to make 'good copy'. Stories of sexual violence are often sensationalized and 'prompt outrage, fear, sadness and anger – emotional draws which are used to shift papers and make money' (Mendes, 2015: no pagination). More recently, in the context of decreasing resources for investigative journalism and the increasing use of user-generated social media for free content, stories of sexual violence offer mainstream media cheap or completely free content that they can use to attract readers' attention within a broader 'parasitical media economy' (De Benedictis et al., 2017).[2]

Second and related to the first, studies have highlighted the ways that female victims of sexual violence are frequently described in highly sexualised terms (e.g. Carter, 1998; Gallagher, 2001). Benedict (1992), for instance, has argued that survivors of rape are categorized by the media either as 'virgins' (and thus innocent) or as sexualized 'vamps' (and thus asking for it). Third, scholars have highlighted how the news represents rape as a singular occurrence. For example, Boyle (2005) has revealed the way in which rape is often portrayed in the news in terms of individual cases, thus eliding the fact that rape is a societal problem suffered by many. This framing is reinforced both in news and in other media (e.g. television shows) through an emphasis on self-help, which places the onus of working through the trauma on the survivor herself (Boyle, 2005; Moorti, 2001). Fourth, ample research has shown the persistence of a victim blaming culture (Boyle, 2005; Meyers, 1997; Soothill and Walby, 1991). This is perpetuated by myths such as 'women provoke rape and thus deserve it' that place the burden on women to behave in ways that ostensibly make them less susceptible to being sexually abused and harassed. The news media, for instance, often report on what the survivor did, wore or said, but rarely on the perpetrator – thus the survivor is framed in a way that is consistent with the perpetrator's perspective (Boyle, 2005). Furthermore, survivors of sexual violence are frequently spoken *for* and thus their experience and voices are, in effect, silenced.

Finally, the 'ideal victim' of sexual violence that Western news tends to depict is White, middle-class, educated, well-behaved, young and conventionally attractive (Benedict, 1992). For example, Salter's (2013) analysis shows that it is the young, White, middle-class woman who is positioned as courageous and able to leverage support through 'old' as well as 'new' media when she names her perpetrators. By contrast, condemnation, lack of acknowledgement or a generally litigious approach characterizes the coverage of working-class and older women's naming of perpetrators. This echoes and reinforces what law scholar Estrich (1987) calls the 'ideal rape victim' of a 'real rape' and how 'gender, race and class shape who speaks about rape in the public arena and how they speak about it' (Moorti, 2001: 14).

The study

Research design and methodology

Building on this literature, our study aims to analyse the coverage of #MeToo as a feminist campaign focusing on sexual violence. Informed by the literature on the rise of popular feminism and the coverage of feminism and sexual violence in the news, our study examines how #MeToo has gained visibility and whether such visibility was sustained over the first 6-month period following Alyssa Milano's tweet. Has #MeToo been framed in supportive terms? Does the coverage show patterns identified by previous

research, namely, the individualization of women's experience of sexual violence and the de-politicization of feminism? On which issues has the coverage focused and which themes and issues have been neglected or received limited attention? What types of solution were offered for the issues that #MeToo has raised? More broadly, what role has the press played in framing #MeToo?

To address these questions, we conducted a content analysis of the campaign's coverage in the UK press. While, to date, analysis of #MeToo's coverage has been scarce and largely based on small-scale qualitative data (see Conor et al., 2018; Gill and Orgad, 2018; Hemmings, 2018; Tambe, 2018), our study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of this coverage, its prevalence and characteristics over time. We devised a coding framework that would allow us to analyse the coverage by type of publication, overall tone, focus of the article, main sector/industry/work context addressed and the types of solutions offered. It is important to note that #MeToo is often discussed as a general movement with many figureheads, and LexisNexis does not provide the accompanying published photographs to news articles. Therefore, coding for other identity markers of the women included in the newspapers' coverage of #MeToo was impossible.

Tone was particularly important to the study, since we wanted to try and determine whether the framing of #MeToo followed similar patterns revealed by other studies of the news coverage of women's movements (Mendes, 2011). We thus coded for the overall tone characterizing the article and the article's positioning of #MeToo. Articles were coded either as positive, negative, mixed/balanced or unclear, drawing on Orgad and De Beneditis (2015) previous content analysis of news coverage. If articles showed 'commendation/appraisal/valuing/appreciation/recognition' of #MeToo and/or its causes, this was coded 'positive'. If the articles 'demonstrated or included substantial criticism/derision/cynicism/dismissal' (Orgad and De Benedictis, 2015) of #MeToo and/or its causes, this was coded as 'negative', and, finally, if the tone was balanced or included some positive and some negative commentary it was coded 'mixed/balanced'.

