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# THE #METOO SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECT

## AND ITS POTENTIALS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EUROPE

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**THE #METOO  
SOCIAL MEDIA  
EFFECT**  
AND ITS POTENTIALS  
FOR SOCIAL CHANGE  
IN EUROPE

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**Published in October 2019 by:**

**FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies**

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The present study does not represent the collective views of FEPS and its partners but only of the authors.



With the financial support of the European Parliament.

The present study does not represent the European Parliament's views.

Design : Triptyque.be

Cover : AdobeStock

Printer : Prefilm

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**ISBN: 978-2-930769-30-1**

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# The complexity of #MeToo: the evolution of the Twitter campaign in Europe<sup>12</sup>

*Giulia Zacchia, Marcella Corsi and Fabrizio Botti*

## SUMMARY

*Social media campaigns have an important role in raising public awareness to define the extent, the diffusion and the evolution of harassment and in developing social support for changes as a fundamental component of primary prevention strategies. The main findings of this chapter indicate that: a) the social media campaign engagement against sexual harassment is higher with its locally translated hashtag than the international version; b) the social media campaign is polarised between an individual, more introspective level of sharing experiences (such as in France with #balancetonporc) and a collective awareness, active grassroots movement at workplaces (such as in Sweden with #sistabriefen); c) in order to understand how to foster a positive social engagement encouraging survivors to speak and share their experiences and to embrace social support for change, the “sentiments” in social media deserve further attention.*

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12 This paper has benefited from comments by the participants to several events: i) the IAFFE 2018 session on “Public policies and gender inequalities” (June 20th, 2018, SUNY New Paltz, USA); ii) the conference “Endangered Bodies. Representing and Policing the Body in Western Culture” (October 8th, 2018, Lisbon, Portugal); iii) a seminar held in Rome, at Sapienza University (November 7th, 2018). All received comments have been taken into due consideration. Usual disclaimers apply.

# INTRODUCTION

Workplace sexual harassment is one of the main evidences and manifestation of power imbalance in the workplace. It affects women and men across different industries and occupations. It remains pervasive and pernicious all around the world with no exception for EU countries. The European Parliament<sup>13</sup> stressed that “*sexual harassment is a violation of human rights linked to patriarchal power structures that need to be reshaped as matter of urgency*”.

In this chapter, the role of social media is analysed by looking at the #MeToo campaign on Twitter. Through the lens of the identified dimensions of sexual harassment (the workplace environment and the social environment), we seek to understand the influence of different social environments, cultural “sentiments” towards sexual harassment and its common understanding in different EU countries on *how* the hashtag #Metoo (and its locally translated versions) were received in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

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13 European Parliament Report on measures to prevent and combat mobbing and sexual harassment at workplace, in public spaces, and political life in the EU (2018/2055(INI)), Retrieved from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0265\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0265_EN.html)

# THE DIMENSIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

**More than one in two women in Europe have been sexually harassed at least once since the age of 15<sup>14</sup>. Amongst them, 32% declared that the perpetrator was a superior, colleague or customer.** The share of survivors goes as high as 75% for women in professions requiring qualifications or in top management jobs and 61% in the service sector. Moreover, 35% of harassed women never denounced the violence they have suffered, and only 4% reported the incident to their employer or the police. Numerous studies also demonstrate that more than half of working women describe experiencing “sexually harassing behaviours” at work, but less than 20% of these women actually associate the experience with “sexual harassment”<sup>15</sup>. Due to the normalisation of sexist and sexual violence (even amongst women), the persistent low social awareness and the insufficient channels for survivor’s support, cases of sexual harassment remain vastly underreported.

Although the problem is widespread in all EU countries, the legislation enacted to address the issue varies across the EU, reflecting the social and cultural differences in Member States. At the EU level, the European Equal Treatment Directives<sup>16</sup> provide a common definition of harassment – and specifically sexual harassment – seen as a form of discrimination “*where unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person occurs*” or “*where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile,*

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14 “Violence against women: an EU-wide survey” (2015), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Retrieved from: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf)

15 Magley, Hulin, et al. 1999; Magley and Shupe 2005

16 2000/78/EC and 2000/43/EC, 2006/54/EC

*degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”<sup>17</sup>.*

The ETUC Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work<sup>18</sup> provides a clear taxonomy defining the various forms of sexual harassment as follows:

- can be physical, psychological and/or sexual;
- may be performed by one or more individuals;
- may be one-off incidents or more systematic patterns of behaviour;
- may take place amongst colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or by third parties such as clients, customers, patients or pupils;
- can range from cases of disrespect to criminal offences.

Drawing on the final report on the implementation actions of the ETUC Framework Agreement<sup>19</sup> and on the idea that sexual harassment has its roots in gender stereotyping and sexism, we contextualise our analysis and reframe the concept of sexual harassment as composed of two dimensions, which are interconnected with a two-way causal relationship: the work sphere and the social environment sphere.

