

# #MeToo: Intersecting Gender, Race, User Identity, Social Judgment and Social Support

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This study examined the #MeToo movement with an analysis of user comments on Twitter. The study tested an integrated framework of theories and constructs, including social identity, social judgment, and social support as well as race and gender. Findings suggest that social judgment differed between users with separate social identity. Specifically, users affiliated with news media were non-committal to the movement. Those who accepted the movement provided social support to victim-survivors more than those who rejected or remained non-committal. Female and White users were more accepting of the movement than male and

gender/race unidentified users. More male users rejected the movement than gender-unidentified users. The findings have contributed to advancing social psychology theories as the basis for examining public response to a social movement. This study also improved our empirical understanding of how sociological, psychological, and demographic intersectionality in society can help determine the success, failure, or sustainability of a social movement.

*Keywords: #MeToo; social identity; social judgment; social support; social movement*

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**T**he concept of social movement has been broadly defined as “forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands” (Horn, 2013, p. 19; Obregón & Tufte, 2017). Social movements today could reach the masses with the aid of social media tools and Internet technologies, which are often referred to as digital activism or social media revolutions (Zamir, 2017). The #MeToo movement, an example of digital activism, was first founded in 2006 by an African American women’s rights activist Tarana Burke, who organized the movement to provide support to survivors of sexual violence among young and low-income women of color (Garcia, 2017; Ohlheiser, 2017). This movement began to receive widespread attention and recognition, after Alyssa

Milano (a Hollywood actress) tweeted “#MeToo” (on October 15, 2017) in response to the sexual assault allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein (Mendes et al., 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). Milano’s #MeToo tweet quickly generated approximately 500,000 posts on Twitter and 12 million posts on Facebook in 2017 (CBS, 2017; Renkl, 2017).

As victims and survivors of “#MeToo” came forward to discuss the issue of sexual misconduct from across the globe, their testimonies have lent credence to the prevalence of sexual violence against women around the world (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). Today, the main goal of the movement is to pursue a systemic change by reframing and expanding the discourse around sexual violence to protect a broader spectrum of survivors, particularly those from marginalized groups (Langone, 2018; me too, n.d.).

As the #MeToo movement fights against individuals who condone or engage in sexual misconduct against others, disagreements about what constitutes sexual misconduct continue in the court of public opinion (e.g., Newall & Boyon, 2019). These disagreements could be a result of differing beliefs, attitudes and other social identity factors (such as gender and race), which will require theory-driven research to provide scientifically sound explanations. Extant research that adopted an inductive category development (e.g., Clark-Parsons, 2021; Drewett et al., 2021) typically did not test a theoretical framework (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2004). Quantitative content analysis studies likewise tended to provide descriptive findings instead of validating theory-based explanations (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Modrek & Chakalov, 2019).

The current study intends to fill the theoretical gap by examining how Twitter users responded to the #MeToo movement through testing the social identity theory, social judgment theory and social support construct. This research will adopt a quantitative content analysis to explore 1) whether social identity might be associated with an individual’s social judgment toward the #MeToo movement; 2) whether social identity and social judgment would be connected to social support for sexual misconduct survivors/victims; and 3) whether race and gender would demonstrate intersectionality in reacting to this digital movement.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social and Group Identity**

The social identity theory proposed by Tajfel (1978, 1982) emphasizes that self-

concept is comprised not only of personal identity (i.e., unique characteristics of individuals, such as abilities and interests) but also of social identity (i.e., gender, race, or social group memberships) (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity could also serve as “a point of pivot between the social and the individual,” where an individual can feel connected to the well-being and status of others (Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Reicher, 2004, p. 928; Hopkins et al., 2006), which could encourage an individual to participate in collective action (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Dutt & Grabe, 2014; Wiley & Bikmen, 2012).

This is especially true when individuals connect their feelings of inequality and unfairness against the outgroups, who are deemed as external “enemies” or “opponents” (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Oberschall (1973) proposed the theory of mobilization, which suggested that the closer the communal bonds within the collective – to protest toward common objects of hostility among the more socially segmented (isolated) groups – the faster those groups may be mobilized.

