



# UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

## **Department of Informatics and Media**

**Master Program in Social Sciences, specialization in Digital Media and Society**

**Two-Year Master's Thesis**

**#MeToo: A case study of #sistabriefen**

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## **Abstract**

As a result of the #MeToo movement in Sweden, #sistabriefen was created to represent the women, non-binaries and trans-persons working within the communications industry. This study analyzes the dynamics and identities of the #sistabriefen group members on their private social media platform. The analysis incorporates The Logic of Connective Action by Bennett and Segerberg (2012), and two complementary Social Identity Perspectives; Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). The study consisted of 23 interview participants, and a qualitative content analysis over the course of five months. This research assesses how members are motivated to participate in the #sistabriefen group, how they identify themselves within the group, and how the group features affect members' involvement. The findings of the research indicated that digital social movements have the potential to effectively mobilize social change.

**Keywords:** Hashtag Feminism, Hashtag Activism, Safe Spaces, Digital Social Movements, Connective Action

# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	6
1.1	The Origin of #MeToo	6
1.2	#MeToo Movement in Sweden	7
1.3	Research Questions	8
1.4	Defining Key Terms	9
1.5	Justification and Motivation for Study	9
1.6	Disposition	11
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>	11
2.1	Feminism in Sweden	12
2.2	Gender-Based Violence in Sweden	15
2.3	The Spread of #MeToo in Sweden	17
2.3.1	#SistaBriefen	18
2.4	The Communications Industry	20
2.4.1	TakeTwo	20
2.5	Researching Facebook	21
<b>3</b>	<b>Previous Research</b>	22
3.1	Third Wave Feminism	22
3.2	Intersectionality and Social Media Activism	24
3.3	Cyberfeminism and Facebook	27
3.4	Digital Social Movements	29
3.4.1	Digital Storytelling	30
3.5	Hashtag Feminism	32
3.6	Online Feminist Spaces	35
3.7	Feminist Solidarity	38
<b>4</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	41
4.1	The Logic of Connective Action	41
4.2	The Social Identity Perspective	45
4.2.1	The Social Identity Theory	45
4.2.2	Self-Categorization Theory	46
<b>5</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	48
5.1	Digital Ethnography	48

5.2	<b>Researcher Standpoint</b> .....	49
5.3	<b>Qualitative Content Analysis</b> .....	50
5.4	<b>Interviews</b> .....	52
5.5	<b>Offline Observations</b> .....	53
5.6	<b>Coding the Data</b> .....	54
5.7	<b>Ethics</b> .....	56
5.8	<b>Limitations</b> .....	57
6	<b>Analysis</b> .....	58
6.1	<b>Solidarity</b> .....	58
6.2	<b>Awareness and Support</b> .....	64
6.2.1	<b>Inter-Group Networks</b> .....	64
6.2.2	<b>Intra-Group Networks</b> .....	69
6.3	<b>Inner Strength</b> .....	71
6.4	<b>Sense of Security</b> .....	75
6.5	<b>Organizational Structure</b> .....	78
6.5.1	<b>The Mechanics of Facebook</b> .....	84
6.5.2	<b>The Significance of Facebook</b> .....	86
6.6	<b>The Impact of #sistabriefen</b> .....	87
6.6.1	<b>Participant Responses</b> .....	87
6.6.2	<b>#kommunikationskoden</b> .....	92
7	<b>Discussion</b> .....	94
7.1	<b>Effectively Mobilizing Social Change</b> .....	94
7.2	<b>The Motivation of Group Members</b> .....	95
7.3	<b>The Identity of Group Members within #SistaBriefen</b> .....	95
7.4	<b>The Effects on Member Involvement</b> .....	96
8	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	97
9	<b>Bibliography</b> .....	99
	<b>Appendix</b> .....	113
Appendix A	<b>Interview Invitation</b> .....	113
Appendix B	<b>Interview Guide: #sistabriefen Members</b> .....	115
Appendix C	<b>Interview Questions: Participant 9</b> .....	116
Appendix D	<b>Interview Questions: Participant 15</b> .....	117

## **Table of Figures**

<b>Figure 1. Levels of Support in the #MeToo Movement.....</b>	<b>67</b>
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# 1 Introduction

This study concentrates on the worldwide ripple effect of the #MeToo phenomenon, with a specific focus on its implications in Sweden. The hashtag, #MeToo, was created in response to the Hollywood sexual harassment allegations in late 2017, which instigated millions of social media posts and reactions from women, non-binaries, trans-persons, and men around the world about their experiences and support for victims of sexual violence.

As a consequence of this movement, reported by *Dagens Nyheter* and *Sweden's Television (SVT)*, over 70,000 women, non-binaries and trans-persons in approximately 65 industries and societal groups in Sweden have created specific hashtags to address sexual violence issues and provide support (Eriksson & Torén Björling, 2017; Lindhe, 2018). The group, #sistabriefen, is one out of many hashtag groups that was created by women, non-binary and trans-persons working in the public relations, advertising and communications sector. This study examines the potential for digital social movements to successfully mobilize social change, illustrated by a case study of the private Facebook group, #sistabriefen. Additionally, this study seeks to provide qualitative insight into the actions and motivations behind group participants, and their mobilizing effects in a multifaceted digital phenomenon.

## 1.1 The Origin of #MeToo

Twelve years ago, a woman named, Tarana Burke, founder and director of *Just Be Inc.*, and Senior Director of *Girls for Gender Equality*, founded the *Me Too Movement* in Alabama (Jeffries, 2018). Growing up in a low income, working class housing project in New York, Burke experienced sexual assault at a very young age (Brockes, 2018).

Burke's mother was determined to place her into programs that would help guide her through the healing process (Brockes, 2018). Although she was able to strengthen her self-confidence by reading literature, Burke noticed that many of the girls around her did not have the same opportunity to escape sexual violence (Brockes, 2018). The healing process, said Burke, is one that can never be complete, which is why she founded the program, *Me Too Movement* (Brockes,

2018). The mission was to empower young women of color living in marginalized communities who have been sexually abused, assaulted or exploited (Jeffries, 2018). These women were ordinary citizens who survived severe cases of sexual violence and lacked the resources to seek help (Jeffries, 2018). Burke primarily worked without social media to raise awareness of women's stories, actively support victims, and encourage men to treat women with respect, not oust the perpetrators (Brockes, 2018).

On October 5, 2017, *The New York Times* published an article detailing three decades worth of allegations against the Hollywood film mogul and director, Harvey Weinstein. Weinstein was a powerful producer known for taking advantage of women who were seeking a break into the male dominated industry (Kantor & Twohey, 2017).

In support of two actresses coming forward in *The New York Times* about their experiences with Weinstein, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted on October 15, 2017:

“Suggested by a friend: ‘If all the women who have sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.’”

The tweet went viral within 20 minutes, receiving 10,000 replies, and a total of 61,000 replies over two days (Schmidt, 2017). According to Twitter, over 1.7 million tweets included the hashtag #MeToo in 85 countries (Park, 2017). Facebook also confirmed that 12 million posts, comments, and reactions were reached in less than 24 hours by 4.7 million users worldwide (CBS News, 2017). This hashtag, which was inspired and based on Tarana Burke's work, encouraged and inspired women from around the world to share their sexual harassment and assault stories on social media in light of the Harvey Weinstein scandal.

## **1.2 #MeToo Movement in Sweden**

Although the #MeToo movement began in the U.S., it has not received as much widespread, ongoing attention as it has in Sweden, according to *Dagens Nyheter* (Eriksson & Torén Björling, 2017). Christian Christensen, a Professor in Journalism at Stockholm University, commented that the U.S. has placed greater media attention on celebrities than ordinary people outside of the

Hollywood culture during the #MeToo movement (Eriksson & Torén Björling, 2017). Sweden, notable for its gender equality, has been more progressive in recognizing the legitimacy of over 70,000 individuals engaged in online platforms in 65 different industries against sexual harassment and assault (Edwards, 2017; Eriksson & Torén Björling, 2017; Lindhe, 2018).

The focus of this study is to analyze the Facebook group, #sistabriefen (*The last brief*), which represents the public relations, advertising and communications sector, in order to gain insight into the motivations, objectives and mobilization of individuals partaking in the Swedish #MeToo movement. Additionally, this study aims to demonstrate how the spread of #MeToo in Sweden has activated social awareness and built a strong network of users.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The goal of this research is to understand how the implementation of social media for the original *Me Too Movement* produced social movements in various industries and societal groups throughout Sweden. The insight into #sistabriefen will enable an assessment for the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Are digital social movements able to effectively mobilize social change?

**RQ1.1:** How have members been motivated to participate in the #sistabriefen group?

**RQ1.2:** How do members identify themselves with the #sistabriefen group?

**RQ1.3:** How do the group features of #sistabriefen affect the involvement of members?

To address the research questions, digital ethnography was the selected methodological approach to include virtual interviews, and a qualitative content analysis of the #sistabriefen Facebook group. Digital ethnography encompasses an observation of human behavior and interaction through the manifestation of electronic configurations (Kozinets, 2015). Although #sistabriefen is not representative of the entire #MeToo movement in Sweden, the #sistabriefen community can serve to demonstrate how social media is used for interaction, mobilization, participation, and attaining critical knowledge.

## 1.4 Defining Key Terms

This particular study will apply the following concepts: empowerment: “people - both women and men [and all genders] - can take control over their lives: set their own agendas, gain skills (or have their own skills and knowledge recognized), increase self-confidence, solve problems, and develop self-reliance” (Libby Hawk, Mills, Gula, & Wynhoven, 2011, p.11).

As for social movement, the following will be used: “forms of collective action [with a common political agenda] that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression, and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands” (Horn, 2013, p.1).

In regard to defining gender equality, the interpretation from the Swedish Office of Equal Opportunities (*Jämställdhetsombudsmannen*) (2018a) will be applied as: “women and men have the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all areas of life”, such as education and development, responsibility at home and for children, working conditions, financial independence, power and influence, and freedom from gender-related violence.

With respect to non-binary individuals: *The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights* recognizes non-binaries as individuals who identify as being between, beyond, or both male and female (RFSL, 2015).

Finally, this study will employ the World Health Organization’s (2002) definition of sexual violence as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work” (p.149).

## 1.5 Justification and Motivation for Study

The purpose of analyzing #sistabriefen is to demonstrate how social media has the potential to effectively mobilize individuals outside of their digital contexts. Digital activism has been

criticized as “slacktivism”; combining the words “slacker” and “activism” to describe a minimal amount of time and effort; often without real-life mobilization or substantial effects in resolving a social issue (Glenn, 2015, p.81). This term characterizes social media as an indolent space in which action and awareness are conveyed through liking, sharing and commenting on posts without making a real difference (Glenn, 2015). This study focuses on the effectiveness of the spread of the #MeToo movement through the medium of #sistabriefen.

Sweden, having achieved its ranking as fourth out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2016, has closed more than 81% of its overall gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2016b). This report also shows that Sweden has taken a strong stance on Economic Participation and Opportunity, which measures the ratio between female labor force participation over male value, and wage equality between men and women for similar work (World Economic Forum, 2016a). Sweden moved up seven positions in the world rankings between 2015-2016 by increasing its number of female legislators, senior officials and managers (World Economic Forum, 2016b). Additionally, the Swedish government became the world’s first defined feminist government in 2015 (Aggestam & Bergman-Rosamond, 2016). However, despite being one of the world’s leaders in gender equality, sexual violence persists.