As graphically summarised in Figure 1, we consider the **workplace harassment** dimension (physical, psychological and/or sexual) but also the **social behaviour dimension**, which influences perceptions of harassment, both in terms of size and normalisation of

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17 definition of 'sexual harassment' 2006/54/EC

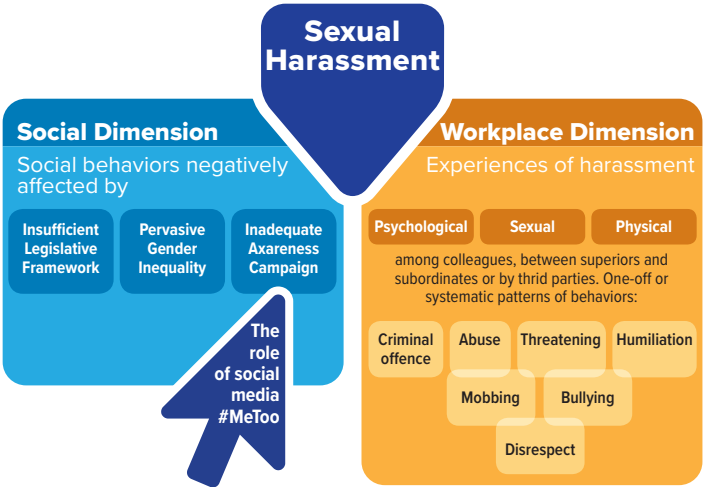
18 <https://www.etuc.org/fr/node/3171>

19 <https://www.etuc.org/en/framework-agreement-harassment-and-violence-work>



violence. The social sphere has a direct influence on the environment where harassment is perpetuated, mainly due to:

- weak and insufficient legislative frameworks for governments, employers, companies and trade unions;
- labour market gender inequality and inequity (i.e. vertical<sup>20</sup> and horizontal<sup>21</sup> gender segregation) ;
- absence of awareness campaigns.



**Figure1:** Mapping the dimensions of harassment

Social media has played an important role both in raising public awareness to define the extent, the diffusion and the evolution of harassment and in developing social support for changes as fundamental component of primary prevention strategies. The European Parliament resolution of 26 October 2017<sup>22</sup> on combat-

20 the concentration of women and men in different grades, levels of responsibility or positions.

21 the concentration of women and men in different sectors and occupations.

22 2017/2897(RSP)

ing sexual harassment and abuse in the EU goes in this direction, stressing the importance of **welcoming “initiatives such as the #MeToo movement that aim to report cases of sexual harassment and violence against women; strongly supports all the women and girls who have participated in the campaign, including those who denounced their perpetrators”.**

Based on the Eurofound (2015) ranking of EU countries addressing workplace sexual harassment, their policies and procedures in place at company level and the prevalent social awareness of the issue, we focus our analysis on:

**(A) Sweden** due to its long-standing and relatively systematic policies to prevent and tackle gender-based violence and harassment. The country’s relative high level of awareness leads to a higher share of workers reporting violence and harassment.

**(B) Italy and Spain** due to their low levels of violence and harassment reporting by workers combined with the low levels of social awareness.

**(C) France and Germany** due to the societal growing concern about the relevance of violence and harassment at work combined with the lack of social awareness of the malpractices and abuses.

Admittedly, the country case selection is concentrated in “Western” European countries because these are the ones where the MeToo social media campaign took up most strongly and where it proved the most powerful in attracting attention on the question. Whilst we must acknowledge the structural reasons preventing women in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from speaking up the same way, the grasp of #MeToo has been relatively poor in the region although women from the region are not spared from the underlying problem of gender-based violence. In Hungary, the campaign was confined to liberal and cultural circles, in Poland the hashtags

#JaTez (#Metoo in Polish) and #Metoo quickly faded away in the media, in Romania and Slovakia the movement remained limited whereas in Croatia the media attention focused on anti-feminist reactions and no real movement appeared<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, the country case selection criteria rests on a balance between countries which experienced a strong social media campaign around #Metoo on the one hand and which present different degrees of tools and policy frameworks combatting sexual harassment on the other hand.

## LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT: FRANCE, GERMANY, ITALY, SPAIN AND SWEDEN IN COMPARISON

EU regulation has enabled some degree of consistency in the legislation of Member States addressing sexual harassment<sup>24</sup>. However, **significant differences in emphases and approaches among countries due to the multiple dimensions of harassment persist**. Most Member States regulate violence under general criminal, civil and administrative laws but the general obligation on the employer to ensure health and safety under all aspects related to work is less developed.