Based on the assumptions of social identity theory, it would appear that an individual’s social or group identity could help shape his or her attitude toward those who are victims/survivors of sexual misconduct. In the current study, the construct of social identity was conceptualized as a Twitter user’s aggregated social-group association, which reflects whether they posted their tweets as a member of an organization, a corporation, a news media outlet, a public figure or an unaffiliated individual. To explore the social/group identity and distribution of these constituencies among those tweeted about #MeToo, a research question is proposed below.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the social identity types represented by those who participated in the #MeToo discussion?

### **Social Judgment of Others**

While the #MeToo movement is hailed by many as beneficial to improve gender equality and women’s rights, perception of the success of #MeToo was not necessarily uniform across society, as indicated by a national survey (Newall & Boyon, 2019). Specifically, survey results pointed out that while 37% of Americans believed #MeToo had created a positive impact on society, 31% indicated the opposite. These discrepant views

on the #MeToo movement could have been shaped by a multitude of factors, including the persuasive effect of messaging on an individual's attitude toward the movement.

As attitude toward the #MeToo movement involves making a value judgment, such effect can be explained by the tenet of social judgment theory. The social judgment theory asserts that the effect of a persuasive message about an issue on the receiver relies on the receiver's evaluation of the position (e.g., for vs. against) the sender puts forth for the message (O'Keefe, 1990; Sherif, 1936; Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif et al., 1965; Smith et al., 2006). Examining receiver evaluation of their position on an issue (as presented in a persuasive message) is an effective way to understand when a message is most likely to be accepted (Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif et al., 1965; Sherif & Sherif, 1968).

Typically, upon receiving a message, an individual categorizes the position on the message into one of the three attitudinal zones: 1) the "latitude of acceptance" or in agreement with the position, 2) the "latitude of rejection" or in disagreement with the position, and 3) the "latitude of noncommitment" or not in agreement nor disagreement with the position (Mallard, 2010, p. 197). While ego-involvement with an issue may help inflate the magnitude of each attitudinal zone, an individual's bias may distort the issue position to fit the preferred category of judgment.

By implication, if this bias is congruent with a Twitter user's existing attitude toward the movement, it will fall within the user's latitude of acceptance. Conversely, if the message is widely discrepant from the user's attitude, it will fall within the latitude of rejection. If neither is the case, then the message will either fall within the latitude of non-commitment or engender a potential perception and behavior change over time (Smith et al., 2006). To explore the different attitudinal latitudes associated with the Me-Too movement based on the social judgment theory, a research question is advanced below.

**RQ2:** Is there a significant difference in user attitude toward the #MeToo movement as reflected by social judgment categories?

Social judgment theory is also considered a reference group theory (Gaske, 1983). Reference group theories suggest that an individual will evaluate others' values or standards to generate determinants and consequences as a comparative frame of reference (Merton, 1957). Individuals often adopt their reference group's attitudes and values

through an internalization process, learning and accepting the norms and values as their own (Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

Researchers pointed out that knowledge of the reference group's values is a significant predictor of an individual's attitudes and values toward certain social groups or issues (Gaske, 1983; Sherif, 1948; Stets & Burke, 2000). In the current study context, an individual's social judgment associated with the #MeToo movement could be aligned with the attitudes and evaluations of the movement that have been espoused by an individual's loosely or closely affiliated reference and/or social groups. To validate the potential relationship between these theoretical constructs as proposed by the social judgment theory and social identity theory, a research hypothesis is posited below.

H1: There will be a significant difference in the distribution of social judgment categories across users with different social identity types.

### **Social Support**

Social support communication is generally considered as the exchange of both verbal and nonverbal messages that contain emotion, information, or referral that aims to help other people reduce uncertainty or stress and to communicate the fact that he or she is valued and cared for by others (Barnes & Duck, 1994; Walther & Boyd, 2002). To communicate social support on a social media platform, an individual could share an encouraging statement, endorse other people's perspectives, participate in a positive social action, and the like (Mendes et al., 2018). These types of social media activities could also communicate social support for a social issue, cause or movement (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018; Rodino-Colocino, 2018).