We ran a search of newspaper articles using the search terms '#MeToo' and 'MeToo' between 11 October 2017 and 31 March 2018.[3] We decided to explore the coverage over an approximately 6-month period, since this would allow us to see if and how the coverage has changed over time.[4] Conducted through LexisNexis, which is the most comprehensive online news database, our search yielded 3450 newspaper articles across nine major UK newspapers.[5] To create a manageable sample, we used systematic random sampling and selected every fifth article from the total cohort. Next, duplicate and irrelevant items were removed, resulting in the creation of the final sample of 613 items. The three authors and a team of nine postgraduate students proceeded to code the items in groups, ensuring that double coding was performed on all items. Once coding had been performed individually, 12 coders were paired to compare and discuss any coding discrepancies that arose. Items that could not be decided on were passed to the authors to discuss and agree upon. Intercoder reliability across the cohort of groups for the categories analysed in this article stood at 89 percent. Coding was subsequently inputted into SPSS by a research assistant and a series of questions were devised by the authors to run frequencies and crosstabulations on the data.[6] To corroborate our analysis, where

possible, we mapped findings from the sample onto the full data set. We also added qualitative notes in relation to particular findings to illustrate them in more detail.

Unpacking the coverage of #MeToo: patterns and logics of popular feminism's visibility

From digital media to newspapers: expanding the campaign's visibility

Much of the discussion surrounding #MeToo has focused on the role of digital media as a space for voicing stories about sexual violence – stories that had previously been silenced and remained largely invisible in the mainstream news. However, our examination of the press coverage of #MeToo shows that the press, too, has played an important role in making such stories visible. The content analysis reveals that, overall, #MeToo gained considerable visibility in the press during the campaign's first 6 months and that 59 percent (363 items) of the coverage focused directly on sexual harassment and/or sexual assault and/or rape.

The newspaper coverage over this period not only reinforced the visibility of stories that emerged online but also included original stories, thus expanding the content of the campaign. For example, several newspapers published exclusive reports on allegations of sexual harassment in the humanitarian field (in NGOs such as Oxfam and Save the Children, for example, see Siddique, 2018 in *The Guardian* on 21 March 2018).[7] Thus, the press coverage contributed to expanding the campaign's visibility beyond social media both in terms of reach and content (news stories), as well as in terms of reinforcing and consolidating stories and issues that originally emerged online.

Unequal visibility: new sites of attention and old spaces of invisibility

The significant role the press has played in enhancing and expanding the visibility of #MeToo is particularly pronounced when examining the distribution of the coverage among the different newspapers and the tone of the coverage. Almost a third (31%, 190 items) (see Figure 1) of the entire coverage appeared in the *Daily Mail*, a conservative paper notorious, historically, for its postfeminist and, at times, anti-feminist stance (see McRobbie, 2009, 2013, 2015).

Furthermore, just over half of the coverage that the *Daily Mail* devoted to #MeToo (95 items) was positive (see Figure 2). Thus, one of the significant aspects of the news coverage of #MeToo appears to be extending the visibility and endorsement of the campaign beyond the 'usual suspects', namely, the liberal press, represented by *The Guardian* and *The Independent* in the sample. The coverage of both of these latter newspapers was, unsurprisingly, overwhelming positive (78 items, 70% of *The Guardian*'s entire coverage, and 52 items, 67% of *The Independent*'s), yet their share of the overall coverage was smaller than expected, and together equalled that of the *Daily Mail* alone (31%; see Figure 1).