In all five European countries considered in our analysis, sexual harassment is specifically mentioned in national legislation<sup>25</sup>. Only

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23 “#metoo in the East? Women’s rights in south-Eastern and Eastern Europe” (8 May 2019), Open Democracy, retrieved from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/international-civil-society-week/metoo-east-womens-rights-south-eastern-and-eastern-europe/>

24 Harassment is mentioned in the national legislation of 17 European countries

25 Women, Business and the Law Report (2018). World Bank

in Germany sexual harassment is not a separate criminal offense. Instead, it is considered under the generic category of libel and slander<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, in the five countries considered, national laws also regulate the employers' responsibility to prevent and act against sexual harassment.

**Table 1:** World Bank's Protecting Women from Violence Scores

	PROTECTING WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE SCORE	Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	Is there legislation on sexual harassment in education?	Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	Are there civil remedies for sexual harassment in employment?
Spain	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sweden	80	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
France	60	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Germany	60	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Italy	60	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓

Source: World Bank (2018).

In Sweden, the Discrimination Act<sup>27</sup> clearly defines sexual harassment as a conduct of a sexual nature in working life that violates the dignity of a job seeker or an employee. It also applies to schools and university colleges. The law requires the employer to prevent harassment as far as possible and to render victimisation unacceptable. Furthermore, employers must have a system in place for

26 Libel: A published false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation; a written defamation. Slander: The action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's reputation.

27 Chapter 1, Section 4 and Chapter 2, Section 3

detecting and correcting unsatisfactory working conditions, problems of work organisation or deficiencies of cooperation, which may cause violence. Employers also need to take countermeasures as soon as signs of harassment are detected (e.g. conducting special investigations with the objective of improving work organisation). Finally, the employer must provide employees survivor of harassment with adequate help and support.

In Italy, the definition of sexual harassment, close to the EU definition, has been introduced by the “Code of Equal Opportunities”<sup>28</sup> as a form of discrimination related to unwanted conduct, of a sexual nature, expressed in any way which violates, or is intended to violate the dignity of an employee or which creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment. In Italy, harassment is assimilated to mobbing and stalking. Harassment is therefore considered a crime, included in the section of the criminal code regarding *crimes against moral freedom* establishing that “*it is a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment ranging from six months up to four years, to continuously threaten or harass another person to such an extent as to cause a serious, continual state of anxiety or fear, or to instil in the victim(s) a motivated fear for his/her own safety or for the safety of relatives or other persons linked to the victim(s) by virtue of kinship or emotional relationship or to force the victim(s) to change his/her living habits*”. Harassment is defined as a continuative and systematic pattern of behaviours. Moreover, according to the principle of equality provided by the Italian Constitution, employers must prevent and punish sexual harassment occurring in the workplace, adopting all necessary measures to guarantee a safe working environment, in which everyone’s dignity is respected and promoted.

In Spain, the Criminal Code dedicates a chapter to sexual harassment, stating that in a situation of labour, teaching or hierarchical superiority “*whoever solicits favours of a sexual nature, for them-*

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28 Law no. 198 of 11 April 2006, Article 26.2

selves or for a third party, within the setting of a continuous or usual work relation, teaching or service provision relation, and by such conduct causes the survivors a situation that is objective and seriously intimidating, hostile or humiliating, shall be convicted of sexual harassment and punished with a sentence of imprisonment of three to five months or with a fine from six to ten months”<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, sexual harassment is covered in Spanish legal frameworks Constitution (i.e. the right to physical and moral integrity) and in several labour laws:

- Workers’ statute establishing the ‘right of all workers to physical integrity’ and ‘respect for privacy and dignity’<sup>30</sup>;
- Prevention of occupational risks<sup>31</sup> establishing workers’ right to an effective protection on health and safety at work;
- Equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility for disabled people<sup>32</sup>
- Equal treatment of women and men<sup>33</sup>

In France, sexual harassment is a criminal offence. It is defined as “*the imposition on a person, of repeated remarks or behaviour of sexual nature that impairs her/his dignity because of their degrading or humiliating character, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive situation*”<sup>34</sup>. There are three legal frameworks addressing harassment at work: the Labour Code, the Criminal Code or the Civil Code.

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29 Article 184

30 Article 4.2

31 Law 31/95

32 Law 51/2003

33 Organic Law 3/2007

34 Law no. 594 of 2012

- The Labour Code lays down that harassment by any person aimed at obtaining sexual favours for him/herself or for a third party is prohibited<sup>35</sup>. It also lays down an obligation to prevent sexual harassment<sup>36</sup> for employers, who must take all the necessary provisions to combat sexual harassment.
- The Criminal Code<sup>37</sup> clamps down on the crime of sexual harassment, based on the existence of a relationship of authority and power. Contrary to the case of moral harassment, the perpetrator of sexual harassment can only be a hierarchical superior.