Showing social support for others has been found to be widely prevalent in computer-mediated communication contexts due to the readily available weak-tie relationships in online social support groups (Tanis, 2008; Walther & Boyd, 2002; Wright & Miller, 2010; Wright & Rains, 2013). Weak ties are loose connections created through secondary associations in a social network (i.e., neighbors or acquaintances) (Putnam, 2000; Walther & Boyd, 2002; Wright & Miller, 2010). Social networking sites, such as Twitter, provide a platform where the victims/survivors can share stories with and provide support to the weak-ties who share similar difficulties (Hosterman et al., 2018). Twitter

users who provide social support could also be regarded as the movement's information disseminators, reflecting a form of "digital activism" (Zamir, 2017, p. 8).

For example, Mendes et al. (2018) indicated that rape victims expressed gratitude towards the solidarity and support which they received in the form of likes, retweets, or direct messages from strangers on online social networks. These victims also agreed that tweets associated with relevant hashtags (e.g., #MeToo, #BeenRapedNeverReported, etc.) enabled them to have their voices heard, build social support networks and identify a systemic sexual violence problem. Rodino-Colocino (2018) suggested that the #MeToo movement has created "affective solidarity" (p. 98) among victims/survivors based on empathy, which promotes both healing and subsequent action, such as legal actions against perpetrators.

In the current study context, the presence or absence of social support provided by Twitter users could be indicative of the existence or lack of social action toward the victims/survivors. To ascertain social support for the #MeToo movement, the following research question is posed.

**RQ3:** Is there a significant difference between the presence and absence of social support toward the victims/survivors?

As discussed above, issue-specific shared social identity between individuals and/or advocacy groups was often tied to certain grievances that connected them through the common feelings of inequality and unfairness felt toward the outgroups (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Individuals who share similar experiences of identity denial, rejection or disprivilege could come together to push for change through collective social action triggered by their grievances (Milner, 1996; Van Zomeren et al., 2004). Specifically, Tanis (2008) suggested that those who faced similar ordeals were inclined to be more empathetic and understanding of one another, regardless of potential differences in personal or demographic characteristics.

Based on the discussion above addressing the relationships between social identity and social action associated with a social movement, it is anticipated that Twitter users who are members of a public advocacy group will be more likely to provide social support

to victims-survivors than those who are not affiliated with such a group. To verify this theoretical connection, the hypothesis below will be tested.

H2: There will be a significant difference in the presence or absence of social support across different social identity types.

As aforementioned, the social judgment theory addresses the discrepancy between the position of the message and that of the recipient as well as the recipients' attitude change after message exposure (Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif et al., 1965; Siero & Doosje, 1993). When the evaluation of a message falls in the "latitude of noncommitment", perception and behavior change can still shift to the latitude of acceptance or rejection (Smith et al., 2006). For example, Matthews (2019) tested audience bias toward media characters' dispositions on their subsequent moral judgments of the characters' behaviors and found that an assimilation effect could occur when such bias was affiliated with an extremely low magnitude of moral violation.

Among the multiple factors that could influence attitude change toward the #MeToo movement, one important factor to consider is an individual's knowledge about sexual misconduct events or experiences shared by their friends, families or peers. For example, Suk et al.'s (2021) quantitative content analysis demonstrated that Twitter users' discourse about their own traumatic experiences reflected an activism discourse that provided support for and helped sustain the #MeToo movement. Likewise, social support shown through expressing sympathy toward victims or survivors could also help advance the #MeToo movement. For instance, Clark-Parsons's (2021) content analysis study suggested that the #MeToo movement served as a vehicle for advancing feminist activism to provide a bridge between the individual with the collective for their involvement with the movement.

In the current study context, it is unknown how many of those individuals who hold an attitude of acceptance, rejection or non-commitment toward the #MeToo movement may express or withhold social support toward the victims and survivors. Nonetheless, it is safe to assume that an individual who accepts the movement may be more willing to express such support. The opposite could be true for those who are non-committed to or rejecting the movement. To validate these theoretical assumptions, a hypothesis is postulated below.