At the same time, as seen in Figure 1, *The Sun*, the UK daily newspaper with the largest daily print and mobile readership (Newsworks, 2018), and well known for
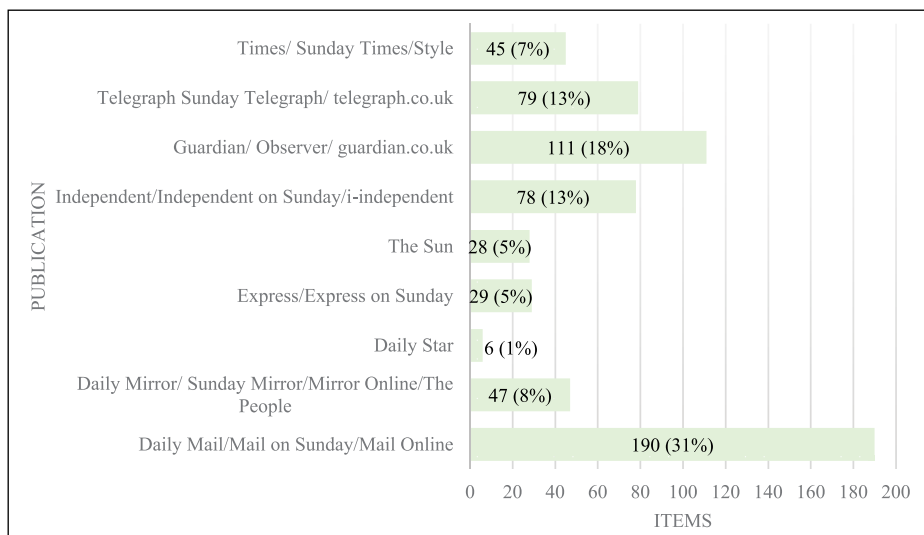
Figure 1. Frequency of publication of newspaper articles covering #MeToo.[8]

hypersexualizing and objectifying women, devoted strikingly little coverage to #MeToo. Only 5 percent (28 items) of the entire coverage during the 6-month period comes from *The Sun*, of which just over a half (54%, 15 items) is positive in tone (see Figure 2). This finding serves as an important caveat to the general enthusiasm (which we, as feminists, partly share) about the ostensibly heightened visibility and widespread embrace of #MeToo within the broader context of the growing popularity of feminism in the mainstream media. The fact that this extremely popular newspaper paid such limited attention to #MeToo between October 2017 and March 2018, is an important reminder that although feminism has become popular, its popularity is clearly not equally distributed.[9] Furthermore, the fact that the *Daily Mail* devoted considerable coverage to #MeToo, half of which was positive in tone, is not in itself an indication that the coverage embraced feminism wholesale or per se – a theme we discuss later. Nevertheless, the visibility that the *Daily Mail* allowed the campaign is significant.

#MeToo coverage over time

From 15 October 2017, the day of Milano's tweet, we see an immediate spike in the number of articles mentioning #MeToo. There is then a steady increase in coverage in the first 3 weeks of October 2017, and specifically, there is a rise in the number of articles from 15 October to 21 October 2017, followed by a slight dip in coverage in the final week of the month. This is proceeded by a steady rise in coverage from 12 November 2017 to 7 January 2018 and steady coverage from 7 January to 31 March 2018 (74% of the sample, 454 items).

Thus, what we witness is a clear rise and, subsequently, sustained visibility in the #MeToo press coverage over the examined period. When exploring the sample by weeks,

Publication	Tone				
	Positive	Negative	Mixed and/or balanced	Neither / unclear	Total
Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday/Mail Online	95	34	18	43	190
Daily Mirror/ Sunday Mirror/Mirror Online/The People	25	7	5	10	47
Daily Star	3	1	1	1	6
Express/Express on Sunday	12	9	1	7	29
The Sun	15	7	3	3	28

Figure 2. (Continued)

Publication	Tone				
	Positive	Negative	Mixed and/or balanced	Neither / unclear	Total
Independent/Independent on Sunday/i-independent	52	4	5	17	78
Guardian/ Observer/ guardian.co.uk	78	3	11	19	111
Telegraph Sunday Telegraph/ telegraph.co.uk	43	11	3	22	79
Times/ Sunday Times/Style	18	13	6	8	45
Total	341	89	53	130	613