In Germany, the 2006 General Equal Treatment Act<sup>38</sup> mentions sexual harassment when an unwanted conduct of a sexual nature takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the person creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The comparison shows that in all analysed countries there is an **increasing attention to codify the concept of sexual harassment on a legislative level** and to **clearly define the employers' responsibility of preventing and fighting sexual harassment**.

## GENDER IMBALANCE IN LABOUR MARKETS AND POWER STRUCTURES

Sexual harassment stems from gender stereotyping and sexism giving rise to further forms of normalisation of gender-based violence.

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35 Article L1153-1, 1/5/2008

36 L1153-5

37 Article 222-33

38 Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz Section 4

Therefore, another key area of analysis is the presence and intensity of gender imbalances in society. We concentrate our analysis on two aspects closely connected with sexual harassment:

1. **Gender gaps in the workplace** (i.e. equal access to the labour market, employment segregation and fair working conditions<sup>39</sup>),
2. **Gender imbalances in power** (i.e. equality in decision-making positions across the political, economic and social spheres).

The gender gap in access to labour markets<sup>40</sup> varies across the five countries under consideration. Sweden presents the smallest gap while the largest gaps are present in Italy and Germany. In Italy, France and Germany, women's activity rate is lower than the EU average. Considering the full-time equivalent (FTE<sup>41</sup>) employment rate, Italy reports the lowest rate for women with 30%, while in Sweden this rate is 57%. The EU average for the female FTE employment rate is 39.6%.

Gender segregation at the workplace is visible not only looking at the share of women in managerial positions (**vertical segregation**) but also at the participation of women and men in the traditionally

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39 data by Eurostat, EU LFS, 2015 and Eurofound, EWCS, 2015

40 Following the domains of the last Gender Equality Index by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2017), the access to labor market is proxied by the activity rate as a crude measure of the decision to participate in the labor market and the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment that, taking into account the higher incidence of part-time employment among women, compares each worker's average number of hours worked with the average number of hours worked by a full-time worker.

41 A full-time equivalent, sometimes abbreviated as FTE, is a unit to measure employed persons or students in a way that makes them comparable although they may work or study a different number of hours per week. The unit is obtained by comparing an employee's or student's average number of hours worked to the average number of hours of a full-time worker or student. A full-time person is therefore counted as one FTE, while a part-time worker / student gets a score in proportion to the hours he or she works and/or studies. For example, a part-time worker employed for 20 hours a week where full-time work consists of 40 hours, is counted as 0.5 FTE. The workforce of an enterprise, activity, or country etc. can then be added up and expressed as the number of full-time equivalents.



feminised sectors such as education, human health and social work activities (**horizontal segregation**). With the exception of Sweden, all analysed countries demonstrate a level of vertical segregation higher than the EU-28 average. Horizontal segregation points to a higher proportion of women in education, human health and social work activities in Sweden and France while it is lower in Spain and Italy. In all the five countries women suffer from higher vulnerability than men because more women are employed with temporary contracts exposing them in turn to a higher risk of sexual harassment in some cases. Moreover, women from all the five countries under study face higher difficulties to benefit from flexible working time arrangements, which are essential for the reconciliation of working and family duties.

Sexual harassment is one of the main evidences of gender imbalance of power visible from the lack of female participation in decision-making positions across the political, economic and social spheres<sup>42</sup>. Looking at the political, economic and social power as gender (in)equality sub-domains, Sweden showcases the most balanced structure of “women’s power”. Nevertheless, the sphere of economic power is still heavily male-dominated across the five countries. Spain features the lowest share of women in the domain of economic power in the largest listed companies. Similarly, the economic power and social power is male-dominated in Germany. In France, female visibility in Parliament is lower, but the country features the highest share of female members in a national Central Bank. Finally, Italy reports on average the lower indexes across all the three domains of power with the only exception in research funding organisations’ decision-making positions.

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42 Based on EIGE data on the sub-domain of political power (representation of women and men in national parliaments, government and regional/local assemblies), of economic power (proportion of women and men on the boards of the largest nationally registered companies that are listed in stock exchanges as well as of national Central Banks), and of social power (share of women in decision-making positions in research-funding, media and sports organisations, which holds a symbolic importance in shaping social norms).

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SOCIAL MEDIA. FROM EMPATHY TO AWARENESS TO ACTION: THE #METOO CAMPAIGN

The original purpose of “Me Too”, when activist Tarana Burke used it first in 2006 on Myspace, was part of a grassroots campaign to promote “empowerment through empathy” among women and girls of colour, who have experienced sexual abuse, particularly within underprivileged communities. As Burke explained in her later “Me Too” documentary, the 2006 movement was essentially about survivors supporting survivors. It was about community healing and community action for young and vulnerable women.

