

Study examines social impact of #MeToo movement

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Social media have enabled a grassroots #MeToo movement to generate widespread awareness about violence against women across North America, but the movement's global influence has received limited and

sparse research, a Western-led review has found.

A team made up of established researchers, graduate students and undergraduates has conducted an extensive synthesis of research on the #MeToo movement and published its findings recently in the academic journal *New Media & Society*.

They found that current research highlights how the movement's hashtags on such platforms as Twitter and Facebook allowed it to spread, connect people and groups, and start dialogs. But they also identified some cultural blind spots in the research.

"We caution against overestimating the potential of [social media](#) to unify survivors, and to make a lasting [social impact](#)," said professor Anabel Quan-Haase, the lead researcher on the study. "We noticed that over half of the authors in our dataset failed to identify a clear geographic focus to their research, raising concerns about a lack of global diversity and a bias toward 'Global North' perspectives in scholarship about #MeToo."

As International Women's Day on March 8 approaches, experts recognize that [abuse and sexual assault have only increased globally during the pandemic](#). Quan-Haase said it will be important to include broader perspectives on violence against women in studies and look beyond our own culture.

Jointly appointed to the faculties of Information & Media Studies and Social Science, Quan-Haase said future research into the #MeToo movement should include geographic parameters, since different cultural norms, values, practices as well as access to technology will affect people's ability to participate.

The review provided a valuable opportunity to mentor young scholars—especially [undergraduate students](#), who aren't as advanced in

their research abilities as graduate students—she said.

Dennis Ho, a fourth-year [media](#), information and technoculture student when the original investigation was carried out, applied to the project through the FIMS Undergraduate Research Experience Fellowship program. He described the teamwork and the research experience as positive.

"I also knew I was working on something that was important and that was a motivator that made me want to contribute as much, and at as high a level, as I could."

Ho and fellow undergraduate Olivia Lake conducted database searches and created their own data repository. Charlotte Nau, a Ph.D. candidate in Media Studies, analyzed the data.

"The experience of working with Dennis and Olivia was great," Nau said. "Their contributions to the project were significant, especially to data collection and analysis. I was very impressed with the quality of their work."

Both Nau and Ho hope their published results will inspire other researchers to fill in some of the gaps in #MeToo scholarship.

"There are still intersections in discrimination with race, class, disability and other stratifications that make participation, even online, a challenge for many," Ho said.

Quan-Haase said the team's goal is to make a difference in the daily lives of people regardless of economic circumstances or geography.

"In the long run, we are hoping that our research contributes to more conversations around how we can change our culture and, ultimately,

policies and laws," she said.

More information: Anabel Quan-Haase et al. Mapping #MeToo: A synthesis review of digital feminist research across social media platforms, *New Media & Society* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/1461444820984457](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820984457)

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