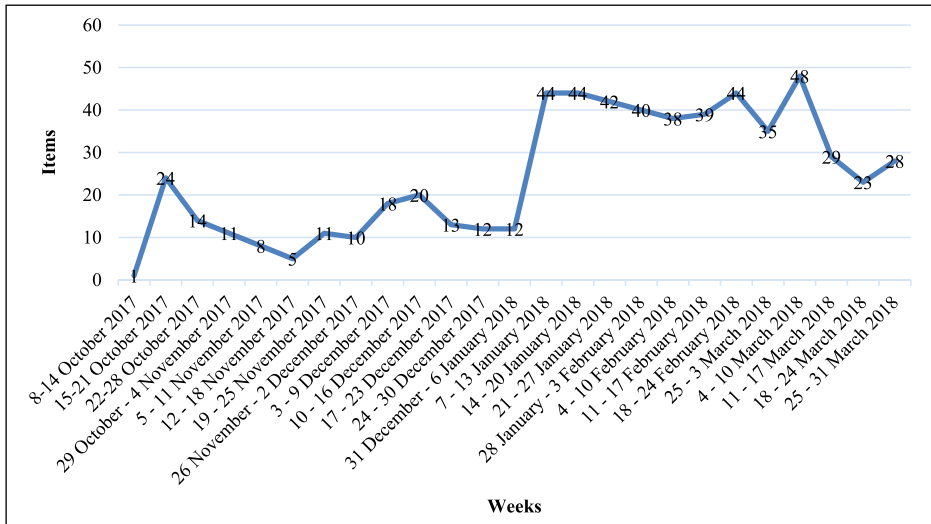**Figure 2.** Crosstabulation of publication and tone of #MeToo newspaper articles.

Figure 3. Weekly newspaper coverage of #MeToo.

there were three notable peaks within the 6-month timeframe (see Figure 3). The first occurs during the week of 15–21 October 2017, namely, the days immediately following Milano's tweet, the second and the sharpest during the 2 weeks between 7–20 January 2018 and the third during the week of 4–10 March 2018. These peaks in the sample parallel peaks in the full data set.

The first peak in October consists mainly of articles discussing new revelations about sexual abuse within the media, entertainment and sports industries, which emerged in the wake of #MeToo. Another focus during these early days revolves around #MeToo's emergence as a social media campaign. Many of the articles during this week debate the significance and implications of digital activism. Some, for instance, remind readers that #MeToo did not begin as a hashtag but as a grassroots movement spearheaded by the African-American activist Tarana Burke to aid sexual assault survivors in underprivileged communities (e.g. 'It wasn't built to be a viral campaign!' MailOnline, 2017), while others raise questions about the significance of 'hashtag feminism', wondering whether it had any solutions or 'real' feminist ideas to offer (e.g. 'I've had enough of MeToo "hashtag feminism" and its intellectual laziness' Strimpel, 2017).

The second peak in coverage occurs during the 2 weeks of 7–20 January 2018, where the number of articles almost doubles, amounting to 14 percent (88 items) of the entire coverage. This dramatic increase is related to the press' extensive discussion of three central topics: The Golden Globes, particularly around the decision made by many female stars to wear black as a sign of solidarity with #MeToo and Oprah Winfrey's acceptance speech for the Cecil B. DeMille Award, Catherine Deneuve's public denouncement of #MeToo and accusations of sexual abuse against Woody Allen and other male Hollywood celebrities.[10] *The third peak* occurs during the week of 4–10 March, consisting of 8 percent (48 items) of the entire coverage. Here, the coverage

revolves around the 2018 Oscars and feminist organizing around International Women's Day, which took place on 8 March, and was used in several articles as a springboard for discussions about the #MeToo campaign and the issues it has raised. For instance, writing in *The Guardian* on 8 March 2018, well-known feminist writer Rebecca Solnit, utilizes International Women's Day to discuss how #MeToo signifies a cultural rupture through feminist activism ('Feminists have slowly shifted power', Solnit, 2018).

What becomes clear through an analysis of these peaks is that all three revolve around key media events. The first peak follows the initiation of the campaign in the wake of Milano's tweet and the surfacing of revelations of sexual abuse and harassment. Peak two takes place amid a media event, namely, the Golden Globes, and the third peak transpires around the Oscars and International Women's Day. These media events revolve around three central themes that characterize the coverage more broadly, namely, feminist protest, sexual violence and celebrity culture, particularly in the high-profile worlds of entertainment and fashion. The combination of these three themes, we suggest, has helped to sustain the campaign's visibility over time.