Actress Alyssa Milano changed and expanded the purpose and the focus of “Me Too” when she encouraged the spread of the hashtag #MeToo as part of an awareness campaign in order to reveal the ubiquity of sexual abuse and harassment. After the public revelations of sexual misconduct allegations against the film producer Harvey Weinstein, Milano tweeted on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2017: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write #MeToo as a reply to this tweet”. **The genius of the hashtag #MeToo on social media lied in its capacity to illustrate the huge extent of the problem and the ubiquity of sexual harassment and assault.** It shed light on how many people have experienced these events themselves in the workplace. Herewith, **the focus of “Me Too” changed, moving from empathy to awareness, from vulnerable to all women, from violence against women to a specific kind of violence in the work place (i.e. sexual harassment).** From 2017, what really emerged from the campaign is the alarming evidence of gender power imbalances in workplaces and the subsequent abuse of power at work in all the economic sectors. From then, millions of people started using the hashtag, countless numbers of individuals from all over the world came forward, sharing their personal stories or endorsing their support to this viral online

movement. It spread to dozens of different languages and it has come to mean different realities to different people with different backgrounds and ethnicities. In many places, **local equivalents of the international #MeToo campaign were created**<sup>43</sup>: **#balancetonporc in France (“#DenounceYourPig”), #quellavoltache in Italy (“#ThatTimeWhen”), #yotambien in Spain (“#MeToo”), #sistabriefen in Sweden (“#TheFinalBrief”)** to cite just a few examples from Europe. **The timing and the reaction of the local equivalents of #MeToo is a first social thermometer to measure the awareness, social engagement and status of gender inequality in labour markets and the degree of gender-based imbalances in the structure of power at work in different countries and industries.**

For example, **while in France the movement #balancetonporc was very focused on individuals, the movement in Sweden** (whose most evident local hashtag was #sistabriefen for the communication industry) **aimed mainly at gathering women into mutually reinforcing economic sector.** It grouped them in a structural route in order to sign a series of petitions demanding change against sexual harassment and gender imbalance within specific industries. Moreover, while the main focus of the French and Swedish campaigns was to provoke change, looking for a more equal future, the tweets posted by women in Italy had a much stronger personal focus sharing past experiences and challenges faced when reporting sexual assault to their families, colleagues and the police.

The international #MeToo campaign as well as the Italian #quellavoltache and the Spanish #yotambien launched by the lawyer Estefanía Palomino released an emotional wave of testimonials by women around the world, comparable to an online group therapy aiming not to leave the survivors alone and blamed. By contrast, the French answer, #balancetonporc took it a step fur-

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43 More information: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/metoo-balancetonporc-yotambien-women-around-the-world-lash-out-at-harassment/>

ther. The hashtag #balancetonporc was launched on 16 October 2017 by Sandra Muller, a New-York-based French journalist, with the aim of inviting sexual harassment survivors to name their perpetrators. Muller started the campaign with a tweet she naming the man who addressed her with obscene language: *You have big breasts. You are my type of woman. I will make you come all night.* In response, women in France have swamped social media with hundreds of stories of aggression, assault, and harassment. The #balancetonporc movement has been heavily criticised in an open letter published by the French actress Catherine Deneuve and more than 100 other French women from the entertainment industry in the newspaper *Le Monde* on 13 January 2018.<sup>44</sup> The letter argues that the #MeToo and the #balancetonporc movements have gone too far by publicly denouncing private experiences and have created a totalitarian climate. They claimed that “rape is a crime. But insistent or clumsy flirting is not a crime, nor is gallantry a chauvinist aggression”. According to the letter, the #MeToo and #balancetonporc movements instead of empowering women served the interests of “the enemies of sexual freedom, of religious extremists, of the worst reactionaries” and of those who believe that women are “separate beings, children with the appearance of adults, demanding to be protected”.

France is not the only country witnessing a backlash against the international calls for change epitomised by #MeToo. There were extremely virulent reactions by the Italian press when the Italian actress and director Asia Argento revealed that she had been raped in 1997 by US producer Harvey Weinstein. As a reaction to the Italian public scorn and sceptical reaction to women denouncing abuse, the blogger Giulia Blasi launched the hashtag #quellavoltache on twitter on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, three days before Alyssa Milano’s first #MeToo tweet. It was created to raise awareness on the sexist culture that justifies and minimis-