According to the *Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet: Brå)*, 20,300 sexual offences were reported in 2016, of which 6,720 were classified as rape, while 181,000 persons stated that they were exposed to sexual offences. Respectively, 4.1% of Swedish women had said they were exposed to sexual crimes in 2016, whereas 0.6% of men had stated to have been exposed to sexual crimes (Brottsförebyggande rådet: Brå, 2016). Further, a survey conducted by *Sweden’s Television (SVT)* which questioned 1,022 individuals about the Me Too movement in Sweden, showed that 45% of men and 30% of women believed that the hashtag #MeToo was an over exaggeration of women’s claims (Zachariasson, 2017).

With over half of the global population being treated less fairly than their male counterparts, closing the gender equality gap would not only be beneficial for economic development and increased spending on health; it is a human right (Kiviniemi, 2015; United Nations Population Fund, n.d.). Hence, this study contributes vital knowledge toward the implications, consequences

and advocacy of an online feminist movement in one of the world's most progressive, gender equal societies, Sweden.

## **1.6 Disposition**

This chapter has introduced the *Me Too movement*, the research and aim for the study, key definitions, and justification for this particular research. In the following chapter, there will be a detailed background on feminism, gender-based violence, the spread of #MeToo, #sistabriefen, the communications industry in Sweden, and implications to researching Facebook. In chapter three, there will be a discussion on existing literature that provides insight into the study by highlighting critical themes surrounding digital feminism and social media phenomena. Subsequently, chapter four will contain the theoretical framework that will be applied to the empirical data, including The Logic of Connective Action (Bennetts & Segerberg, 2012); Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). An overview of the methodological framework and its application to the analysis will be followed in chapter five, including an ethical evaluation and limitations to the study. Chapter six will present an analysis of the data findings, and an incorporation of the selected theories. Finally, chapters seven and eight will include a summarization of the findings, an application of the research questions, limitations, and future research within this field.

## **2 Background**

This section will provide a description of feminism in Sweden, gender-based violence issues in Sweden, a synopsis of the spread of #MeToo and creation of #sistabriefen, followed by a brief overview of the communications industry and the social media platform, Facebook.

## 2.1 Feminism in Sweden

In the Swedish language, the term for gender has been re-conceptualized to encompass a more widespread social aspect (Hirdman, 1988). Rather than a social category of gender, Hirdman (1988) argues that the perspective of gender could be more culturally influenced by post-industrialism. She contends that the establishment of a gender system has shaped the relationship between men and women, creating problematized gender social norms and expectations (Hirdman, 1988). The interactions between men and women (e.g. communication, reproduction, competition) have built various discursive power structures in different societies (Hirdman, 1988). Thus, the potential for power system changes lies within the human perception. The greater the intellectual component overcomes the biological aspect in gender, the greater room there is for change in the system (Hirdman, 1988).

Sweden was a pioneer for gender equality during the nineteenth century, as it was socially acceptable for men and women to perform the same tasks and chores (Hirdman, 1988). Today, societies such as Sweden, with a more gender equal outlook between men and women (e.g. income, values, everyday life) can be transmitted more easily through technology (Hirdman, 1988). As a consequence, the international hierarchy of gender perspectives is constructed through swift digital communications, promoting global standards for an ideal gender-equal society (Hirdman, 1988).

In Sweden, radical feminism can be argued as having been on the forefront of national discourse (Teigen & Wängnerud, 2009). In the early twentieth century, Alva Myrdal, a Swedish Social-Democratic politician and diplomat, introduced a socialized system for childcare (Herman, 1992). She envisioned equality between men and women through creating an equal care relationship between parents and their children (Herman, 1992). Women's independence, in her view, was dependent upon their opportunities to have full-time employment outside of the home and receive support from child rearing programs to avoid job absenteeism (Herman, 1992). Since then, Sweden has developed into being one of the world's most gender-equal nations (Martinsson, Griffin & Giritli Nygren, 2016). However, the national trait of gender equality could ignore the actual nature of gender relations that occur in Sweden (Martinsson, et al., 2016).

Sweden's internationally recognized, merited status could normalize, or set the standards for behaviors, challenges and emotions (Martinsson, et al., 2016). Sweden is particularly unique in comparison to its Nordic neighbors, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland, which are also known for articulating gender equality issues, as it has been described as "having the most institutionalised model of gender equality" (Martinsson, et al., 2016, p.2). In addition, Sweden has had an impact on gender equal norms due to its strong, social-democratic welfare-state, instigating a shift in the global gender-equality political agenda (Martinsson, et al., 2016). The construct of Sweden as a distinguished, national community and leader in gender equality has arguably constructed its image as the epitome of a gender equal nation (Martinsson, et al., 2016). This framed assumption can, however, be paradoxical to the reality of Sweden's society and culture.

As an example of one of Sweden's far-right political groups, the Swedish Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna, SD*), which has risen in popularity in recent years, the party argues for a definition of "formal equality between men and women" (Mulinari, 2016, p.147). The SD has been considered "strongly anti-feminist" as they have criticized the gender-equality policy by saying that it goes against the natural differences between men and women and weakens the unity of the nuclear family (Mulinari, 2016, p.153). However, SD highlights gender equality, or at least a muted version of it, when distinguishing Sweden from the position of immigrants (Mulinari, 2016). Gender equality is emphasized the most when they refer to "the other" in order to promote their conservative values (Mulinari, 2016, p.153).

In the far-left political stance, the Feminist Initiative (*Feministiskt Initiativ, FI*) party became one of the fastest growing parties between the years 2013 and 2014, with a focus on intersectional perspectives, such as feminism, anti-racism, LGBTQ communities, racial minorities and people with disabilities to encompass a broader range of feminism (Filimonov & Svensson, 2016). *Sweden's Television (SVT)* stressed an important gender division between two radical parties, the FI and the SD; 85% of FI was dominated by females, whereas men dominated 70% of the SD party (Salö, 2014). This prominent division between the parties demonstrates that Sweden's reputation as a gender equal society in reports such as the OECD (2017), in which Sweden was considered a pioneer of gender budgeting, could be jeopardized by the polarization of stances on feminist efforts.

According to the *Swedish Office of Equal Opportunities* (2018b), 72% of managers and CEO positions are occupied by men, with the private sector consisting of 78% and the public sector with 44% of male managers. Since 1974, Sweden has given parental leave days, which can be shared between parents (JämO, 2018b). Although parents can transfer unused parental leave days to one another - aside from 60 reserved days for each parent - the vast majority of families have shown that men have a higher tendency of transferring unused parental leave days to their wives (JämO, 2018b). Overall, men take only 20% of their parental leave days, and 60% of men do not receive parental leave at all during the child's first year (JämO, 2018b). Women take out on average 80% of their guaranteed parental leave days, which leads to a lower work compensation and increased absenteeism during that time (JämO, 2018b). The distinguished gender equal image of Sweden is perhaps not as ideal as it seems.

Reflecting on Myrdal's politicization of gender equality in Sweden, there is a stark contrast from the American feminist perspective on feminism, in which the *Me Too movement* originated. Although gender oppression has come a long way since the beginning of the twentieth century in the U.S. such as, the denial of voting rights, deplorable working conditions, laws that excluded women from employment and abusive marriages, there is still a lack of affordable child care, wage differentials, and barriers to reproductive health services (Goss, 2013, p.186-187).

On the contrary, Sweden prioritizes feminism as the world's first feminist government by providing free access to pre- and post-natal care, offering a total of 480 days shared paid parental leave for parents, a monthly allowance for raising children, 80% pay for parents to stay home with sick children, and stricter employer discrimination acts (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018a; Swedish Institute, 2018a; Swedish Institute, 2018b). Although there have been great strides toward gender equality in Sweden, there are pronounced gaps between men and women, such as the unevenly used paid parental leave days between parents, and a 25% actual earned income disparity between men and women (Government Offices of Sweden, 2015).

## 2.2 Gender-Based Violence in Sweden

According to Swedish law, sexual harassment in workplaces, universities and colleges is defined as the “conduct of sexual nature” that “violates the dignity of a job seeker or an employer”, whereas sexual abuse is defined as “using a person’s dependence of one, to make the person do or support something sexual” (*Diskrimineringslagen 2008:567*, ch.1, para. 4 & ch.2, para. 3 as cited in European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018). Sexual abuse, excluding rape, is defined as “using a person’s dependence of one, to make the person do or support something sexual” (*Brottsbalk 1962:700*, ch.6, para. 3 as cited in European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018). Although most studies have focused on sexual harassment in the workplace or educational environments, there are wider contexts in which sexual violence occurs (Latcheva, 2017).

In 2014, a survey of a random sample of 42,000 women aged 18 to 74 years old in 28 European Union member states found that Sweden had one of the highest prevalence ratings, with approximately 81% of victims who have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15, and 32% of victims who have experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months (The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). These results were based on a survey of 11 questions regarding sexual harassment as “acts that respondents felt to be unwanted and which they experienced as offensive or intimidating” (The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014, p.96).

A prior study in 2012 conducted by the *European Working Conditions Survey* had also found that Northern EU member states have higher prevalence ratings than Southern EU member states in adverse social behaviors relating to “verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats and humiliating behavior, physical violence, bullying and harassment, and sexual harassment” (Eurofound, 2012 as cited in Latcheva, 2017, p.1831). In contrast to the Scandinavian countries, there is a severe lack of sanctions against perpetrators in Southern and Eastern EU member states (Giaccone, Di Nunzio, & Trentin, 2015).

According to the *Eurofound* report 2015, countries such as Sweden and Finland, have the lowest tolerance rates in the EU toward sexual harassment and violent behaviors, as employers uphold higher expectations for appropriate and respectful treatment at work (Giaccone, et al., 2015). As a

result, the threshold for reporting inappropriate behavior may be lower in Sweden than in Southern and Eastern EU member states, which contributes to the perception of Nordic countries displaying higher levels of sexual harassment and violence in the EU (Giaccone, et al., 2015).

A new *Gender Equality Agency*, formed in January 2018, was established to represent females and actively participate in decision-making processes in governmental agencies and organizations (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b). *The Swedish Work Environment Authority*, adopted in 2016, was a progressive leap toward preventing sexual misconduct in work environments (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b). The government invested SEK 100 million per year in hiring inspectors to monitor office behaviors throughout Sweden, which was recently strengthened to include instructions on promoting gender equality and diversity in office environments (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b). In addition, the *Children's Welfare Foundation Sweden* is expected to receive SEK 500,000 from the government to spread mandatory information and awareness on sexual harassment in upper and secondary schools (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b). Teachers will receive a guide called, "Time to talk about [*Dags att prata om*]" in order to improve their abilities on teaching children about sexual violence (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b, "Awareness-building measures", para.3).

After many initiatives, the *Government Offices of Sweden* (2017) proposed a new consent-based legislation to better combat and prevent men's sexual violence against women. Although this proposal is not a direct result from the #MeToo movement, the government acknowledges the #MeToo movement by demonstrating their preventative work toward strengthening law enforcement, promoting safer work environments and generating awareness through education (Government Offices of Sweden, 2018b). The proposal of the new consent-based law includes (a) convicting a rape perpetrator will no longer require threats or violence to be used (b) "negligent rape" and "negligent sexual abuse" will be considered offences to focus more on consent (c) stricter laws on abusers and rapists (d) providing emotional support and counsel representation for victims at an earlier stage in the prosecution (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017, para.2).

As reported by *SVT*, the bill was submitted to *The Council of Legislation (Lagrådet)* in the beginning of 2018 and proposed to take effect after July 1, 2018. However, *The Council of Legislation*, which is responsible for reviewing legislative proposals, has suggested modifications

to the bill (Harris, 2018). Despite this setback, there may be further revisions made to the bill before re-submitting it (Harris, 2018). In any case, the effect of the #MeToo movement has political implications that are viable in the effort toward gender equality.