The warm but selective appreciation of feminism

One of the most notable findings concerns the overall positive tone of the coverage: 56 percent (341 items) of the articles expressed a clearly positive view of #MeToo, while 21 percent (130 items) were unclear, neutral or balanced; 9 percent (nine items) mixed; and only 15 percent (89 items) negative (see Figure 4).[11]

The distribution of tone seems consistent and proportionate with the overall coverage over time in the full data set. This finding also appears consistent with Mendes' (2011) findings concerning the coverage of feminism in the US press from 1968 to 1982 – the heyday of second-wave feminism. While within every newspaper the largest number of articles framed the campaign in positive terms, the highest percentages are found, predictably, in *The Guardian* (70%, 78 items) and *The Independent* (67%, 52 items) left-wing papers with liberal leanings (see Figure 2). It is equally unsurprising that the lowest percentage of positive-toned articles and highest proportion of negative articles are found in the conservative papers, *The Times* (18 items, 40% positive, 13 items, 29% negative) and *The Express* (12 items, 41% positive, nine items, 31% negative). While the proportion of negatively toned articles in *The Times* and *The Express* is substantially higher than the overall average of 15 percent for all newspapers, in the other newspapers, the proportion of negative coverage is generally in line with the overall 15 percent – with the exception of *The Sun*, a quarter (seven items) of whose coverage was negative, and *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, whose negative coverage was far lower (three items, 3% and four items, 5% respectively).

These findings support the claim that 'feminism is clearly having a moment, basking in a warm … glow of appreciation' (Gill and Orgad, 2017). However, as Gill and Orgad (2017) crucially note, this appreciation is selective. Indeed, a more careful and critical look into these findings introduces some important caveats to the overall argument that the UK newspaper coverage of #MeToo exemplifies increased visibility alongside an embrace and appreciation of feminism.

First, the distribution of positively and negatively toned articles still largely mirrors familiar ideological lines: overall, #MeToo has been most clearly and overwhelmingly embraced by the left-leaning liberal press, while conversely it has received the least positive
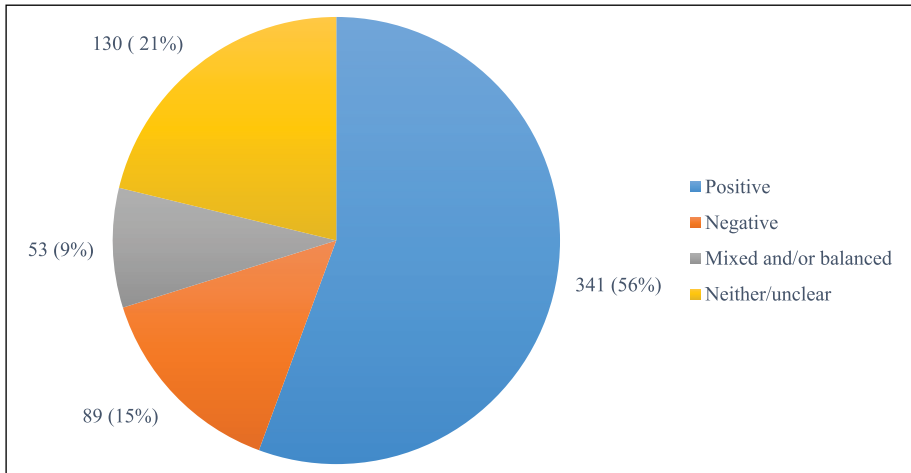
Figure 4. Distribution of tone in newspaper coverage of #MeToo.

coverage and highest negative coverage in the conservative press. Thus, while #MeToo is being embraced, it has been embraced rather unequally and along familiar ideological lines.

Second, while the left-leaning press coverage demonstrates a warm endorsement of the campaign, it is characterized by the almost complete absence of critique of #MeToo. Of the six negative-toned articles (Gosling, 2018; *The Guardian*, 2018; Hooton, 2018; *The Independent*, 2017; Persaud, 2018; Street-Porter, 2018) published in both *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, articles that do include critiques either explicitly distance themselves from feminism or are simply condemnatory and do not consider any of the complexities of the feminist debate around #MeToo. It could be that other voices critical of the #MeToo campaign are included in the full data set and/or in some of the articles coded as mixed or balanced tone. Nevertheless, the fact that critiques of #MeToo received such little mention or attention within the sample suggests that these newspapers overlooked and even silenced certain critical voices. An example of a critical feminist voice excluded from the coverage of both *The Guardian* and *The Independent* is that of American rapper, former stripper and woman of colour, Cardi B. Interestingly, in an article published in the MailOnline (2018), the singer criticizes #MeToo for selectively foregrounding certain women, favouring a particular femininity that is 'respectable' and believable', to which, she argues, women like herself and others in the hip hop industry do not belong. Cardi B's claim echoes feminist scholar Bev Skeggs' (1997) critique of the cultural production of 'respectable femininity' and its crucial intersection with race (Tate, 2012). Yet, her voice is excluded from the left-leaning newspapers in our sample.