H3: There will be a significant difference in the presence or absence of social support across different social judgment categories.

### **Gender and Race**

As discussed earlier, the public's attitude towards the #MeToo movement is not necessarily positive across the board. This phenomenon also paralleled that of American men's responses to a national survey, where 36% of them saw a positive effect and 31% mentioned a negative effect resulting from the movement (Newall & Boyon, 2019). It is likely that #MeToo is evaluated as a women's rights issue with a singular focus. However, as pointed out by Crenshaw (1991), violence against women is often shaped by other aspects of their identities, such as race or class. Concepts such as "intersectionality" and "gendered racism and multidimensionality" have been studied to explain discrimination and subordination based on the intersection of gender and race categories (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Hutchinson, 2001).

Gender and race are two of the most important aspects of an individual's social identity (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The #MeToo movement has revealed the exclusion and marginalization of women of color in the feminist movement, even though they are usually more vulnerable to sexual harassment, assault and rape than White women (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Modrek and Chakalov's (2019) quantitative text analysis of tweets posted during the first week of the #MeToo movement demonstrated that these tweets were mostly shared by White women aged 25-50.

As gender and race represent important characteristics of victims and survivors of sexual misconduct, the question at hand then extends to whether Twitter users' gender and race may be associated with how they make social judgments of the #MeToo movement. By the same token, the question of whether gender and race may be relevant to how Twitter users express their social support toward the victims/survivors is also an important one to explore. To navigate these potential associations, the following research questions are proposed.

RQ4a-b: Is there a significant difference in the distribution of social judgment categories between a) racial categories or b) gender-identity types?

RQ5a-b: Is there a significant difference in the presence or absence of social support between a) racial categories or b) gender identity?



## METHODS

Data collection was conducted by selecting a random sample of Tweets via the public API of Twitter. The sampling period chosen was Jan 2017 to June 2018, when the #MeToo movement emerged as a hashtag-driven social media movement. To avoid missing any important subjects related to #MeToo, the sampling procedures of other relevant content analysis studies were consulted (e.g., Kaufman et al., 2019). Ten hashtags most pertinent to the #MeToo movement were identified as the “search terms” to guide the sampling process, including #metoo, #timesup, #sexualassault, #azizansari, #sexualmisconduct, #rape, #feminism, #sexualharassment, #consent, and #neveragain. The search for English-language tweets yielded 2.8 million tweets. A simple random sampling procedure was adopted to select 1,279 tweets for the final sample.

### Coding Procedure

Two research assistants participated in an initial training session and coded a sample of 100 tweets (or 6% of the sample) for the purpose of establishing preliminary intercoder reliability. Due to the complexity of coding abstract concepts (e.g., social identity or social judgment) and user attribute variables (e.g., race or gender not always identifiable in tweets), repeated training was conducted to refine the coding approach. After the coders were able to achieve an acceptable intercoder reliability (i.e., Krippendorff’s alpha > .70), each coder completed coding the remaining tweets independently.

After removing the incomplete data – including tweets that were protected/suspended accounts, unrelated to the study variables, and redundant – a total of 500 tweets were used in the data analyses. The final intercoder reliability computed with Krippendorff’s alpha for each variable is as follows: .71 for social identity, .70 for social judgment, .66 for social support, .80 for gender and .78 for race. The low than ideal intercoder reliability for social support (.66) was considered acceptable, due to the abstract nature of this construct (De Swert, 2012).

### Operational Definitions

#### *Social Identity*

This variable shows a Twitter user’s reference/social group affiliation via five categories: 1) public advocacy group represents social groups (e.g., Equal Rights

Advocates) that champion women's rights; 2) other interest group reflects an entity aiming to communicate with their own stakeholders/followers, i.e., celebrities, politicians, corporations, and educational, religious and research institutions; 3) news media group indicates a journalist, writer or news personalities affiliated with a news organization; 4) unaffiliated includes users independent from affiliation with the other three categories.

