

## Human Rights Campaign Report: MeToo

### 2:1

When considering social movements that have striven to affect change on a human rights basis, it is difficult to look past the recent successes of the MeToo movement. This movement was born from the work of activist and survivor Taran Burke but saw its height in 2017 following a string of celebrity testimonies (me too. Movement, 2023). MeToo's work sought to correct the problems faced by many women, as their experiences were invalidated and left women's rights trailing behind the standards expected of international human rights. It is this goal, to ensure equality presented in article one of the declarations on human rights, which makes this movement so prominent. To demonstrate how the MeToo movement achieved this we will look at the relevancy, effectiveness, and efficiency of the MeToo campaign's use of social media, before finally concluding by reviewing the results and assessing the impact the campaign had on changing women's equality. Overall, we will find that MeToo had large amounts of success and used social media extremely well to meet their goals.

When people think about the MeToo movement, they often think about calling out high profile abusers and having them face the consequences. Whilst this has been a significant part of their work, the campaign clearly prioritised personal empowerment over retribution, with their initial objectives based on supporting survivors of sexual assault and shifting society's perspective towards the topic. Consequently, the campaign was aimed at two audiences. The first was women who were survivors of sexual abuse. The movement was designed to support and empower these women, creating an environment where they felt safer calling out abusers and providing resources to help them heal and continue their lives (me too. Movement, 2023). Using media and public platforms to share their message reinforces the personal aspect of this campaign. If their aim was to serve justice to abusers, a more legal based battle would have been appropriate, but the use of social media and publicly sharing stories and truths shows that their priority was uplifting women and encouraging open discourse about sexual violence. The MeToo campaign was also aimed at the general public, as they wanted to educate people on sexual violence and make them aware of its presence in everyday society, in order to make meaningful societal change. Having a primarily social media based campaign is appropriate when the goal is to educate a wider audience. Social media allowed the movement to spread globally, meaning they could educate people about the truth of sexual abuse and fundamentally shift the world's view on what it means and how it can significantly affect women and their lives (Siuta, R L. et al. 2023).

The Me Too movement was an effective and successful campaign that brought the issue of sexual abuse and harassment, particularly in the workplace, to the forefront of public discourse. The movement also employed various techniques throughout the campaign in order to reach its objectives of changing the narrative of these issues and removing the negative stigma surrounding them.

The first technique was the employment of social media, especially Twitter and hashtags. In contemporary society, social media is a common form of communication for many people, with over '3.1 billion' social media users existing at the time of the campaign (Dixon, 2023). Therefore, social media can advance the outcome of a campaign, attracting a wide, international audience. The hashtag feature on Twitter has been adopted by users over the years expanding across other platforms. Bonilla (2015, as cited in Goswami, 2018, p.3) explains how 'Hashtags (#) are used to index, order, and accumulate public dialog into coherent topical threads', so using them provides a place for people to collectively discuss the MeToo movement and their experiences. The Twitter hashtag also furthered the campaign's global reach, enabling the movement to go viral as it was used 'more than 19 million times' in 2018 (Monica, Erson and Toor, 2018).

The campaign also used celebrity involvement to achieve its aim of raising awareness. Celebrities often have expansive platforms and audiences that trust their viewpoint, meaning that they can easily encourage people to support movements and causes. Alyssa Milana tweeted about MeToo in relation to Harvey Weinstein, which caused the movement to quickly become viral and international news. There has also been more celebrity involvement from people such as Reese Witherspoon, Jennifer Lawrence, and Terry Cruz, which not only shows how the movement was growing throughout society but also that sexual violence is not just a women's issue and affects all societal groups.