Third, the overall support of #MeToo by the press must be situated in the context of the coverage's overwhelming (369 items, 60%) focus on the entertainment and fashion industry and the extremely limited discussion of sectors such as hospitality and administration (11 items, 2%) or education (14 items, 2%), where there is a very high concentration of female employment. The focus on the entertainment and fashion industry (and especially on individual celebrities within these industries) helps to explain the

heightened visibility of #MeToo in the press in general, and in papers such as the *Daily Mail* more particularly, where the percentage is even higher (135 items, 71%). As several feminist researchers have noted (Banet-Weiser, 2018: Rottenberg, 2018), spectacular expressions, such as celebrity feminism, achieve far greater visibility than 'unsexy' stories like those related to the women working in industries, such as hospitality, since these women tend to be mostly poorer, non-White and/or migrants. Anita Biressi's (2018) analysis of the news coverage of the sexual assault scandal involving elite politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn and hotel cleaner Nafissatou Diallo reveals that even when non-elite women are allowed to interrupt the news media and political discourse, their depiction is always deeply entangled with issues of economic power and control. Furthermore, reinforcing Mendes' (2011) observation in relation to the 'lifestyling' of feminism in news coverage, the news' focus on 'softer' issues such as celebrity, and women in the cultural industries and fashion – which in our sample characterized the *Daily Mail*'s coverage as well as the coverage more broadly – framed #MeToo in individualizing terms rather than in structural and systemic ones. Specifically, the reporting tended to frame women's accounts of sexual abuse and harassment as human interest stories, highlighting these women's personal working through or overcoming of the traumatic events while emphasizing the power of self-empowerment.

Relatedly, it is important to note that within the articles discussing the entertainment and fashion industry (369 items, 60%), many focus on the clothes or the colour (black) that individual female celebrities have worn at various media events as a sign of solidarity with the #MeToo campaign. While mention was made of the campaign, the emphasis was often on these women's sartorial choices, and the thrust of these articles' discussion was the extent to which these celebrities' #MeToo expressions were fashionable. It therefore appears that news coverage of #MeToo achieves heightened visibility, particularly in venues such as the *Daily Mail*, when sexual abuse is associated with culturally desirable and normative celebrity bodies. Examined in this light, the *Daily Mail*'s coverage is less surprising than might appear at first. Indeed, although the newspaper produced the highest number of articles about #MeToo, half of which were positive – findings that seem inconsistent with its conservative orientation and at times anti-feminist stance – the paper's coverage foregrounded precisely those female subjects it has traditionally presented as desirable and normative, namely, White and celebrity women. Simultaneously, the paper obscured from view those women it has historically portrayed as abject, namely, poor, working class and non-White women (see, for example, Meyer, 2010).

The absence of solutions

A final notable finding relates to the kinds of solutions that the news articles present to the problem of sexual harassment and assault. Our interest in exploring what if any solutions the newspapers proposed for the problems exposed by #MeToo is not informed by a view that journalism should *devise* solutions, but rather that it should *inform the public about and debate potential solutions* (see also McIntyre, 2019). Thus, we wanted to see whether the press offered a platform for discussing potential recommendations and/or remedies to address the issues the coverage raised with respect to #MeToo. Strikingly, in

our sample, 41 percent of the articles (253 items) do not mention any potential solution at all, while 15 percent (94 items) suggest that empowering women to speak out or encouraging women to speak out constitutes a viable solution. The third highest frequency solution, appearing in 8 percent of the articles (47 items), consists of more radical propositions, such as rooting out sexism and patriarchy or demanding profound structural change, such as the right to unionize in order to ensure that women who make a complaint cannot be fired for speaking out against abuse. Notably, the solutions in the 'radical' category were the most intersectional in character, referring to structural changes needed to ensure 'a feminism for the 99%' (Martín Alcoff et al., 2018). The remaining solutions revolved around changing gender norms/practices in the workplace (or similar spheres) (6%, 35 items), women supporting each other (5%, 29 items), legal reform (4%, 27 items), exposing or punishing men who have harassed/abused (4%, 25 items), women protecting themselves and saying 'no' (2%, 13 items), men speaking out or encouraging other men to speak out about sexual harassment and assault (1%, five items) or another type of solution (14%, 86 items). Solutions suggesting more radical changes appear in much higher numbers in the left-leaning papers such as *The Guardian* and *The Independent* (19%, 21 items and 10%, eight items respectively), as opposed to 4 percent (seven items) in the *Daily Mail.*