Sweden is also considered a feminine society, in which the quality of life is dependent upon the care of all citizens, promoting a sustainable work and life balance, and involving all parties in decision-making processes (Hofstede Insights, 2018). As the Swedish government continues its prioritization in combating sexual harassment and violence, the subject of gender equality becomes further embedded in public discussions. Hence, #MeToo may have spread rapidly due to its social acceptance in a society due with a lower tolerance of sexual violence against women.

### **2.3 The Spread of #MeToo in Sweden**

On October 13, 2017, Lulu Carter, a well-known Swedish television personality wrote on her Instagram, “*Timell = TV4’s egen [own] Harvey Weinstein #metoo*,” which referred to program leader, Martin Timell, who sexually abused her while working alongside her on a television program (Westin, Trus, Bustamante, 2017, para.1). Carter, calling him a “manipulative person” in the Swedish newspaper, *Aftonbladet*, had felt belittled under his influence in the television production industry, as he was considered a critical figure on one of Sweden’s largest television networks, TV4 (Westin, Trus, Bustamante, 2017, para.3). After the allegations against Harvey Weinstein, Lulu Carter’s disclosure of her sexual abuse was the tipping point of the social media spread in Sweden (SVT Nyheter, 2017). The movement generated 157,768 Swedish posts on Facebook and Twitter, and 640,600 posts on Instagram mentioning “#metoo” between October 15<sup>th</sup> and December 13<sup>th</sup> (SVT Nyheter, 2017).

Reported by Lindkvist (2017) in *Dagens Nyheter*, Alice Bah Kuhnke, the Swedish Minister of Culture and Democracy, proposed a plan of action for the performing arts, opera and theater sector after the first hashtag was created by the film industry. She believed that legislative efforts to reduce the amount of sexual harassment and abuse were not enough to see effective change, but instead it required the responsibility of organizations and leaders to impose safety measures (Lindkvist, 2017). As one of the first political figures to propose strong steps toward actions of

change, she is a significant figure in the #MeToo movement, as she emphasized the importance for women to speak out at a time when #MeToo was a trending issue.

According to *Dagens Nyheter* and *SVT*, eventually over 70,000 women, non-binaries and trans-persons created 65 specific hashtag groups related to working life, schools, and societal groups under the #MeToo movement (Eriksson & Torén Björling, 2017; Lindhe, 2018). The purpose of these hashtags was to enable women, non-binaries and trans-persons to share their stories and shed light on the realities of sexual violence in Swedish society.

Hashtags were not the only social media tools implemented across Sweden in connection with the #MeToo movement. One woman initiated the *Me Too Sweden* manifestation in response to the global #MeToo movement by creating a Facebook event for women and girls across Sweden to gather in Stockholm to support of victims of sexual abuse and harassment (Lindström, 2017). She and the organizers of the event emphasized that offline mobilization was equally as important as the online activism of #MeToo (Lindström, 2017). The turnout of the event was much larger than anticipated, with well-known speakers who addressed the necessary actions to alter societal norms. Women shared their experiences and performed self-written songs to encourage a more open dialogue beyond the #MeToo online discussion (Lindström, 2017).

### **2.3.1 #SistaBriefen**

The term ‘Sista Briefen’ translates into The Last Brief. A brief is when a client organization hires a team of individuals working in a public relations or advertising agency for a creative and effective solution to maximize their brand image or increase awareness of a product or service (Dahl, 2017). After two weeks of contemplation about a group label, the #sistabriefen hashtag was chosen by its members to represent their work.

Over 6,000 members have joined #sistabriefen since it was created on November 15, 2017. Out of these members, 2,162 women, non-binaries, and trans-persons have publicly signed an appeal, sharing 322 anonymous testimonies regarding personal discrimination, harassment and sexual violence experiences in the workplace (Winberg, 2017). The appeal placed responsibility on industry owners, executives and managers, unions and industry associations, clients, educational

institutions and colleagues to enforce actions and reflect behaviors toward women, trans-persons and non-binaries.

The appeal was composed in both Swedish and English to address over 500 industry executives, managers, employers, and industry actors at agencies, firms, and schools who are in a position to enact organizational measures against inappropriate and discriminatory behaviors. Over 100 agencies, firms, organizations, and academic institutions have pledged actions to promote safer, more gender equal work and educational environments. As a billion Swedish Kronor industry, these organizations are responsible for maintaining norms and values in the Swedish society (Winberg, 2017). Hence, members of the group feel that their subjugation to harmful work settings are being reflected in the production of advertisements and publications.

The #sistabriefen appeal does not suggest or necessitate any required steps toward a more gender equal workplace or institution, but it does pressure various actors to strategically formulate and execute actions in their own contexts. Actions to change these environments were demanded to be prioritized and applied immediately, and follow-up assessments were expected to take place in January 2018.

As reported by *The Local*, the founder and one of the group administrators of #sistabriefen called for a change in action in the communications industry after noticing many other industries taking initiatives (Edwards, 2017). She was asked by another communications professional on Twitter to set-up a Facebook group for women in their industry. Even though members were restricted to invite personal contacts to the secret group, over 1,000 members joined within the first 24 hours, accumulating over 300 testimonies within a few days (Edwards, 2017). She continued explaining that many younger women who begin their careers in this industry typically do not have employment security, rights or pensions, and feel suppressed when speaking up for themselves or others (Edwards, 2017). Their goal is to alter the entire industry by giving women the power to stand up for themselves in the workplace. She went on to explain that they not only want to focus on sexual assault and harassment, but also change the norms in the workplace environment between genders (Edwards, 2017).

## 2.4 The Communications Industry

Although quite similar, advertising and public relations are two separate fields of work. According to *Forbes Magazine*, advertising is paid media such as, creating messages and campaigns for companies to appear in paid media channel spaces; whereas public relations is earned media, in which consultants work alongside companies to convince reporters and editors to write stories about a brand or product (Wynne, 2014).

Arnberg & Svanlund (2017) argue that the advertising industry has long been built upon the image of Don Draper in the popular hit series *Mad Men*, as it stresses a dominating masculinity in the advertising business and portraying females in subordinate roles. Over the years, gender divisions in the advertising industry have affected the commercialized representation of females in society as a whole (Arnberg & Svanlund, 2017). In the late nineteenth century, however, a woman started the very first successful advertising agency in Sweden. She hired almost exclusively female employees, differentiating the onset of Swedish advertising firms and patriarchal-structured American agencies in the beginning of the twentieth century (Arnberg & Svanlund, 2017).

Although the share of female employees has been noticeably high from the 1980s to the 2010s in Sweden, there has been a clear division in labor, as 1 out of 10 executive creative directors in the top 30 advertising agencies are women (Arnberg & Svanlund, 2017; Nilsson & Rågsjö Thorell, 2017). In 2015, the public relations industry was comprised of 75% women out of 10,000-15,000 practitioners, and almost one in two managerial positions was a woman (Johansson & Larsson, 2015). Despite the high rates of female employment in public relations and advertising sectors, individuals have come forth with their personal stories in #sistabriefen to share an alternative perspective of the industry.

### 2.4.1 TakeTwo

Prior to the #MeToo movement, the *TakeTwo* organization was founded in 2017 by two female industry experts to increase the awareness of gender equality in the public relations, advertising, television news media, and film sectors (personal communication, March 24, 2018). This

organization offers lectures, workshops and one-on-one mentoring to improve awareness and address subjects such as, how to become more profitable by being more gender inclusive; how to effectively make changes in practice; and how this knowledge develops one's professional role as a leader (TakeTwo, 2018b). Additionally, this Swedish based platform has worked both nationally and internationally, with organizations such as *Guldvägenpriset* (The Golden Wave Award), *Allbright*, *The 3 Percent Movement*, *Women in Film and Television International*, and more (TakeTwo, 2018c).

According to the website, 85% of the world's consumer purchases are made by women, demonstrating a crucial need for gender equal representations in media industry production (TakeTwo, 2018a). For instance, only 15% of women are portrayed in on screen professional roles, resulting in misguided views on societal gender stereotypes (TakeTwo, 2018a). *TakeTwo* has created a certification process for organizations to become more knowledgeable and progressive in terms of gender equality. As the world continues to develop a strong "sheconomy" consisting of a large population of educated females, this initiative aims to drive profitability and gender equality for businesses (TakeTwo, 2018a, para. 3). The significance of *TakeTwo* is important to note, as it represents one of the many ongoing efforts that has promoted gender equality in the communications industry prior to the #MeToo and #sistabriefen movements.

## **2.5 Researching Facebook**

As of 2017, Facebook had reached over 2 billion monthly active users, making it the most popular social network worldwide (Statista, 2018). Active users in this context constitute those who have logged into Facebook within the past 30 days (Statista, 2018). In Sweden, four out of five Swedes use the internet (94%), with Facebook being the most popular among 74% of internet users, and women on average spending more time on social media than men (The Internet Foundation in Sweden, 2017; Mjömark, 2016). Digitalization has become embedded in the Swedish society, as most Swedes have become accustomed to socializing on Facebook and using an online banking system (The Internet Foundation in Sweden, 2017).

While approaching this research on Facebook, this study acknowledges that #sistabriefen is not entirely representative of all individuals working in communications in Sweden. Nonetheless, it appears that Facebook has been chosen amongst many industries in the #MeToo movement as an opportunistic platform on which to share and disseminate information across a comprehensive scale of users.

## **3 Previous Research**

The following section presents previous research under topics that have contributed to the discovery of digital online feminist movements. The selected literature is primarily focused on Western viewpoints since this study covers the origination of #MeToo from the U.S., and Sweden, where #sistabriefen and other hashtag groups were established.

### **3.1 Third Wave Feminism**

The wave metaphor is an interpretation of feminist discourse, as it encompasses a continuity of past feminist endeavors, shared theories and campaigning under a paradigm of “relationships and competing tensions between different feminist ideologies” (Evans, 2016, p.411). The first wave refers to the women’s suffrage movements in Western societies, the second wave refers to 1960’s women’s liberation, and finally the third wave focuses on the resurgence of feminism following the backlash of women’s struggles for equality in the 1980’s (Evans, 2016). A divide between liberal and radical feminists became apparent during the 1960s when radical feminists wanted to eliminate the system, while liberal feminists wanted to change the system (Brandt & Kizer, 2015). One of the primary aspects of the third wave feminism, in comparison to the second wave, are the group-led actions for making political change. The internet provides a space for women to connect through a common goal, formulate and execute a feasible plan of action (Brandt & Kizer, 2015). In addition, it allows individuals to be heard, informed and involved in political processes (Brandt & Kizer, 2015).

In the 1990's, the third wave was established to incorporate technology into the political feminist discourse (Dejmanee, 2016). The political aspect of third wave feminism was articulated through "embodied politics," which emphasizes the physical action for individuals to "provoke change by exercising and resisting power in everyday life" (Fixmer & Wood, 2005, p.237). Embodied politics emphasize the significance of the locality and multiplicity of female viewpoints. Whether a woman is Caucasian, African American, Indian, straight or lesbian, solidarity was created to incorporate a more intersectional approach to feminism through recognizing the specific needs of separate identity groups (Fixmer & Wood, 2005).