### ***Social Judgment***

This variable describes Twitter users' evaluation of #MeToo related topics: the movement itself, feminism, women's rights, victim's rights, and the like. Each tweet was coded for whether it conveyed "acceptance", "rejection", or "non-commitment" toward any of these topics. For example, a sample tweet indicating "acceptance" stated, "I HAVE been raped, I WILL stand up for others who have. #MeToo." A sample tweet expressing "non-commitment" (or no opinion) was identified via "Bill O'Reilly out at #FoxNews following #sexualharassment allegations; precipitated by @nytimes report last month <http://on.ktla.com/6na4k>." An example of a tweet showing "rejection" endorsed, "Feminism: A load of bull".

### ***Social Support***

This variable identifies whether a tweet displays support for the issues related to #MeToo. An example of a supportive tweet stated, "SO BRAVE. @EvanRachelWood ♡♡♡ Westworld' star Evan Rachel Wood details her experiences of horrifying sexual abuse to help other survivors. #SexualAbuse #SexualAssault #Rape." By contrast, an example for the absence of social support noted, "Nursing Home Held Liable for Patient's #SexualAssault <https://buff.ly/2n14awa> #MayaLaw #lawyersinCT #employmentlaw #elderlaw #patientsafety #patientprotection #elderabuse #sexualharassment".

### ***Gender & Race/Ethnicity***

Both user gender and race/ethnicity were identified based on reviewing the user profile, including their photos and self-reported gender and racial/ethnic identity. Despite the possibility of the profiles being subject to users' impression management motivations, coding the demographic characteristics – such as sex and race – based on the visual cues has been found to be realistic, casual, and unembellished (Step et al., 2016).

For this study, gender categories coded included: male, female, lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, and unidentified. These gender categories were further collapsed into four types: male, female, LGBTQ, and unidentified. Racial/ethnic categories coded were: White, Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Native American, and unidentified. These were merged into three groups: White, ethnic minorities, and unidentified.

## RESULTS

### Research Questions

The results for the reference/social group types (RQ1) were distributed as follows: 14.6% *public advocacy* group ( $N = 73$ ), 17.2% *institutions/celebrities* group ( $N = 86$ ), 20.6% *news media* group ( $N = 103$ ), and 47.6% *unaffiliated* ( $N = 238$ ). The chi-square test suggested that the frequency for these social identity categories was statistically significant from each other ( $\chi^2 (3, N = 500) = 139.82, p < .001$ ). A significant difference was also found for the distribution of social judgment categories (RQ2), as 56.6%, 35.2% and 8.2% of the tweets in the sample were respectively coded as “acceptance”, “non-commitment” and “rejection” ( $\chi^2 (2, N = 500) = 175.19, p < .001$ ). The same is true for the distribution of social support (RQ3), with 16.2% of all tweets contained the language of social support and 83.8% included no such language ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 500) = 228.49, p < .001$ ). To test research questions RQ4-5, a two-way chi-square test with residual analysis was conducted to identify specific cells that contributed to the “goodness of fit” to indicate a significant association between variables (Sharpe, 2015). For the residual analysis, we looked for cells with an adjusted standardized residual greater than  $\pm 2$ , which demonstrates the lack of fit for the null hypothesis in that cell (Agresti, 2007; Haberman, 1973).

RQ4a queries whether users’ social judgment significantly differs by race. The chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference ( $\chi^2 (4, N = 500) = 26.57, p < .001$ , Pearson’s  $\chi^2 = .21, p < .001$ ). The residual analysis showed that White users expressed acceptance of the movement, but not the race-unidentified users. The race-unidentified users’ tweets indicated a non-commitment toward the movement. Racial minorities were not significantly differentiated for their social judgment types (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Chi-Square Test for Social Judgment Type by Race*