Thus, it appears that the vast majority of coverage focused on announcing rather than attempting to address the root cause of sexual violence. The very limited discussion of potential solutions echoes Banet-Weiser's observation regarding popular feminism: while #MeToo's coverage has helped to expose the scale and pervasiveness of sexual violence, its heightened visibility has largely remained 'an end in itself rather than a route to dismantling asymmetries of power' (Banet-Weiser, 2018: 54; see also Rottenberg, 2018).

Furthermore, the fact that women speaking out is the solution mentioned with most frequency is, however, also noteworthy (15%, 95 items). This, we suggest, may gesture to a constitutive tension that lies at the heart of #MeToo as a digital media campaign. On the one hand, the campaign has been predicated on the importance of voicing silenced experiences, which has been facilitated by the digital affordances of social media. It thus draws on a longer history of feminist consciousness-raising and has certainly galvanized women across the globe, encouraging them to speak out and protest. There is even some evidence to support the claim that important cultural and organizational changes have occurred in the wake of the campaign (see Gill and Orgad, 2018). Yet, on the other hand, encouraging women to speak out can easily become the default solution to questions of sexual harassment and assault, placing the onus on *individual* women rather than on the structures that create and sustain inequality, thus dovetailing quite seamlessly with popular and neoliberal feminism. Therefore, while the UK press coverage might be said to have gone some way in exposing the widespread prevalence of rape and sexual abuse as symptomatic of a wider culture of sexual violence, it offered limited space for discussing potential solutions that address systemic problems, let alone that encourage radical social change.

Conclusion

To date, the discussion about #MeToo as a mediated campaign has focused almost exclusively on the role of digital media. Many scholars and activists have highlighted

the possibilities for making women's and girls' voices more visible and audible globally, calling out rape culture, and developing feminist solidarity and effecting social change, which have been opened up by digital spaces. More recently, scholars and commentators have also discussed the limitations and potential pitfalls of #MeToo as a digital feminist campaign, including, for example, the misogynist vitriol against feminism and feminists that the campaign has triggered and seemingly made easy, the emotional labour that participating in this campaign demands of victims of sexual violence (Mendes et al., 2018), and the centring of White women's experiences of sexual violence (Tambe, 2018).

However, little attention has been paid to the role and importance of news media in making visible the issues raised by #MeToo. Our examination of the first 6 months of #MeToo's coverage in the UK press reveals that newspapers played an important role in heightening the campaign's visibility in the United Kingdom, although it is impossible to determine what exactly their relative contribution to the campaign's overall visibility and success has been. Nevertheless, as Guha (2015: 155) notes, albeit in relation to the Indian media sphere, 'for a successful feminist campaign to take off, there needs to be a convergence of social media hashtagging and news media discussion'. Indeed, our study has shown that the press contributed to expanding and reinforcing #MeToo's visibility in two important ways. First, in terms of *reach*, it has expanded the movement's visibility beyond social media, addressing potentially new and different readerships from both social media users as well as the readers of left-leaning liberal circles represented by newspapers like *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Thus, arguably, the press' overall support of #MeToo has played an important role in engaging the public on the issue of sexual violence raised by the digital campaign. Second, in terms of *content*, while the news coverage developed and consolidated stories originally revealed on social media, it also publicized original stories, some of which were a product of investigative journalism (e.g. the example discussed earlier, of reports on allegations of sexual harassment in the humanitarian field; see also Note 5).

At the same time, our study has highlighted how the press' role in enabling and expanding the visibility of #MeToo has been characterized by a number of arguably limiting and problematic factors. First, although #MeToo was covered positively in all newspapers, there was significant variation within newspapers, which was largely consistent with their traditional ideological alignments. Thus, the press contributed to the general 'popularization' of feminism, but only up to a point. #MeToo was, unsurprisingly, both more visible and popular in certain newspapers than in others. Second, while the amount of sustained attention to the topic of sexual violence received from the press over a 6-month period is definitely notable, the #MeToo coverage seems to have followed and reinforced familiar patterns with respect to news coverage of both sexual violence and feminism including: the support of feminism alongside its concurrent 'lifestyling' (Mendes, 2011), an individualizing and thus de-politicizing tendency through a focus on celebrity and the cultural industries and fashion sector, and the centring of the experiences of the 'ideal victims', namely, celebrity female subjects (who are predominately White and wealthy).