Harris and Dobson (2015) conducted research on nuanced perspectives of female agency that affect young women, and how these images are portrayed in contemporary media. They applied the traditional components of female agency: "choice, empowerment, and voice" (Harris & Dobson, 2015, p.145). The aspect of choice has always been complicated when measuring one's agency, since one's decisions are inevitably intertwined with a social context; however, Harris and Dobson (2015) argue that social conditions in neoliberal post-feminist times have required self-identification and self-reflection as key determinants in signifying one's freedom of choice. According to a neoliberal discursive framework, a young woman's agency is shaped by the aggregation of her lived experiences, rather than the reproduction of structural forces (Harris & Dobson, 2015). Regarding empowerment in this framework, a woman is typically characterized by her successes in work and education, self-presentation, and cultural sexualization, especially within Western cultures (Harris & Dobson, 2015).

Neoliberal feminism, or corporate feminism, refers to the capitalist, right-winged, individualist feminist who pursues economic gains in order to improve her self-esteem (Gill, 2016). This type of feminism has been glorified in the media as boosting one's confidence and "one-size-fits-all solution" to gender prejudice, which ignites a debate by default (Gill, 2016, p. 617). Additionally, the individualized disposition of the post-feminist, neoliberal context of choice and empowerment can be problematic for women, as they are encouraged to address issues and actions alone (Harris & Dobson, 2015). Thus, a woman's voice in "'speaking up' and demonstrating 'empowerment' or 'resistance'" is considered "inherently powerful" in postfeminist conditions, as they are encouraged by Western societies to pursue personalized actions of interest (Harris & Dobson, 2015, p.152). A woman's agency in postfeminist times has been criticized as being over simplistic,

as it separates a woman's internal agency from societal pressures and structuration (Harris & Dobson, 2015). Conclusively, the female agency should not be perceived as overly powerful or individualized, but rather as a suffering agent in need of support (Harris & Dobson, 2015).

As the third wave era matures, feminist hashtag movements, such as #MeToo, have generated a culture of awareness for particular movements, continuing the theme of individualism. The #sistabriefen group offers a unique case of individuals who are largely responsible for promoting and shaping stereotypical images in the media. There is a necessity to analyze and reflect the development of third wave feminism, as hashtags have the potential to exceed international boundaries.

### **3.2 Intersectionality and Social Media Activism**

While the term intersectionality began as a conceptual tool to highlight the lived experiences of black women in America, it has been further developed by feminists to analyze distinctions among women in an attempt to resolve issues in feminist scholarship (Kings, 2017). The term intersectionality has been used to critique and analyze how cultural hierarchies and power structures generate inclusion and exclusion among categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, et al. (Lykke, 2005).

Lykke (2005) emphasizes the issue of “competing intersectionality (*konkurrerende intersektionalitet*)”, which describes the prioritization of social groups under the hegemonic hierarchy of social categorization (p.10). As an example, feminists may highlight the category of class more so than the category of race in an intersectional analysis. A reductionist approach hence subsumes the notion of intersectionality when power balances become outweighed by the reinforcement of stereotypical social categories (Lykke, 2005). This point of view could potentially lead to the fragmentation of political agendas, rather than the formation of alliances amongst social units (Lykke, 2005).

Rather than politicizing the feminist theoretical concept with a one-dimensional framework, Lykke (2005) proposes a discursive process for feminist theory that is reliant upon the ongoing

negotiations and interpretations of various political resistance. Overall, her conception of feminist theory is based upon the political resistance and development among social categories, which have characterized modernity. The application of intersectionality in feminist analyses is highly beneficial, as it encompasses both socio-cultural and discursive intra-action amongst gender and power structures in the expansion of feminist theories.

Intersectionality has extended into an international domain, crossing borders into appropriate national and regional settings, transforming predominantly Anglo-American contexts into an alternative focus on local conditions in the Global North and South (Rigoni, 2012). Although the application of intersectionality does not encompass all individual experiences, theorized identities, and social structures and cultural discourses, there are no boundaries to its wide application and understanding of local social practices, individual and group experiences, and cultural structures (Davis, 2008).

As an example, #YesAllWomen was introduced by a Muslim woman of color who aimed to speak out against sexual violence toward women after the May 2014 UCSB area Isla Vista, California shootings (Rodino-Colocino, 2014). The male shooter wanted retribution against women who had rejected his sexual advances (Rodino-Colocino, 2014). In response to this, the hashtag #YesAllWomen went viral, with women sharing stories, statistics, and beliefs about sexual assault, including their encounters with intimate partners. In the nineteenth-century, the categorization of “all women” was narrow, classifying women as white, middle-class, US-centric, and heteronormative (Rodino-Colocino, 2014, p.1114).

The #YesAllWomen hashtag attempted to expand this normalization by expanding its inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds through a reflective hashtag discourse (Rodino-Colocino, 2014). Following the dissemination of this hashtag, women in the Twittersphere discussed issues of sexual violence regarding race and sexual orientation; however, it was not long until death threats from internet trolls discouraged women from further discussion (Rodino-Colocino, 2014). Consequently, women had experienced sexual violence in an effort to mobilize against it. Since intersectional inclusivity is an essential component in feminist activist efforts, there is a need for safer online spaces to promote and communicate mobilization (Rodino-Colocino, 2014). Additionally, #YesAllWomen has demonstrated that rather than creating a new feminist wave,

hashtags highlight gathered threads of correspondence within a greater national and international discourse.

Although the internet has the potential to forge transnational alliances among feminists, the notion of online activism can be problematic, as digital culture is primarily dominated by corporations (Winch, 2014). Younger women, for instance, who rely upon social media channels for promoting online campaigns, may face the challenge of finding resources and supplemental funding. Inevitably, much of feminist activism takes place through the support of Facebook and Google, where gathering spaces generate lucrative data from user created content (Winch, 2014). Consequently, campaigners are forced to compete with larger funded entities and third-party advertisers to sustain independence and longevity (Winch, 2014). This kind of environment creates a privileged digital culture, which replicates mainstream media tactics of marginalization (Winch, 2014).

The *Feminist Times*, an online platform for feminists, typified the paradox of accessibility when it was criticized for imposing a membership policy of collecting direct payments (Winch, 2014). Even though open online publications are funded by the permeation of advertisers retrieving user data, critics believed that having membership fees would exclude low income earning people from accessing material (Winch, 2014). Winch (2014) argues for feminists to construct feasible models of online publishing that do not rely on corporate sponsorship. This reflection could potentially apply to a social media context, in which users are encouraged by corporations to publish personal data.

Literature has covered a broad base of intersectional approaches to mainstream, traditional media, but there is a relative lack of extensive research on intersectional approaches to internationalized feminist hashtags and their effects on localized cultures.

### 3.3 Cyberfeminism and Facebook

Cyberfeminism addresses an array of domains in which women use the internet, such as work and education, which suggests that women are able to reinvent their lives through technology (Daniels, 2009). For example, “cyborg feminists” place emphasis on how technologies can become integrated with the physical body (Sundén, 2001, p.217). Through this process, a woman becomes acquainted with her offline identity, such as her race and class status, as a result of online interaction (Sundén, 2001). The other well-known perspective of cyberfeminism, arguably the most dominant kind, places less emphasis on how communication technology impacts a woman’s identity, such as race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and instead acknowledges its political and personal impact on the woman’s everyday life (Brophy, 2010; Sundén, 2001). The latter emphasis is crucial to understanding women’s control in an electronic environment as “patriarchal representations of femininity occupy the space where women could be defining themselves and their own relationships to new technologies” (Sundén, 2001, p.222).

Online users, according to Brophy (2010), are typically white, male, Christian, middle-class citizens on U.S. based websites, which erases the notion of utopian cyberspaces. Hence, cyberutopianism disregards cyberfeminists’ inherent relationship between online and offline activities, as it assumes that the internet and the offline world are dichotomous. Cyberfeminists, therefore, should not view the internet as a “utopian replacement for the spaces of lived experiences, but rather as an augmentation of those spaces” (Brophy, 2010, p. 932). As an example, the internet has been credited with enhancing upward mobilization for women in professional and career networking contexts. Even though there are opportunities for women in cyberspace to make new connections and develop their careers, this type of empowerment has been ridiculed for its highly liberal, individualized feminist nature, as it assumes a one-dimensional form of female success (Brophy, 2010). When analyzing feminist progress through digital spaces, it is essential to recognize the multi-faceted notion of success, and how it may be defined in various contexts.

Facebook is especially vital in cyberfeminist activity, as it provides space and tools to create groups, conversations and raise awareness for important issues. Founder and creator, Mark Zuckerberg transformed the platform into a corporate digital empire, in which businesses, celebrities, politicians, and organizations are able to intertwine with individual users’ professional

and personal interests (Brandt & Kizer, 2015). As Gajjala (2014) points out, Facebook is considered to be predominantly feminine, whereas sites such as Reddit and chan4 are considered to be more masculine; however, these presumptions can be misleading since anonymous users are typically classified as white males. Fuchs (2014) criticizes Facebook, claiming that social media does not “constitute a public sphere or participatory democratic space, but are rather colonized by corporations, especially by multimedia companies that dominate attention and visibility” (p.102).

Due to this corporate control over social media channels, IT and music are considered to be the most domineering categories of interest, whereas political discussions and engagement are rather insignificant (Fuchs, 2014). Facebook generates a majority of its assets through advertising revenue, which conveys its vital dependence on advertisers (Fuchs, 2014). It has been argued that the capitalistic motives of Facebook legitimize the breach of privacy of consumer data, while protecting the privacy of wealthy, large corporations (Fuchs, 2014). Since Facebook advertisers are reliant on their consumers’ interests, tastes, and behaviors in maintaining market competitiveness, they use “surveillance” as an instrument to observe and gather insight into their target group preferences (Fuchs, 2014, p.158).

Facebook supplies advertisers with analytics on consumer behaviors in order to optimize content and influence users’ purchasing decisions (Fuchs, 2014). This concern has been referred to as the “filter bubble”, which describes the reflection of a user’s personal interests, political agenda and world views in their media consumption (Pariser as cited in Caldeira & De Ridder, 2017, p.326). Facebook is not a utopia, nor a private space in which consumers are entirely free to discuss their opinions or ideas without the consequences of advertisers influencing their behavior. Researchers are therefore obligated to understand the purpose of the platform, its capital interests, and how it is designed to target or cater toward particular groups.

Literature concerning cyberfeminism is a flexible, discursive research field that could benefit from additional knowledge into how social media affects a woman’s online and offline identity. Further research should be conducted into how certain platforms, such as Facebook, enable or limit a woman’s control over her identity. Moreover, it is essential to reflect upon the current political economic state in particular analyses, as it can affect the way in which a woman uses the internet, and how it impacts her interactivity among other female users.

### 3.4 Digital Social Movements

Social movement organizations (SMOs) are essential for mobilizing and maintaining prolonged support for efforts that aim to change societies, industries, and/or individuals (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016). SMOs coordinate solidarity among individuals, networks of authorities, and allies with similar values in order to gain collective support (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016). It has been argued that SMOs are able to mobilize through purposeful “action repertoires,” which describe online and offline means of legitimate actions, such as street rallies and digital petitions (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016, p.332).

Digital action repertoires possess an autonomous form of interaction that extends beyond transnational borders and enables supporters to discuss multiple issues at once (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016). Due to its autonomous nature, however, there are drawbacks to digital action repertoires, such as the impartiality toward non-digital repertoires offered by SMOs. Driven by political goals and values, SMOs aim to provide protection for their supporters, and develop action repertoires for social change (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016). The ease and convenience of social media communication have steered SMO supporters to become more independent in organizing collective actions (Selander & Jarvenpaa, 2016). Selander and Jarvenpaa (2016) contend that strong supporter-to-supporter ties can be paradoxical in a SMO where ties are weak, as personal and private modes of interactions among users may result in an absence of guiding values that were once the central focus of the primary SMO. Anstead (2014) argues that while social media contributes to significant levels of participation, they are not able to provide centralized, traditional methods to address the lack of collective action. The contemporary version of personalized communication enables activists to take ownership by using slogans, hashtags, memes, to reproduce their reflections of personal interests (Anstead, 2014).