		White	Racial Minorities	Unidentified	Total
Acceptance	N	137	41	105	283
	Column %	66.50%	56.90%	47.30%	56.60%
	Adjusted Residual	3.7	0.1	-3.8	
Rejection	N	21	7	13	41
	Column %	10.20%	9.70%	5.90%	8.20%
	Adjusted Residual	1.4	0.5	-1.7	
Non-commitment	N	48	24	104	176
	Column %	23.30%	33.30%	46.80%	35.20%
	Adjusted Residual	-4.7	-0.4	4.9	
Total	N	206	72	222	500
	Column %	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

RQ4b inquires whether users' social judgment of the movement differs by gender. The chi-square test confirmed a significant difference ( $\chi^2$  (6,  $N=500$ , 58.46,  $p < .001$ ; Pearson's  $\chi^2 = .16$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The residual analysis indicated that female gender significantly expressed acceptance of the movement instead of gender-unidentified users. Of those who rejected the movement, more of them were male instead of gender-unidentified users. Among users who took a non-commitment position, more of them appeared to be gender-unidentified than female users. As a very small number of users self-identified as LGBTQ (2.8%), their tweets rendering social judgment on #MeToo did not result in a statistically significant manner (see Table 2).

**Table 2***Chi-Square Test for Social Judgment Type by Gender*

		Male	Female	LGBTQ	Unidenti- ed	Total
Acceptance	N	50	139	11	83	283
	Column %	48.10%	70.60%	78.60%	44.90%	56.60%
	Adjusted Residual	-2	5.1	1.7	-4.1	
Rejection	N	20	13	1	7	41
	Column %	19.20%	6.60%	7.10%	3.80%	8.20%
	Adjusted Residual	4.6	-1.1	-0.1	-2.8	
Non- commitment	N	34	45	2	95	176
	Column %	32.70%	22.80%	14.30%	51.40%	35.20%
	Adjusted Residual	-0.6	-4.7	-1.7	5.8	
Total	N	104	197	14	185	500
	Column %	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

RQ5a tests whether social support differs by race. The chi-square results did not find a significant difference ( $\chi^2 (2, N = 500) = 2.32, p > .05$ ; Pearson's  $\chi^2 = .07, p > .05$ ). The same non-significant results were also true for RQ5b, which investigates the possible differences in social support between gender-identity types ( $\chi^2 (3, N = 500) = 6.53, p > .05$ ; Pearson's  $\chi^2 = .04, p > .05$ ). Additional analysis on users' racial attributes indicated the following: 41.2% White, 14.4% ethnic minorities, and 44.4% in the "unidentified" category. As for gender characteristics, 20.8%, 39.4% and 2.8% of the users were identified as males, females and LGBTQs, respectively; another 37% fell in the "unidentified" category.

### Research Hypotheses

H1 tests the presumed a significant difference in social judgment categories across social identity types. Results indicated that there was a significant difference ( $\chi^2 (6, N = 500) = 58.46, p < .001$ ; Pearson's  $\chi^2 = -.02, p > .05$ ). The residual analysis reveals that *advocacy groups* and *institutions/celebrities* demonstrated no significant association with how social judgment was rendered. By contrast, the *news media* group indicated its positive inclination for "non-commitment" and negative tendency for "acceptance" and "rejection" beyond chance. As for the *unaffiliated* users, their attitude in the "rejection" zone was statistically significant but not the "non-commitment" zone; no statistical

significance was present for the “acceptance” zone. H1 was thus confirmed, as social judgment categories were significantly differentiated by social identity type (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Chi-Square Test for Reference/Social Group by Social Judgment Type*

		Acceptance	Rejection	Non-commitment	Total
Advocacy Groups	N	46	2	25	73
	Column %	16.30%	4.90%	14.20%	14.60%
	Adjusted Residual	1.2	-1.8	-0.2	
Institutions/Celebrities	N	57	5	24	86
	Column %	20.10%	12.20%	13.60%	17.20%
	Adjusted Residual	2	-0.9	-1.6	
News Media	N	34	3	66	103
	Column %	12.00%	7.30%	37.50%	20.60%
	Adjusted Residual	-5.4	-2.2	6.9	
Unaffiliated	N	146	31	61	238
	Column %	51.60%	75.60%	34.70%	47.60%
	Adjusted Residual	2	3.7	-4.3	
Total	N	283	41	176	500
	Column %	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

As for H2, which asserts that a significant difference in the presence/absence of social support across social identity types, the chi-square results were not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 (3, N= 500) = 4.80, p > .05$ ; Pearson's  $\chi^2 = .04, p > .05$ ). H2 was hence not supported.