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44 “Nous défendons une liberté d’importuner, indispensable à la liberté sexuelle”(9 January 2018). *Le Monde*. Retrieved from: [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle\\_5239134\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-une-liberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html)

es violence and blames survivors, especially when they decide to denounce the abuses as Asia Argento. The Italian activist Lorella Zanardo explains that the Italian public reaction is rooted in a strong sexist culture, influenced by the media tycoon and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose commercial TV networks have participated in shaping Italian society for three decades, creating a culture where it is accepted that a woman is used as a decoration, desirable object, dancing provocatively, never uttering a single word. In this stubbornly patriarchal society with a strong prejudice against women, #quellavoltache aims to define harassment as an endemic phenomenon of Italian society, seen as so “normal” that many women find it difficult to recognise it as such. The hashtag seeks to break the wall of *omertà* (code of silence) that condemns a woman survivors of harassment at work to silence, shame and guilt. To quote Laura Boldrini, former president of Italy’s lower house of Parliament, the #MeToo movement “in Italy certainly hasn’t had the same impact” since women fear the repercussions of speaking up<sup>45</sup>. The movement even caused public apathy and the survivors have been virulently attacked in the news media. Therefore, **the #MeToo and its local equivalent has had a far lesser positive impact in Italy than in other European countries.**

By contrast, the experience in Sweden differs completely. The Swedish social media campaign made a strong impact on real life towards changing pathological workplaces. The local hashtags were set up very quickly. At first as “secret groups”, i.e. people could only join if personally invited by other members. The virtual groups were organised by women in the sectors of law, politics, technology, unions, journalism, dance, sport, construction, communication and more. The groups managed to use their industry-specific expertise to help each other. For example, when some women shared stories of harassment in the commu-

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45 “In Italy, #MeToo is more like ‘meh’ ” (16 December 2017). The New York Times, Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/world/europe/italy-sexual-harassment.html>

nication industry, facing backlash from employers for speaking out, those from the legal industry group were able to help. In return, women from the communication industry could help, guiding others in the writing of press releases, talking to the media, and answering difficult questions. The most widespread hashtag in Sweden was #sistabriefen (#TheFinalBrief) launched on 28 November 2017, calling for change within the communication industry. The Swedish journalist Elin Ahldén, one of the initiators of #sistabriefen, clearly explains the shared conviction of the #sistabriefen movement, that it is only the beginning of a greater change. “Of course it’s about preventing sexual assault and rape in the workplace, but it’s also about shifting a norm<sup>46</sup>”.

In Germany, the #MeToo campaign has also been instrumentalized by far-right activists to amplify xenophobia in Europe and to promote European white supremacists against migrants and refugees. This has been the case with the “120 decibels” campaign, a reference to the volume of most pocket alarms carried by some women as a defence device against abuse and violence. It first appeared on Twitter on 30 January 2018 with the hashtag #120dB. The movement against gender-based violence perpetuated by migrants is an attempt to normalise hate against immigrant and refugees presenting women as the victims of both migrant sex crimes and of wrong immigration policy.

Although the evolution of this phenomenon in terms of its diffusion, reaction and social engagement still deserves further attention, confronting the different national #MeToo campaigns provides a comparison of the different general contexts and reactions in Europe.

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46 #MeToo: 'We're shouting in unison, because that's what Swedes do (November 2017). The local SE, Retrieved from: <https://www.thelocal.se/20171129/metoo-were-shouting-in-unison-because-thats-what-swedes-do>

# #METOO: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In our research, we conducted a content analysis of individual tweets with the specific hashtags. We investigated the tweets via #MeToo in different languages, and its local, European equivalents (*#balancetonporc*, *#quellavoltache*, *#yotambien*, *#sistabriefen*, *#db120*). Through a comparative analysis of Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Sweden, we focused on the different levels of social engagement in the #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment, on the specific sub-topics addressed by individual tweets and, in particular, on how individuals label harassment, gender identity, the #MeToo movement and feminism.

To analyse the #MeToo social campaign we collected the Twitter posts (from October 2017 to April 2018) containing the #MeToo hashtag and some other European local hashtags: *#balancetonporc* for France, *#quellavoltache* for Italy, *#yotambien* for Spain and *#sistabriefen* for Sweden<sup>47</sup>. We collected a total of **2,174,787 posts** from **1,203,564 Twitter users**. We considered only the publicly shared posts and we analysed all the meta-data associated with the post. The geographical origin of a post was proxied by the language used because tweets cannot be geo-tagged. In other words, if a post is written in Italian, it is assumed that the author comes from in Italy or lives there.<sup>48</sup>

The highest number of tweets and users that tagged the #MeToo recorded in this study (if we exclude the tweets in English) is in France, while the lowest is in Italy (table 2). Looking at the local hashtag, the highest usage was recorded in France where the hashtag *#balancetonporc* has been shared in 114,283 tweets and by 49,183 tweeters.

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47 We obtained data about the tweets using a Python-built application programming interface (API).

48 The *#yotambien* hashtag gathered support from across the Hispanic world, not only in Spain but in Latin America too. But, to be clear, for us those tweets refer to Spain.