As technology advances, activists tend to combine new technologies with older ones in order to diversify their range of communication (Mattoni, 2017). Since social movements generally follow a cyclical pattern, sometimes lasting for several years, the fluctuations can affect how activists use digital media to sustain mobilization (Mattoni, 2017). Furthermore, Mattoni (2017) argues that political participation and mobilization have drastically changed over the past twenty years as personalization and individualization have become increasingly prioritized. Leaders frame their

personae in front of citizens rather than political parties in order to relate to their constituents on a more personal level. Social media networks and internet communication enable political leaders to employ a more direct, personal style to their electorate than ever before (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Hence, ordinary activists, or protest participants, have appropriated this type of political communication through sharing personal narratives and experiences on social media platforms (Mattoni, 2017).

Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) classified a popular form of digital storytelling, the hashtag (#), as a way in which users communicate their personal news and emotions; creating a genre of news that is “affective” and emphasizes “anticipatory gestures” that “afford emotive expression” and shape the course of an ongoing event (p. 276). Wang, Liu and Gao (2016) also discussed the virality and dimensions of the Twitter hashtag (#), which enables users to articulate social issues and bridge common interests. As a “thematic identifier,” it accrues a plethora of voices in the purpose of constructing a decentralized conversation (Wang, Liu & Gao, 2016, p.853). As SMOs become integrated into digital media through creative techniques, such as smartphone videos and interactive documentaries, it is important to recognize that these practices are complementary to more traditional forms of organization, including public demonstrations and personal meetings (Canella, 2017).

### **3.4.1 Digital Storytelling**

Canella (2017) describes three primary distribution processes that have been used to attract a large base of working-class individuals in digital social movements: “digital storytelling, social media as a platform for organizing and multimedia distribution, and participation in documentary film as democratic citizenship” (p.25). Digital storytelling is a strategy for social movements to frame members and campaigns by using localized narratives, which can be publicly or privately distributed on digital media platforms (Canella, 2017; Couldry, 2008). Additionally, digital stories can be considered “counter-narratives” that aim to impact individual identities and actions by offering “alternative interpretations of the world” (De Jager, Fogarty, Tewson, Lenette, & Boydell, 2017, p.2550).

Personal stories are shared in various contexts, with the purpose of connecting a vulnerable, intimate dimension of the self to an audience (Vivienne, 2016). Digital media introduces a hybrid transparency of public and private matters by conflating authenticity with public self-conveyance (Vivienne, 2016). Moreover, Humphreys and Vered (2014) argue that interactive media employ broader forms of narratives and communicative acts. For instance, Facebook possesses narrative elements, as it “demonstrates rich interplay between individuals operating in a network” through creating and regulating exchanges, applying peer pressure, promoting playful performances, and constructing user identities in dynamic fashions to social normativity, whether they realize it or not (Humphreys & Vered, 2014, p.6). Activists tend to incorporate testimonies of personal experiences in social movements to empower and build a collective identity, and engage audiences in political mobilization (Vivienne, 2016). While some digital storytellers see personal sharing as a therapeutic relief, others may display their vulnerabilities in an attempt to persuade audiences (Vivienne, 2016). Digital storytelling possesses only a potential to effectively motivate people in social movements (Vivienne, 2016). As such, an audience may empathize with a story, but not partake in action; may not empathize with a viewpoint far removed from their own; or a poorly written story may discourage rather than strengthen shared emotional identities (Vivienne, 2016).

Interactive media enables ordinary individuals with various levels of technical expertise to creatively represent themselves through multiple technological formats (e.g. vlogging, photos) (Vivienne, 2016). There are numerous objectives in instigating digital storytelling, including “personal empowerment; archiving social history; community development; education; and social advocacy” (Vivienne, 2016, p.18). Digital storytellers who are determined to “transform personal anecdotes into persuasive advocacy” may, depending on their success, adopt rudimentary marketing strategies in an effort to communicate their message (Vivienne, 2016, p.31).

Online narratives provide alternative spheres for marginalized groups to express their lived realities and compels the mainstream public sphere to acknowledge them (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016). Minority viewpoints can be compared to network counter-publics, which have been referred to as digital arenas of political participation that are independent of governmental or capital control (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016). Social networks, such as Twitter, can disseminate close perspectives in social movements through real-time updates of personal stories, experiences and sympathies (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016). The function of social networks

enables people to release emotional tension, while simultaneously increasing transnational attention (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016).

Overall, literature concerning digital social movement organizations have expressed the necessity for centralized values and actions in online and offline contexts. In addition, social media has been criticized for its lack of longevity and offline mobility in digital SMOs. Further research could be conducted in order to discuss how social media and its tools can be improved to enhance the actions and values of digital SMOs.

### **3.5 Hashtag Feminism**

Hashtags (#), which are widely used on social media platforms, are attempts to cognitively characterize and control certain events or phenomena through a combination of fact and opinion (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). Aside from #MeToo, there have been other feminist hashtags, such as #WhyIStayed, #EverydaySexism, and #RapeCultureIsWhen that have intended to reshape societal views on gender equality (Clark, 2016). Research has covered the extent to which hashtags are able to produce and bond individuals' experiences for an improvement and expansion of political representation (Clark, 2016). Online tools have escalated online collectivism, created new identities through hashtags, and reshaped organized activism by appointing new, influential leaders in innovative ways.

Hashtag feminism is a concept that describes how feminism has expanded its reach due to digitalization. Its global presence and popularity on Twitter and Facebook has redefined interpretations of feminist activism, and what Dixon (2014) argues is a new wave of feminism. The concept of hashtag feminism began as a virtual space where "victims of inequality can coexist together in a space that acknowledges pain, narrative and isolation" (Dixon, 2014, p.34). Clark (2016) argues that women of color and lower-class statuses, which have been marginalized in U.S. historical narratives of feminism, are able to effectively communicate online. Feminist hashtags can be viewed as cultural resources to mobilize offline political action through creating a foundation of collective identities; however, they are not political in themselves (Clark, 2016). Digital media has enabled feminist organizations to become accessible to a wider range of users,

removing the need for formal membership requirements to be involved in political caucuses and organizations (Clark, 2016). Traditional organizations are thus no longer considered the primary source of feminist communication, as hashtags have transformed organizational structures into networks of individuals to achieve a common goal (Clark, 2016).

Researchers in online activism have demonstrated that social media provides channels of awareness by instilling “a sense of solidarity between ‘physical occupiers’ and ‘internet occupiers’” and spreading inspirational information to effectively translate emotional behaviors into action (Gerbaudo, 2012, p.103; Castells as cited in Earl, 2013). In addition, it decentralizes the political engagement processes through flexible, horizontal structures of collective actions and increased visibility, and leverages the affordance of low-cost online participation (González-Bailón, 2013; Earl & Kimport, 2014).

Shaw (2012) argues that while most literature in online activism focuses on protest organization, online communities have the potential to develop discursive change through political motivation. The characteristics of certain online social movement activity have a tendency to be undervalued, as they are not explicitly focused on conventional forms of political action (Shaw, 2012). Rather than solely focusing on online mobilization and organization, the internet has enabled discursive communities to promote cultural change through altering the ways in which we use and consume media (Shaw, 2012). Individual social media blogs and posts are not politically meaningful in themselves, but rather through the interlinkage and exchange that take place between them that creates a “medium for the political” (Shaw, 2012, p.375). Bloggers and social media users have the potential to connect with earlier posts and posts from others to challenge traditional national and international frameworks, such as sexist or anti-feminist public discourse (Shaw, 2012). Online networks are not only engaged in sustaining social movements for organized activism, but also have a political purpose in changing the perceptions of mainstream discourse (Shaw, 2012).

In the case study of #WhyIStayed, which spread after news reports of a woman who chose to remain in an abusive relationship with her athlete husband, social media was flooded with personal narratives in support of domestic violence victims and backlash against the media’s portrayal of the female victim (Clark, 2016). This hashtag united users’ stories under a single categorized frame, encouraging survivors to spread their stories from diverse backgrounds with 140 Twitter

characters (Clark, 2016). As a result, the hashtag effectively challenged the mainstream media discourse of blaming victims, as well as provided a resource for victims to become a part of a larger network (Clark, 2016). In essence, hashtag feminism through its content and production, encourages users to take control over their identities by highlighting their subjective narratives and reflections upon a particular subject of debate (Clark, 2016). The hashtag empowers users to share their experiences in order to engage in alternative interpretations of ongoing issues, which differentiates it from mainstream media discourse.

On the contrary, hashtag feminism can also be viewed as an oversimplified version of feminism. It can circumvent the tools provided by feminists to analyze historical elements, the relationships between certain local and global cultures, and explore gender power relations that may have an effect on violence against women and girls in various contexts (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). As an example, the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag feminism retaliated against notably different groups - Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban - as if they were all part of a singular, collective effort in creating extremist interpretations of Islam (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). However, each of these groups formed in response to different geopolitical events, which resulted in separate types of grievances (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). Thus, it is imperative to bear in mind while analyzing feminist hashtags that the plurality of perspectives and origination of the issues will be highly dependent on localized cultures and individuals.

Furthermore, online communities that express feministic viewpoints and share stories may face adversity, such as hate speech, online harassment and disagreeing comments (Dixon, 2014). These groups may also be subject to backlash from feminists who may not view online activism as a suitable, sustainable attempt in advocating for feminist political changes. The sharing of women's personal narratives can, however, be viewed as a form of therapy in societies where men dominate the social discourse (Dixon, 2014). The woman's narrative is considered a crucial component in understanding the development of past feminist movements, as it has reshaped our perception of how class, race and gender interplay in various geopolitical contexts (Cruikshank, 1992). Therefore, it is critical to appreciate the significance of women's shared stories, as they provide insight into current societal conditions that may have a direct impact on their livelihood.

Literature on hashtag feminism has demonstrated how digitalization has effectively enhanced and expanded online feminist movements; however, there seems to be a shortfall in evaluating the discursive, non-conventional political potential of online communities that are not visible to the public, as well as analyzing developmental changes in behavioral and societal expectations among men. Further, the majority of hashtag feminism literature has been focused on gender inequalities in American culture, which presents an opportunity to critically analyze an international feminist hashtag that has penetrated the politically gender-conscious Swedish society.

### **3.6 Online Feminist Spaces**

According to Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern (2015), online spaces with user-generated content present rich, intricate environments for feminist research, as they offer access to unlimited amounts of data, and insight into a globally diverse set of users. The ambiguous terrain of politics has arguably shaped our virtual experiences through the commodification of communication space; thus, influencing our social relations (Morrow et al., 2015). The geographic standpoints, and cultural definitions of the public, personal and political can greatly affect the subjective experiences of authors and participants in online spaces (Morrow et al., 2015). Rather than viewing the researcher as a disembodied, neutral subject, Morrow et al. (2015) contend that researchers should develop a more critical reflection on their geographical position and access to certain content relative to their users of interest. The spatial conception of public and private spaces is a fluid concept, which is constantly restructured through social relations and capitalistic intentions (Morrow et al., 2015).

As an example, the *SlutWalk* movement began in Toronto, Canada when women were shamed for their dress attire by the Toronto Police Service, which instigated a sequence of protests, rallies, and marches around the world in response to the occurrence (Cook & Hasmath, 2014). Facebook webpages, among other forms of media, were established by the movement founders to spread awareness and organize events, eventually evolving into spaces for engagement and discourse on gender and sexuality expressionism (Cook & Hasmath, 2014). In this case, Facebook provided a space where women from disparate geographical regions could partake in a global movement from within their localized contexts (Cook & Hasmath, 2014).