H3 assumes that there is a significant difference in the presence/absence of social support across social judgment categories. Results revealed a significant difference between these two variables ( $\chi^2 (2, N= 500) = 58.22, p < .001$ ; Pearson  $\chi^2 = .33, p < .001$ ). The residual analysis showed that users who accepted the movement were positively associated with the presence of social support and negatively associated with the absence

of such support. For those users who rejected the movement, more of them were associated with an absence rather than presence of expressing social support. Among those users indicated non-commitment toward the movement, more of them were affiliated with an absence instead of presence of social support. These findings confirmed H3 (see Table 4).

**Table 4***Chi-Square Test for Social Judgment Type by Social Support*

		Yes	No	Total
	N	77	206	283
Acceptance	Column %	95.10%	49.20%	56.60%
	Adjusted Residual	7.6	-7.6	
	N	1	40	41
Rejection	Column %	1.20%	9.50%	8.20%
	Adjusted Residual	-2.5	2.5	
	N	3	173	176
Non- commitment	Column %	3.70%	41.30%	35.20%
	Adjusted Residual	-6.5	6.5	
	N	81	419	500
Total	Column %	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

**DISCUSSION**

This study is among the first to examine the narrative of the #MeToo movement based on a social scientific theory-driven framework. Specifically, this research has contributed to the literature by linking a social movement to relevant social psychology theories and constructs to help predict and explain the social outcomes associated with the movement. In particular, the study explored how individuals reacted to the movement based on their reference/social group identity as well as social judgment of and social support for the movement. Two demographic variables that constitute the intersectionality for sexual misconduct – gender and race – were also studied in relation to social judgment of and social support for the movement.

Our findings suggested that Twitter users' social judgment regarding the #MeToo movement was differentiated based on their reference/social group identity. This difference was in part a result of the news media's inclination to remain non-committal to the movement instead of explicitly representing their positions of either acceptance or rejection. By implication, the news media accounts on social media appeared to primarily report the facts associated with the movement (Bailo & Vromen, 2017). In other words, the tweets posted by the news media in the current sample have collectively demonstrated that they have fulfilled their social responsibility by presenting the news without biasing their audiences about this movement (Asp, 2007).

Another reference/social group category contributed to the significant contrasting results in social judgment of the movement was the *unaffiliated* individuals or those Twitter users who posted their opinion only for themselves. Interestingly, results indicated that these *unaffiliated* individuals were more likely to reject the movement instead of remaining non-committal to the movement. This could be probably explained by the negative view of which feminism has been receiving historically (Haddock & Zanna, 1994). Researchers have argued that such unfavorable public attitude towards feminism was formed through the media's negative and sexualized construction of feminism, which often framed feminism as outdated and lacking relevancy (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012).

Tweets posted by a public advocacy group were not significantly different in their social judgment of the #MeToo movement. From the perspective of public advocacy for women's rights, establishing a collective identity among women has been particularly challenging. This is because women, in general, a) are structurally scattered across all other social groups, b) live/work closely with their "oppressors", and c) may regard other collective identities, such as race or class, as more important than their gender (Buechler, 1993). Social ties among feminist activists have hence been created in conjunction with specific subcultures, which promote distinct "micro-cohorts" within the larger feminist movement (Whittier, 1995, p. 17). In essence, divergent subcultures, which created fractured communities within the larger feminist movement, might not have been conducive to building a collective identity or mobilizing collective action for the movement (Diani, 2000; Whittier, 1995).