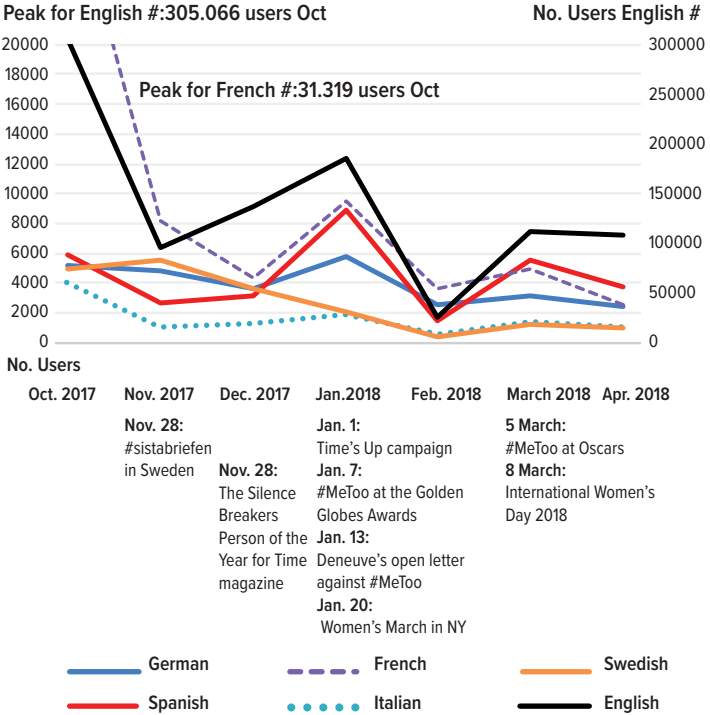
**Table 2:** #MeToo on Twitter from October 2017 to April 2018

	<b>Total No. of posts</b>	<b>Total No. of users</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,174,787</b>	<b>1,203,564</b>
<b>Languages</b>		
English	1,705,214	721,970
French	117,404	50,936
German	53,405	19,447
Spanish	44,320	26,194
Swedish	38,021	12,421
Italian	18,069	9,388
<b>Local hashtags #</b>		
#MeToo	2,048,092	847,229
#balancetonporc	114,283	49,183
#yotambien	7,237	4,965
#sistabriefen	336	149
#quellavoltache	9,048	3,831

The evolution of the interest in the #MeToo campaign was similar in all the analysed countries, i.e. from the first tweet by Alyssa Milano on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2017 until the end of April 2018 (figure 2). The only exception can be noted in Sweden, which recorded a peak in November 2018, that is when the local hashtag #sistabriefen emerged, highlighting the different effect of the Swedish social media campaign. In the four other languages, the evolution of the salience of the campaign followed the main stages of the international (mainly North American) social media campaign in English. There are two main peaks in January and March 2018. In January, numerous actions raised awareness on the #MeToo phenomenon, for instance: the launch of the *Time's Up* campaign, celebrities wearing black to honour survivors of sexual abuse during the Golden Globes Awards, the unprecedented Women's March organised in New York. Meanwhile, the Deneuve letter in France



inflated the social debate in Europe. In March 2018, another peak in interest is observed and coincides with the 2018 Oscar ceremony when celebrities turned up in black again but also with the unprecedented “feminist strike” in Spain where over five million female workers stopped working under the slogan “If we stop, the world stops”.



**Figure 2:** Evolution of interest in #MeToo by language, October 2017-April 2018

Given the viral nature of the hashtag MeToo, how did the related tweets engage other Tweeters?<sup>49</sup> On average each #MeToo post collected 7.28 likes and has been retweeted 3.37 times (see Table 3). #MeToo tweets in Swedish collected the highest average number of likes (7.67), while those in Italian received the lowest amount (4.73). **Local hashtags collected a significantly higher engagement:** the tweets published under the Italian hashtag #quellavoltache for example, received almost twice as many likes (8.63) than the Italian language tweets under #MeToo. The same applies for Spain and France too.

#MeToo-related posts are socially engaging and therefore it is not only important to consider the quantitative but also their qualitative coverage. The textual analysis<sup>50</sup> points to **differences in the #MeToo campaign between an individual and more introspective way of sharing experiences, as in France, and a collective awareness and active grassroots movement at workplaces in Sweden. Furthermore, there is a difference in places where gender-based violence occur. In Sweden, the workplace is clearly identified as the main point of reference, while in Italy violence in the household and workplace are used interchangeably. Moreover, the identification of women as “victims” is evident only in Italy and Germany.**

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49 For this purpose, we computed statistics about the social engagement such as the number of “likes” these tweets received, number of times a tweet from this dataset is retweeted and the number of hashtags attached.

50 We looked at the most frequent words used in the posts in the different languages. Then, we focused on three main words: “women”, “harassment” and “feminism” in order to grasp how the #MeToo tweets label these concepts. We computed pointwise mutual information (PMI) using twitter as a data source. PMI defines the relation between two words. We analysed the content of the tweets, in all the different languages considered here, to identify how women are perceived, in terms of background and personal characteristics of experiences and of reactions to harassment. We also identified the most common concepts and words connected with the term “harassment” and “feminism”.