Another example called *The Everyday Sexism Project* was denoted as a “mediated consciousness-raising (c-r) space” where women posted anonymous stories on Twitter about their encounters with sexual harassment, catcalling, and sexist jokes (Wood, 2008, p.481). The mediated c-r space is known as a virtual space, in which share-ability and archiving functions enable its users to have a similar experience of communication exchange as traditional face-to-face interaction (Pruchniewska, 2016). These spaces arguably enable women to work across different viewpoints through an open dialogue and deeper comprehension of women’s subjective experiences (Pruchniewska, 2016). Contrary to the idea that women should build a universal understanding of oppression, the new media provides knowledge of individual situations to support a multifaceted conception of feminism (Pruchniewska, 2016).

Hunt (2017) challenges the motives of young women in social movements, such as *Occupy Wallstreet*, in which feminism had been implicitly used to justify separate agendas in “targeting global elitism” (p.108). In her study, Hunt (2017) found a youth-only feminist network that excluded women over 30 years of age due to their experiences with intergenerational tensions, such as their use of digital repertoires. According to Hunt (2017), there is a need for additional research in transnational activist organizing among young women. However, this type of research can be meticulous, as a universal definition of youth does not exist. Nonetheless, the women in this particular study demonstrated that their marginalization from older, more experienced activists was a conduit for them to form a mutual identity based on age; thus, excluding other non-essential traits, such as nationalism, ethnicity, cultural and sexual differences (Hunt, 2017).

The women in *Occupy Wallstreet* sought separate, technological spaces from traditional feminist movements in order to enact alternative organizational preferences, which created a flatter hierarchal structure to encourage open discussions and engagement (Hunt, 2017). Their organizational complexity and unique life experiences enabled them to reform their idea of transnational feminist activism by using the notion of youth for their collective identity (Hunt, 2017). Additionally, this study conveyed that young women in these networks had actively sought to engage with women from diverse backgrounds and beliefs in an aim to set them apart from their predecessors (Hunt, 2017, p.119). These fora and network dialogues could be conceived as

Habermasian, as the young women created spaces to counteract their exclusion from participation in traditional feminist spaces (Hunt, 2017).

The public sphere was a concept formed by Jurgen Habermas that describes the idea of open critical debate among society members, which are unhindered by economic and political power (Habermas as cited in Fuchs, 2014). The public sphere requires that all citizens have access to, and the ability to partake in, public discussion (Habermas as cited in Fuchs, 2014). According to Fuchs (2014), the public sphere has been encroached by economic and political systems of power, and consequentially engendered counter publics. The postmodern critique of the public sphere addresses the issue that these spheres have been dominated by educated, wealthy white men, whereas private spheres have been comprised of mainly women (Fuchs, 2014). Morrow et al. (2014) contribute to the postmodern critique by stating that online participation requires time, money, internet access and literacy, which are not widely available to the global public. As a result, women, gays and lesbians, and ethnicities, and other subaltern groups have a greater exclusion from the public sphere, therefore creating a plurality of counter public spaces to unify against their oppression (Morrow et al., 2014). Nevertheless, Fuchs (2014) argues that individuals need to remain unified in their diverse objectives in order to strive for a participatory democracy.

The feminist “safe space” was a term that formed in the late twentieth century, referring to a secure setting in which women could identify, voice their personal expressions, and communicate with one another without the presence of dominant groups, fear, or intimidation factors (Clark-Parsons, 2017, p.4). These groups provide support and emotional therapy for women who face similar injustices in order to unanimously organize for social change (Clark-Parsons, 2017). Due to the entanglement of misogyny, abuse and threats toward women on social media sites, public visibility can be harmful to women, as many have experienced death, rape, and other serious threats from internet trolls (Keller, Mendes & Ringrose, 2018). Online harassment has also forced women of all backgrounds, such as journalists, gamers, activists, writers and more to leave their homes, refrain from online engagement, and even remove themselves from the public life altogether (Clark-Parsons, 2017). As a result, safe spaces have been a critical priority for contemporary feminists in the digital sphere to cultivate a secure, online space for freedom of expression (Clark-Parsons, 2017).

Clark-Parsons (2017) also draws on the issue of maintaining safe spaces, such as a private Facebook group. Since many popular closed feminist Facebook groups have members upwards of 3000 members, there may be a lack of “moderation and self-reflexivity” (Clark-Parsons, 2017, p.6). Rather than understanding ‘safe space’ as a universal term that applies to all groups that identify as such, various social processes may defy the meaning of safety and privacy in certain settings (Clark-Parsons, 2017). The notion of a safe space is constantly in flux, which should be acknowledged by researchers when determining how spaces maintain their inclusivity and neutrality among participants (Clark-Parsons, 2017).

Literature concerning online feminist spaces has shown that these spaces are highly dependent on geographical and societal settings. Overall, common concerns for researchers conducting online analyses include a self-assessment of one’s position and privilege to online access, a recognition of capitalist influence on social media and its effects on public discourse, as well as a critical evaluation on how particular digital groups define themselves as safe. There is, however, an opportunity for contributive research to investigate the fluid dynamics of private, online feminist spaces and their potential for sustainability.

### **3.7 Feminist Solidarity**

Solidarity refers to the reinforcement of loyalty and commitment among a specific group of persons acting on behalf of a social movement (Brown, Ray, Summers & Fraistat, 2017). Scholz (2015) refers to Sara Ruddick’s work in measuring women’s shared struggles, rather than identities, as the primary foundation for feminist solidarity. The framework for transnational feminist solidarity can be defined as the “struggle to” work rather than the “struggle against” oppression (Scholz, 2015, p.183).

According to Scholz (2015), the traditional understanding of feminists in working against having a domestic life is no longer the primary objective in feminist solidarity. However, she acknowledges Ruddick’s work by classifying a unified effort among women in a progressive struggle as “living work”, which highlights the central pursuits in one’s life, such as the ability to enjoy life, freely speak, participate in communities, care for one’s family, and withstand sexual

abuse or violation by connecting feminists in a “political movement to be” (Scholz, 2015, p. 383; p. 395). The coalition of feminist solidarity is arguably founded upon the enrichment of female self-worth through the interconnectedness of women who face correlated hardships in the effort to improve living standards. Be that as it may, national borders continue to be a challenge for solidarity efforts to overcome (Scholz, 2015). Although women in distant cultures may experience similar struggles, this does not necessarily indicate that they are willing to abandon their allegiance to a country or culture in order to align themselves with an international feminist solidarity group (Scholz, 2015).

Hemmings (2012) draws upon the concept of “affective solidarity,” which comprehends a diverse range of “affects,” including anger, frustration, and the eagerness to connect, as necessary components for sustainable, transformable feminist politics (p.148). Similar to Scholz (2015), Hemmings (2012) prioritizes the connection of emotionality in feminist solidarity movements, rather than embracing other forms of identity, such as race, class, gender, et al. An individual’s experience may be subsumed into a collective feminist group by the force of politics, which amalgamates individuals into a specific directional goal, rather than confirming what women already know (Hemmings, 2012). Empathy has been considered the foreground to constituting feelings as knowledge; a “minimal requirement” in developing an extensive connectedness and trustworthiness among cross-cultural feminists (Hemmings, 2012, p.151). Critically speaking though, the use of empathy can be a concern for transnational feminist groups, as they may Westernize their approach to inadvertently conflate empathy with pity (Hemmings, 2012). In other words, individuals who profess to be empathetic may have ulterior motives to enhance their reputation. Empathy, in this case, could become a “sentimental attachment to the other, rather than a genuine engagement with her concerns” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 152).

Furthermore, Hemmings (2012) distinguishes a woman and a feminist by the uncertainty of affective outcomes. A feminist, for example, may become outraged to resist her social prescription, whereas a woman may remain completely content with her situation (Hemmings, 2012). The difference between a woman and a feminist is the extent to which one’s life is or is not consumed by the desire to change gender relations (Hemmings, 2012). An “affective shift” must occur in order to create counter-knowledge and politics; a realization of one’s own position in relation to others (Hemmings, 2012, p.157). As a result, the dissemination of knowledge through affective

language and actions embodies a new form of evaluation, even if it is not transmitted into action (Hemmings, 2012).

According to Wiley, Srinivasan, Finke, Firnhaber, and Shilinsky (2013), feminist solidarity groups are not obligated to consist solely of females. In addition, they argue that younger females often perceive feminists as more competent, advanced, and intelligent individuals with radical political views (Wiley, et al., 2013). The notion of the feminist woman, whether it is positive or negative, is considered a major determinant for women's identification and commitment to action in collectivities (Wiley, et al., 2013). Hence, positive portrayals of feminist identification in past collective efforts have arguably led to the success of immense participation (Wiley, et al., 2013).

In regard to men, the stigma of identifying oneself as a feminist has been correlated to questioning one's manhood (Wiley, et al., 2013). One web-based study, which consisted of 117 men in the U.S., measured men's reactions to a positive portrayal of feminist men in support of feminist solidarity efforts, their intentions of supporting collective action groups for women, and their perceptions of feminist identification (Wiley, et al., 2013). The results from the study indicated that men who had been exposed to positive portrayals of male feminists had increased their feelings of solidarity, and intentions to partake in feminist activist movements (Wiley, et al., 2013). The results had also suggested that while male feminists can often be negatively perceived, such as embodying lower traits of masculinity, these opinions can be reversed (Wiley, et al., 2013). Thus, it is possible for men to associate good qualities with male feminists, if they are positively framed. This causal relationship between positive portrayals and self-identification could be applied to both males and females, indicating that solidarity can be expanded beyond the personal identifications of race, class and gender.

Overall, literature regarding feminist solidarity emphasizes that the identification among various groups is strongly tied to relatable struggles toward progressive political actions. In addition, affective language and emotions can be strategically used to form coalitions and promote sustainable collective action. Additional contributive research could investigate how transnational feminist solidarity groups could encompass both men and women by appealing to a common, emotive concern; thereby coalescing into a greater, possibly more sustainable, collective action.

## 4 Theoretical Framework

This section examines the following theories: The Logic of Connective Action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), and Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). The Logic of Connective Action will evaluate the digital instruments used in #sistabriefen to engender female empowerment, assess its strength and potential sustainability, and its solidarity with the broader #MeToo phenomenon. Lastly, the Social Identity Theory, paired with the Self-Categorization sub-theory, will address the reflexivity of individuals who partake in online feminist groups. The aforementioned theories will be critically applied to the analysis of the #sistabriefen Facebook group and dissemination of the #MeToo movement in Sweden.

### 4.1 The Logic of Connective Action

The Logic of Collective Action was established in 1965 by Mancur Olson, who investigated why certain interests among different groups are not equally represented in political processes (Pecorino, 2014). He argued that political agents do not always promote a collective welfare and questioned whether the size of groups correspond with their effectiveness (Sandler, 2015). The logic behind the theory focuses on evaluating group behaviors to assess a correlation with mobilization (Sandler, 2015). Over the years, developing technological innovations have modified the traditional Logic of Collective Action, as individuals have the capacity to expose their private matters in a more publicized manner (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl 2005).

The Logic of Connective Action extends the Logic of Collective Action to demonstrate how organized social movements can evolve from personalized forms of communication through digital networks. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) contend there are three types of actions: collective action logic, and two personalized actions that are characterized by the degree of centrality in organizational communication. In personal action frameworks, emblematic issues may resemble topics from older political parties or social movements (i.e. environment, women's equality, et al.), but the ideas and organization are more personalized than a social group action, which is based on a common, collective ideological identification (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). As networks shift

from group-based themes to individual agendas, the expression of identity forms complex social networks of individuals in diverse cultural settings (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Personal action frames entail the inclusivity and compatibility of people's reasoning behind addressing a certain issue and are highly dependent on current social conditions and political opportunities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). As a result, personal action frames are not immediately spread on a mass level, as users are challenged to convey the significance and relevance to others who may be affected.