Although the MeToo movement was effective in achieving its aims of 'raising public awareness'(Bhattacharyya, 2018), it did receive some criticism in the media and by scholars. One of the main critiques was that the victims' stories could not be validated, meaning there was potential for false accusations and legal trouble. The 'HimToo' movement is a prominent example of backlash the campaign received, as it attempted to 'discredit the MeToo movement, focusing on the rare false rape allegations' (Ellis, 2018 as cited in, Shi, 2021). Receiving '227,000 tweets', HimToo publicly criticised the MeToo movement and had the potential to affect public opinion on the campaign (Shi, 2021).

Another criticism of MeToo was that it didn't effectively reach a wider community. When Burke first set up the movement, she aimed to *'help women of colour from underprivileged communities who have experienced rape or sexual assault'* (Leung and Williams, 2019). However, in recent years the movement has failed to consider race as a factor like it initially set out to do. For example, a comparative study of MeToo regarding Weinstein and R. Kelly shows that *'the victims of the R. Kelly scandal failed to receive the same mainstream support'*, perhaps because they were predominantly women of colour (Leung and Williams, 2019).

The MeToo campaign has been, and still is, highly efficient in the way it achieves its aims. When it was just a local grassroots movement, their easy to access support and resources were extremely helpful for many women, but it was Alyssa Milana's tweet that made the campaign worldwide news. The power of celebrity can be very influential on the efficiency of a campaign, as it helps it gain media attention and therefore a much wider audience, as it is suddenly a much more newsworthy project (Henry, 2020, 182). Whilst celebrity influence was not initially planned by the campaign, they used this momentum to increase their media following. This was extremely efficient, as it meant that their message and resources were being reached by a wider audience, and awareness of their work was spreading around the world. With this increased awareness, also comes increased funding and donations. The campaign has continuously used its money in an efficient manner, which we can see laid out in the financial section of its 2022 annual report. It shows us that 75% of the money was spent on the programs that are at the heart of the campaign, supporting and empowering victims of sexual abuse. The remaining 25% was split between vital administration and being put back into fundraising (MeToo, 2022). From this, we can see that the campaign is cost-effective, and they continuously use their money and fundraising to increase their reach and the support they provide.

For a campaign of this type, aimed at a wide range of women around the world, the use of social media is probably the most efficient method of communicating the campaign's message, as it can provide a broader public and encourage discussion and participation in a variety of ways (Ozedmir, 2012, 33). MeToo uses various platforms to reach as many women as possible, which is important when considering their aim of assisting a growing spectrum of survivors of all ages, races, sexualities, and backgrounds. Throughout the campaign, they have had events and programs that have been advertised and covered by numerous media sources as well as being supported by well-known public figures, which again shows how the campaign effectively uses social media, celebrity, and news sources in order to share the message and goals and help as many people as possible.

To conclude, as a result of the campaign, the public is now more aware of matters regarding sexual abuse in the workplace and there is less of a stigma around speaking out about these issues. The MeToo movement annual report in 2022 revealed the long term impacts that this movement has had on society, for example 'Over 20 laws have been passed to make workplaces safer from harassment and violence; organizations and companies created countless policies to prevent workplace rape culture and hold those who cause harm accountable'. The virality of the movement also enabled behaviours to change so people are more educated on sexual abuse:

"Globally, the increased discussion on the issue of sexual violence was made possible by #MeToo, and organizers and activists across the world have been successful in not only passing legislation, but also in changing culture and behaviour" (me too. Movement, 2022).

Ultimately, MeToo successfully achieved its aims and objectives of empowering women through social media use and celebrity involvement; regarding long term impacts, one can see that a more educated world when it comes to sexual assault is emerging.

#### **Self-Evaluation form:**

**Group members: Anya Collins, Isobel croft and Dara Doyle**

**What kind of challenges did your group encounter in working on this assignment and how did you overcome them?** To begin with we faced challenges on our topic as we were originally going to focus on the Apartheid movement until we realised there was a lack of academic support relating to the media use during this movement. We overcame this issue by researching social media campaigns instead so we could focus on a campaign that was rich in media. Besides this minor setback at the start, we worked well as a team and were able to overcome this problem.

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