**Table 3.** Local social engagement with the #MeToo campaign (average values)

# by language						
	English	French	Spanish	Italian	Swedish	German
likes	7.33	4.92	5.17	4.73	7.67	6.52
retweets	2.7	3.2	2.79	2.59	2.53	2.32
hashtags	2.4	2.76	1.94	2.36	1.86	2.28
#MeToo and Local #						
	#MeToo	#yotambién (ES)	#balancetonporc (FR)	#quellavoltache (IT)	#sistabriefen (SE)	
likes	7.28	6.41	5.80	8.63	3.88	
retweets	3.37	4.42	3.97	3.00	1.21	
hashtags	2.31	1.98	3.20	2.35	2.69	

Finally, the sentiment analysis<sup>51</sup> of the collected #MeToo tweets shows that, among the hashtags considered, the tweets labelled #yotambien are those which expressed the most positive emotions compared to #balancetonporc and the international #MeToo (table 4). Considering that Spain has the highest level of legal protection against gender-based violence, a female activity rate higher than the average EU-27 and low horizontal segregation, this hints at the close interconnections between the two dimensions of sexual harassment in figure 1 (p. 16), namely: insufficient legislative framework, pervasive gender inequality and inadequate awareness campaign.

**Table 4:** Sentiment distribution for Twitter posts (%)

		#MeToo	#balancetonporc	#yotambien
<b>Strong negative</b>	<b>0</b>	0	0	0
	<b>1</b>	74	84	48
	<b>2</b>	23	15	51
	<b>3</b>	1	1	1
<b>Strong positive</b>	<b>4</b>	0	0	0

51 Sentiment analysis or opinion mining is the computational study of people's opinions, sentiments, emotions, appraisals, and attitudes towards entities such as products, services, organisations, individuals, issues, events, topics, and their attributes. To measure the type of sentiment on twitter, we used a deep learning technique, a powerful machine learning technique that learns multiple layers of representations or features of the data and produces state-of-the-art prediction results. For example, driverless cars use "deep learning algorithm". It helps the car to differentiate between pedestrian, lamppost, traffic signals etc. It learns from image, text or voices. Models are trained by a set of labelled data and neural network that has many layers. Along with the success of deep learning in many application domains, deep learning is also popularly used in sentiment analysis in recent years specifically to extract sentiments from social media posts. We applied deep learning for Sentiment Analysis of the tweets labelled with the hashtag #MeToo, based on Tree-LSTMs model. We had to restrict the analysis to the tweets in English. Each tweet has been associated with a score from 0 to 4: 0 indicates a strong negative attitude, 2 neutrality, 4 strong positive sentiment. The deep learning model we used considers a full representation of the tweet (and not just the single words). The sentiment depends on how words create the meaning of tweets. For example, the model has learned that 'funny' and 'witty' are positive, but the following sentence is negative: "This movie was neither funny, nor witty". The sentiment analysis underlined a general negative sentiment in the posts that used the hashtag #MeToo. Therefore, it is more interesting for our analysis to consider the "positive sentiment" in the tweets because it represents a positive social engagement in the campaign both in the direction of encouraging survivors to speak and share their experiences and to embrace a social support for change.

## CONCLUSIONS

In a time of deep polarisation in society, #MeToo can offer possibilities for engaging in dialogue, for articulating related aspirations for social change. It is about establishing alliances in fighting rape culture and sexism transnationally and forging spaces for common combats. Above all, it is about bringing the public to discuss issues of gender equality and sexual violence. Social media campaigns have an important role in raising public awareness to define the extent, the diffusion and the evolution of harassment and in developing social support for changes as a fundamental component of primary prevention strategies.

Several key findings emerged from this research. Firstly, the international version of the #Metoo found many locally translated equivalents, which spurred higher social media campaign engagement compared to the international albeit original version. Secondly, the content analysis of the tweets reveals a polarisation of the #MeToo campaign between an individual and more introspective level of sharing experiences, as in Italy and France, and a collective awareness and concrete actions in order to change the status quo, as in Sweden (e.g. petitions, group complaints, class actions, etc.). Thirdly, the sentiment analysis of the #Metoo tweets indicated that positive or negative emotions are directly correlated with the positive or negative social and workplace dimensions of sexual harassment. In other words, insufficient legislative frameworks, pervasive gender inequalities and inadequate awareness campaign are closely connected.

This chapter illustrated that despite the overseas origins of the #Metoo movement, Europe embraced and re-interpreted it, although quite differently according to the underlying sexual harassment dimensions, namely the social environment and the workplace dimensions, in each country.

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