Collective action is framed as two or more people in the pursuit of a shared outcome, or "public good," which refers to nonexclusive, tangible or intangible goods that are available to the public (Bimber et al., 2005, p.367). Collective action frames involve obtaining a membership in established groups or ideologies to "share common identifications or political claims," which results in a recognized theme or group slogan (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.747).

Connective action is fundamentally distinct from collective action, as it involves increased individualization and technological processes, without the requirement of a uniform collective identity or extensive organizational resources, to respond quickly and effectively to appropriate circumstances (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Additionally, connective action acknowledges digital media as "organizing agents" at the core of its logic, in which technology and social media shape how individuals communicate (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.752). Similar to the pursuit of the common public good in collective action, the Logic of Connective Action interprets this notion as a "personal expression and recognition or self-validation" which is attained by "sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 752-753). Occasionally, these interactions may take place between individuals living in various locations, and do not necessarily require a shared ideology or framework to establish a connection (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Connective action analyzes how individuals are personally motivated by their internalized ideas, thoughts, plans, and images to share with others in a large network (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This sharing process typically transpires on social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, or via media platforms with higher publicity, such as YouTube and Twitter (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) created a tri-part typology to characterize action networks: a collective action logic, and two distinguishable connective action logics, which differentiate by the amount of influence formal organizations have on interpersonal engagement. The intention of introducing two forms of connective action logics is not to resolve the motivation behind social movements, but to highlight and broaden the dynamics of digitized organization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Networks characterized by the collective action logic aim to facilitate participation and coordination through digital technology, without encouraging self-organization or personal motivation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Further, collective action involves wide-scale networks to rely on established organizations for reconciling dissimilarities among individuals, and cooperative efforts (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

In contrast, networks characterized by connective action involve self-organized individuals who use technologies without a centralized leadership (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Personal action frames become the primary “transmission units” for organization, as opposed to the collective action logic (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.755). In some cases, though, formal organizations are present at the periphery of connective action, as they adopt personal action frames to facilitate the spread of influence across online and offline platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

The hybridity of connective action networks is comprised of: “self-organizing networks” and “organizationally enabled networks” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.756). The self-organizing networks in connective action describe little to no organizational coordination, wide-scale personal access to social technologies, self-expressionism on social networking sites, inclusive personal action frames, and an avoidance of formal organizational interference (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This type of connective action varies slightly from the connective action under organizationally enabled networks, in which organizations, or informal actors, are loosely tied to action networks by incorporating personal action frames into commercial and customized social technological platforms; moderate personal expressions through social networks; and loosely partake in action coordination and resource mobilization, without imposing a strong brand identification (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In addition, organizations may loosely tie with other

likeminded organizations to form a vast network of compatible causes (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

One of the many advantages of connective action is that individual engagement may be increased due to lesser demands of membership or subscription to formal organizations (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Consequently, the potential network growth of connective action may exceed networks of collective action due to lower-required levels of organizational or collective commitment. Further, these action network descriptions may be applied simultaneously, or cycle from one model to another over a period of time. The notion of “informal organizational resource seeking” involves informal networks sharing and linking their concerns and objectives with pre-existing, more conventional organizations without compromising their original identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.758). Depending on where, when and how one perceives an organization or cause, each typology of connective and collective action has an appropriate application for a given set of circumstances (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

Although the Logic of Connective Action may be applied in various settings, it can be problematic, as it creates an artificial distinction between the individual and the organization. Connective action and collective action may exclude a plurality of alternative action frameworks by prescribing specific characteristics to groups and individuals. As a result, Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) tri-part model does not encompass the vast complexity of digital action structures in various social settings.

Nonetheless, the tri-part model presented in the Logic of Connective Action is applicable to this research, as it amalgamates the traditional Logic of Collective Action of emphasizing group behaviors, and the implementation of social media in forming collectivities. As such, the theory was deemed appropriate for analyzing the digital qualities and effects of #sistabriefen. Additionally, this theory was chosen to address the motivation of group members, as it is effective in assessing individual interpretations of #sistabriefen and the #MeToo movement.

## **4.2 The Social Identity Perspective**

### **4.2.1 The Social Identity Theory**

The Social Identity Perspective incorporates a plethora of sub-theories, most notably the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Reid, 2006). The Social Identity Theory was first conceived by Tajfel (1974) who emphasized that an individual's self-concept is derived from one's knowledge and emotional significance of a social group membership. This theory entails the social category (e.g. nationality, organization, political affiliation, et al.) that one is placed into, and belongs to, and defines oneself by the characteristics of a particular category; an embedded self-definition in one's self-conception (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Additionally, category membership constitutes a form of social identification in each member's mind that "describes and prescribes one's attributes as a group member;" for instance, how one should think, feel and behave (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p.3). As group members encourage behavioral strategies that help maintain, accomplish and prioritize in-group objectives, members evaluate their social identities (Hogg & Terry, 2001).

The Social Identity Theory explores two socio-cognitive processes. The first is categorization, which navigates and specifies intergroup boundaries by highlighting stereotypical features, enforcing socio-normative perceptions on group behaviors and actions, and assigning individuals, including the self, to a relevant category (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Social categorization of the self and others frames how one should behave in certain social contexts (Hogg & Terry, 2001).

Secondly, self-enhancement refers to the favored norms and stereotypes of the majority members in an in-group setting, which guides the process of social categorization (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Norms can be defined as shared systems of thought, feelings, and behaviors in a group setting, in which members communicate information about norms, and are "configured by norms by normative concerns" (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p.8). This communication can either be direct or indirect depending on whether members explicitly state, or use nonverbal signals to infer in-group norms, which can also be influenced by out-group norms (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Self-categorization and self-enhancement processes are elucidated through “subjective belief structures,” according to the Social Identity Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p.4). These structures refer to the in-group members’ favored stereotypical traits or salient norms, which produce an in-group prototype that guides their behaviors (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). Since it is presumed that people have a desire to view themselves in a positive way in relation to others, self-enhancement is attained by comparing in-group and relevant outgroups to effectively elevate the in-group status (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Members’ beliefs, which may not necessarily reflect reality, enforce the credibility and sustainability of intergroup relations, and the likelihood that social mobility and change can occur through a commonly evaluative social category membership (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006).

#### **4.2.2 Self-Categorization Theory**

The Self-Categorization Theory was conceived by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987), and considered an extension of the Social Identity Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2001). This theory places emphasis on the social cognitive process of social categorization, in which individuals are prompted to interpret themselves and others by group standards and exhibit group behaviors (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Self-categorization is based on one’s adopted behavior to relevant in-group prototypes, which can result in depersonalization. In this context, depersonalization is positively referred to as one’s assimilation to normative in-group behaviors, such as emotional empathy, cooperation, compassion, and shared influence (Hogg & Terry, 2001). The representation of a group’s prototype is the main focus of self-categorization theory, as it defines how individuals cognitively perceive social categories through their embodied characteristics, including attitudes, behaviors, emotions, and social contexts (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). A group prototype encompasses the proportion of intragroup similarities and intergroup differences among relevant in- and outgroups (Hogg & Reid, 2006). A prototype enhances the “entitativity” of a group by articulating its structural boundaries through a set of social categories that are contextually dependent (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p.10). As a result, members evaluate themselves individually and socially as to how

compatible they are with a prototype and may cycle through multiple self-categories until they find an “optimal fit” in a group identity (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p.7; Hogg & Reid, 2006).

The self-categorization process depersonalizes an individual’s behavior according to the in-group prototype (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Individuals, however, may attempt to manipulate a salient in-group prototype with the use of persuasive language and behaviors to accommodate their “meaningful and self-favoring identity” (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p.7). Accordingly, the mutual exchange of communication between in-group members produces a dynamic perception of the self, and concurrently shaped by the self-motivation of members.

Self-categorization aims to reduce one’s subjective uncertainty of socially accepted attitudes, emotions, conceptions, and behaviors by assimilating to a specific group prototype. The concept, “uncertainty reduction” refers to the capability of subjectively significant meanings to produce one’s internal motivation (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p.6). Certainty instills one’s self-confidence and existential meaning by confirming behavioral expectations within one’s physical and social environment (Hogg & Terry, 2001). The prototype reduces uncertainty by providing “consensual validation” for one’s cognitive behaviors and becomes strengthened through group cohesiveness (Hogg & Terry, 2001, p.6).

Self-enhancement in the Social Identity Theory refers to one’s engagement with others for positive self-affirmation, whereas uncertainty reduction involves one’s need to associate with others in order to find their position in the social world. Self-enhancement could also be interpreted as one’s motivation to enhance a group’s social identity in order to increase intergroup competition and acquire prestige (Hogg & Reid, 2006). A person’s cognitivism, which may be guided by uncertainty reduction or self-enhancement motives, involves the pairing of social categories with the most salient properties of a social context. Through this process, the individual ascertains a subjective and reflexive meaning of the self to befit a social context.

In relation to Lykke’s (2005) notion of “competing intersectionality (*konkurrerende intersektionalitet*)”, which refers to the prioritization of social categorizations under a hegemonic hierarchy, the application of the Social Identity Perspective purposefully highlights the domineering identities among group members, while understating others (p.10). Individuals

possess a myriad of identities, which are not scrutinized by these theories due to the narrow scope of interpretation of in-group behavior. The Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory do not critically assess members' alternative identities outside of the #sistabriefen group, which limits the results of this study.

The Social Identity Theory is applied in this case study to assess the intergroup behaviors of #sistabriefen, while the Self-Categorization Theory evaluates the intragroup behaviors of its members. The pairing of the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory were chosen together as they analyze how members identify themselves among other members as well as the status of #sistabriefen among outgroups. Further, the findings from applying these theories will contribute knowledge on how #sistabriefen members are motivated to mobilize and potentially sustain the group's presence.

## **5 Methodology**

This section outlines the selected methodologies, and their application to address the research questions. Additionally, this section provides an overview of digital ethnography, a comprehensive view of qualitative content analysis and interviews, a hybrid approach to conducting research and coding data, an evaluation of the ethical implications under Swedish law, how digital ethnography and online observations are applied to the study, and the methodological limitations.

### **5.1 Digital Ethnography**

Ethnography is a theoretical and methodological approach that epistemologically extends from the understanding that knowledge is constructed through human interaction (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Ethnography involves the participation of an ethnographer to interpret various cultural patterns and their significance in the daily lives of members across and within societies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Digital ethnography, however, entails a shift from direct, in-person presence to a mediated contact, as the internet has become an embedded part of our

everyday context (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis, Tacchi, 2016; Hine, 2015). Researchers may be able to track others online by observing their conversations and actions, chat with them through instant messaging tools, or analyze imagery, such as videos and photography (Pink et al., 2016). As the emergence of new technologies produce innovative ways of engagement, ethnographic practices expand and assimilate into various environments (Pink et al., 2016).

An ethnographer's participation is mandatory for understanding first-hand accounts of behaviors and activities in a particular setting (Hine, 2015). This deeper level of participatory involvement offers ethnographers to emotionally experience an "embodied understanding of how activities feel, beyond the verbal accounts that participants can give" (Hine, 2015, p.55). The ethnographer acquires extensive knowledge by remaining in a field for a specific, prolonged time frame, partaking in events and interactions as they occur (Hine, 2015). An extended time frame enables ethnographers to be exposed to various significant meanings in participants' lives and provides the time to revise and restructure analytical frameworks (Hine, 2015).