Turning to the relations between gender and an individual's social judgment on the #MeToo movement, study results revealed a statistically significant difference between male, female, LGBTQ, and unidentified gender types. Specifically, female users tended to accept the movement and male users tended to reject the movement. These findings confirmed Peleg-Koriat and Klar-Chalamis's (2020) study, which showed that women's attitude towards the #MeToo movement were more favorable than that of men. Moreover, while female users were less likely to remain non-committal, the opposite was true for the gender-unidentified individuals. The gender-unidentified individuals' (44.44%) non-committal attitude seems to capture the on-going status or progress of the movement, which appears to have met continuing criticism and skepticism. For instance, a 2018 Pew Research study indicated that 31% of those polled mentioned women making false sexual harassment/assault claims as a major problem and another 34% stated the same about firing accused men before establishing all the facts (Blazina, 2021). Even though the goal of the #MeToo movement has never been to advocate "hatred" against men, some men consider the movement to be vengeful towards them.

Furthermore, this paper also revealed that White, ethnic minorities and race-unidentified individuals reacted differently in their social judgment of the movement. The current study data on race indicates that only 14.4% (7.8% Black) of the users identified themselves as racial minorities, compared to 41.2% of Whites and 44.4% for the race-unidentified group. Compared to racial minorities and race-unidentified individuals, White users were more likely to accept the movement, instead of remaining non-committal. Combining the race data with the gender data – which describes 39.4% of the users as female, followed by 37% gender-unidentified and 28% male users – it seems clear that the #MeToo movement is primarily led by and associated with White women. Such imbalance in racial group representation demonstrates the White-centered characteristic of the movement, while masking the sexual harassment and assault grievances and vulnerability of Black and other minority women.

Study findings also demonstrated that the presence or absence of social support provided by Twitter users differed based on their social judgment of the movement. In particular, those who accepted the movement were more inclined to extend social support to the victims/survivors, while users who rejected or remained non-committal to the

movement tended not to do the same. By contrast, no significant difference was found for social support across the reference/social groups, race categories or gender-identity types. These results further suggest that a majority of Twitter users did not extend social support to sexual misconduct victims/survivors, perhaps because of their need to verify the authenticity or seriousness of the alleged private conduct. Pain's (2020) textual analysis study, for instance, found social media platforms to be sexist by nature and thus yielded negative consequences for digital feminist activism. The author nonetheless noted that some women had created tangible support systems such as offering pro bono legal services on Twitter for #MeToo victims and survivors.

This study has the following limitations. Coding abstract concepts such as social identity and social judgment to achieve high inter-coder reliability was challenging. The difficulty in verifying a user's institutional affiliation also affected the study's ability to utilize social group identifier to more fully describe how different institutional establishments reacted to the #MeToo movement. Anonymous tweets and incomplete user metadata also restricted a more thorough analysis based on race and gender. Golder et al. (2022) pointed out that although the profile metadata is used by most studies to extract race or ethnicity from social media, the accuracy of using this metadata through various methodologies – including manual inference – is significantly lower in identifying categories of people of color. To address this methodological imperfection, developing a comprehensive operational definition for each variable and selecting a sample with more complete data should help mitigate these coding issues in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The current study has laid a foundation for theorizing social media users' attitudinal and behavioral responses to a social movement such as #MeToo from a social psychological perspective at the individual and collective levels. This theoretical framework encompasses the social identity theory, social judgment theory, social support constructs, and the race-gender intersectionality concept. Based on this framework, the study demonstrates how social media users may express their beliefs, attitudes, and actions toward a social movement that has a significant impact on the ethical and legal boundaries associated with how co-workers should interact with each other in a workplace

setting. The study has thus contributed to advancing a theory-driven empirical approach that studies the macro phenomenon of a social movement at a micro level to explain the human behavior that propels the movement.

Moving forward, it would be useful to replicate the current study to help verify its measurement validity and reliability in conjunction with a cross-sectional survey. Additional work could also consider creating machine learning algorithms to study a large universe of tweets with hashtags related to the #MeToo movement. This type of “big data” analysis could further elucidate the conceptual links between the variables in the model and to better explain the factors that could predict social support and social action. Future studies could also consider applying the theoretical framework tested here to examine other social justice movements such as #BLM (Black Lives Matter) and more.

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