Importantly, our study highlights that the press' focus on celebrity women in the entertainment and fashion industries (60% of the entire coverage, 369 items) inevitably entailed the occlusion of the experiences, voices and struggles of many women, particularly

women in sectors such as hospitality, domestic services and administration. While we were unable to code for race or class, the latter sectors, which were nearly invisible in the coverage, are notably racialized and classed in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere), as it is most often women of colour, low-income and migrant women who are employed in them. Our findings of #MeToo's coverage in the UK press therefore appear to corroborate critiques (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Hemmings, 2018; Tambe, 2018), which argue that #MeToo has helped to reinscribe a dominant version of feminism, one that forefronts White women, and most often White women with a substantial amount of economic, social and cultural capital.

Perhaps most striking of our study's findings is the news' failure to discuss potential solutions to the problems that #MeToo has attempted to expose. Indeed, by failing to inform the public about or to debate potential solutions, the press can be understood to have helped defuse any potential that #MeToo might contain as a mobilizing social force. Rather, the press seems to have framed #MeToo largely in terms of neoliberal and popular feminisms, which disavow structural analysis and critique and largely place responsibility on individual women. Moreover, the press and popular feminism can be seen to exist in a symbiotic relationship: popular feminism, which has contributed to the widespread embrace of #MeToo, produced a heady and conducive context for the campaign's uptake in the press. The press, in turn, has bolstered popular feminism in and through its coverage of #MeToo.

This latter observation leads us to a slightly different conclusion from Guha (2015), who argues that the news media must resonate and converge with feminist digital campaigns in order to advance awareness of and engage the public with their issues – what she terms 'Collaborative Agenda Setting' (p.155). As we have argued, the interaction between news media and digital media feminist (and other) activist campaigns is certainly important in terms of visibility, reach and sustained attention. However, in the case of #MeToo, it seems that the press – at least in the United Kingdom in the first 6 months of the campaign – has largely converged with and reinforced the narrow terms of popular or neoliberal feminism that circulate in digital and popular media. This, in turn, can be understood as limiting rather than advancing public awareness and engagement with the larger social and structural issues that #MeToo, as a catalyst, could potentially raise. In times when the news media, and newspapers in particular, are struggling to survive in their traditional format, asking them to represent less popular or unpopular feminisms might seem a tall order. It is the popular, after all, that sells. Yet, given the news' central role as a source of information and its historical role in helping to shape demands for social change, it is an order, we believe, upon which we must continue to insist.

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Notes

1. This was true at the time of writing in November 2018. See https://MeToorising.withgoogle.com/ and Pasha-Robinson (2018).
2. A parasitical media economy sees 'an increasing range of media agents … able to accumulate capital as the "media storm" transfers from one field of production to another' (De Benedictis et al., 2017: 351).
3. 11 October 2017 was chosen as the start date for the period we examined since this was the date when the first article on Harvey Weinstein being accused of sexual assault was published.
4. Indeed, it would be an interesting and important endeavour to examine how the coverage has changed in the following 6 months.
5. LexisNexis does not categorize the *Metro* as a UK national newspaper and therefore it was not included in our sample. In addition, for LexisNexis to search *The Financial Times*, an institutional subscription is needed, and therefore, this newspaper was not included in our sample either.
6. Surmising statistical significance was not possible due to vast differences of items in some groups. The minimum number of cases was not reached across the sample to perform valid tests.
7. Glenda Cooper has described these reports in the context of what she calls 'humanitarian #MeToo'. See https://www.intdevalliance.scot/events/humanitarian-metoo-event-university-edinburgh; similarly, in the United States, *The New York Times* played a key role in exposing several high-profile cases of sexual harassment and abuse, such as those against NBC's Today Show co-anchor Matt Lauer.
8. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding up.
9. The examination of the rest of the coverage of *The Sun* during this period was beyond the scope of our study, and thus, we cannot make claims about its representation of sexual violence and/or feminism more generally during this time.
10. It is also important to note that the #TimesUp campaign was launched in January 2018, so it seems fair to surmise that press coverage of this movement, which itself emerged out of the #MeToo campaign, boosted the already heightened visibility of #MeToo.
11. See Note 8.

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