Ethnographers conducting research in virtual environments are challenged with making themselves present and accepted into a setting where they are able to observe and interact with participants to the extent of their technological capability (Hine, 2015). One of the features of conducting research through online discussion groups is that ethnographers may choose to remain invisible among participants by observing others' interactions without self-involvement (Hines, 2015). As a result, ethnographers in the digital context are not obligated to partake in every group discussion for their research. Nonetheless, whether it is through direct communication with other members, or having a social media profile, an ethnographer's co-presence is essential for a deeper solidarity with participants (Hine, 2015).

## **5.2 Researcher Standpoint**

The interviews, observations and qualitative content analysis were studied in the Swedish language. An ethnographer who studies a foreign language and spends a significant amount of time in a distant culture for his or her field of study, is acknowledged with integrity and elevated research value (Winchatz, 2006). However, the usage of native speakers' peculiar vocabulary or

jargon may cause misunderstandings between the researchers and participants (Winchatz, 2006). Arguably, the researcher may expose his or her background knowledge as a non-native speaker, without compromising his or her credibility (Winchatz, 2006). As a researcher, I have been studying the Swedish language since August 2016, and attained sufficient competency to conduct this study in a non-native language.

Since the standpoint of a researcher is directly affected by his or her surroundings and previous knowledge, it is crucial for an ethnographer to identify his or her subjective position in a particular field through a self-reflexive point of discussion (Pink et al., 2016; Hine, 2015). As an intern at a communications agency in Stockholm, I was able to gain access to the #sistabriefen group through connecting with a colleague. Since I work primarily from my computer outside the daily office environment and have limited work experience of less than one year in the Swedish communications industry, I was able to maintain an adequate level of objectivity throughout the study. It should be noted, however, that my past experience may have contributed to an underlying bias in the interpretation of data.

I joined the group in December 2017, shortly after its establishment in November 2017, and immersed myself in the group through observing reactions and reading posts at the beginning of the study. In digital ethnography, data collection begins from the initiation of a project to the final version of published results (Kozinets, 2015). This study commenced in January of 2018, and was completed in June 2018, with consistent updates via Facebook notifications throughout the duration of the study.

### **5.3 Qualitative Content Analysis**

A qualitative content analysis is a research method that focuses on the subjective interpretation of strategic language in a textual form (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Textual data encompasses verbal, print, electronic, interview responses, observations and other kinds of textual content that either implicitly or explicitly communicates meanings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The purpose of this analysis is to identify overarching themes and patterns in textual data through a coding process, which enables a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

There are two analytical approaches that can be used for a qualitative content analysis. A conventional content approach warrants an inductive categorical development, which refers to an emergence of categories from textual codes rather than “imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279-1280). In contrast, the directed content approach is guided by a deductive process, in which data is collected and coded for the purpose of fulfilling a set of theoretically informed, predetermined categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A hybrid of conventional and directed content approaches was implemented in this study, as the analysis of textual data called for both an inductive and deductive process. Prior to collecting data, categories had not been pre-determined, however, there was an extensive amount of previous research that could benefit from the results of the study. In addition, there was an unfinished version of the theoretical framework that was conceived before the completion of the data analysis, which was subject to change depending on the results of the analysis. The categories evolved independently from a theoretically informed categorical framework through an interpretation of textual data, and application of open-ended interview questions.

The posts from the #sistabriefen Facebook group were collected through a non-random, purposeful sampling technique to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The sub-strategy, maximum variation sampling, is a purposeful sampling method that is commonly used to strategically select a broad cross-section of individuals or groups to exemplify the complexity of perspectives in a particular context (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). During the collection and analysis of Facebook posts from November 2017 until April 2018, the maximum variation sampling was used to select comments and posts that are “information-rich” in addressing the research objectives (Patton, 1999, p.1197).

The content shared among group members in November and December 2017 was collected and analyzed between January and February 2018, while the content from January until the end of April 2018 was continuously analyzed through Facebook notifications. Kozinet’s (2015) interpretation of digital ethnography as a “participant observational research based” method was not applied, as I did not solely “reach out” to another human through technology, nor write about my experience in #sistabriefen (p.67). Instead, the interviews were complemented with a passive form of observing members’ posts and interactions, as I did not personally partake in discussions

or comment on posts in the duration of the study. A total of 262 posts were purposefully analyzed out of 432 posts in the group, with content including articles, websites, groups, photos, videos, Spotify playlists, and blogs that were considered highly relevant to the research questions. Due to time limitations, the analysis consisted of reading the most well-liked comments under each post, and shared articles and websites to understand the values of the group. It bears also noting that the Facebook algorithms embedded in group posts and comments had an effect on the way in which data was retrieved.

A qualitative content analysis was advantageous for the application of the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory, as I was able to evaluate intragroup and intergroup norms by reading posted articles, blogs and opinions of group members, which portrayed members' perception of #sistabriefen in relation to outgroups, and internal thoughts about the in-group. This method was also beneficial in the application of The Logic of Connective Action, as various documents and events were posted by group members to organize the #sistabriefen appeal, promote its media presence, and monitor its efforts.

## **5.4 Interviews**

Interviews that take place in real time, online settings can be denoted as “synchronous interviews,” which enable the researcher to reach interviewees in remote locations (Bolderston, 2012, p.73). In this contextual nature, technology could benefit those who prefer nonverbal communication. An ethnographer is suggested to select the most appropriate medium to conduct interviews by making it the most “comfortable and convenient” for the interviewee, while engaging in an open interaction (Hine, 2015, p.79; Bolderston, 2012). The Facebook Messenger application was chosen to conduct interviews, as it allotted participants time to respond in the comfort of their surroundings.

Members were initially recruited through an invitation post in the #sistabriefen group, which was posted twice within a two-week time frame to remind members about participating. Also, a friendly reminder was sent via Facebook Messenger to individuals who liked or commented on

the #sistabriefen post to see if they would still be interested in participating. The interviews consisted of a total number of 23 volunteers, 22 of which are members of #sistabriefen and 1 who is a significant actor in the spread of the #MeToo movement in Sweden. A total of 8 questions were asked, with some follow-up questions, depending on the participant's willingness (see Appendix B).

Additionally, a snowball sampling method was used for obtaining participants, which describes when an informant provides contact information to a researcher about other informants who may be interested in participating (Noy, 2008). This method enriches sampling groups by accessing new participants when other contact methods have been exhausted and is considered one of the most widely used methods among qualitative studies (Noy, 2008). Further, this method is typically associated with the study of more vulnerable populations who are reluctant to partake in other traditional methods (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

The selection of qualitative interviews as part of the methodology was deemed beneficial for the application of the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory, as participants provided insight into their personal experiences in #sistabriefen, and their relation to the #MeToo movement. Interview participants were also able to contribute vital knowledge in understanding the connective action logic of #sistabriefen, as they conveyed how the group has impacted their professional and personal lives.

## **5.5 Offline Observations**

By participating in other appropriate group settings, such as face-to-face meetings, an ethnographer creates a more robust and credible account of their experience (Hine, 2015). An ethnographer may pair online and offline participation in order to understand why certain choices of media are selected for group communication, and how technology is embedded into group practices (Hine, 2015). An offline observation was implemented for this case study, as it bridged the purpose and impact of #sistabriefen with industry trade organizations for an enriched analysis.

I attended the #sistabriefen meeting at *Folkuniversitet* in Stockholm on March 23, 2018. The event was created through Facebook by a member of the #sistabriefen group who sits on the board at one of the communications industry organizations. The purpose of the event was to address the coordination and response to the #sistabriefen appeal with concrete actions from 11 industry organizations: The Documentation Information and Culture Trade Union (*DIK*), The Employers' Organization for the Swedish Service Sector (*Almega*), Media Industries Employer Association (*Mediaföretagen*), Swedish Content Agencies, Swedish Data and Marketing Association (*Swedma*), Sponsorings and Event Sweden (*SES sponsrings and eventsverige*), The Association of Swedish Advertisers (*Sveriges Annonörer*), Public Relations Consulting Company in Sweden (*Precis*), The Public Relations Agencies in Sweden (*Svenska PR-företagen*), Swedish Marketing Confederation (*Sveriges Marknadsförbund*), The Swedish Communication Organization (*Sveriges Kommunikatörer*), and The Swedish Association of Communication Agencies (*Komm!*).

The meeting lasted for two hours with approximately 100 attendants due to the limited space at the venue. The program consisted of a moderator, two lawyers for explaining employee rights and conditions, and board members from each industry organization to present their plan of action. Since the meeting was conducted in Swedish, I recorded it to ensure that the dialogue was properly understood.

Overall, the meeting provided insight into how the effects of #sistabriefen were carried out by a combination of the logics of connective and collective action. The magnitude of expressions that were communicated at the meeting also enabled a deeper engagement with group members, and corresponding actors involved in the manifestation of #sistabriefen.

## **5.6 Coding the Data**

Initial coding is a first coding cycle that condenses textual data into meaningful units by examining and identifying similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2009). It allows the researcher to reflect data, examine social processes, and remain open to possible theoretical applications to the study (Charmaz as cited in Saldaña, 2009). Initial coding may involve In Vivo Coding and Process Coding, and/or other techniques to analyze data (Saldaña, 2009). For example, Process Coding

connotes actions with gerunds (“ing” words), whereas In Vivo Coding incorporates actual wording and phrases used in the data (Saldaña, 2009). Pattern Coding involves a second coding cycle to identify meaningful units in corpus data for a development of themes (Saldaña, 2009). This process entails examining initial codes to discover inter-relational patterns and reflect on why and how they have evolved (Saldaña, 2009).

During the Initial Coding stage, interview responses and group observations were compiled into an analytic memo to infer similarities and differences among members’ motivations. The second cycle of Pattern Coding entailed a scrupulous examination of members’ language in order to determine the overarching themes of the study: solidarity, awareness and support, inner strength, sense of security, organizational structure, and the impact of #sistabriefen (Saldaña, 2009). After coding the material, it was determined that the majority of the analysis consisted primarily of interview responses, as they provided greater depth and insight into the group norms, rather than group observations.

Respondents either expressed solidarity with the #sistabriefen movement or with the #MeToo movement, depending on their experiences. There was a noticeable combination of intergroup and intragroup support and awareness that was indicated by group members. Some informants described their intergroup relationship with similar #MeToo hashtag groups by helping them promote media messages, while others were focused on generating awareness within the communications industry. Additionally, informants explained how the #sistabriefen group personally impacted their lives by receiving or providing intragroup support. As for inner strength, members revealed either how #sistabriefen helped them become more confident in their offline contexts or discovered that they hold a position that enables them to provide valuable knowledge to other members. The sense of security category was determined after understanding how the privacy feature of the group influenced members’ behaviors, and how media leaks impacted the group dynamics. Further, the category of organizational structure was formulated after communicating with different respondents about their level of involvement in the group. This information, combined with an analysis of the Facebook platform, were collected to deduce the in-group norms and hierarchy of coordination in #sistabriefen. Lastly, the impact of #sistabriefen was considered an essential category for analyzing how #sistabriefen affected various informants’

views of the communications industry and society, and how industry organizational actors responded to the appeal.

## 5.7 Ethics

According to the Swedish Research Council (2017), it is vital for researchers to maintain openness, explicate the study purpose, retrieve informed consent from participants, and accurately evaluate the results. Additionally, the confidentiality and depersonalization of participants' identities is expected, unless participants give their written consent to release personal information. Although the interview data was stored in a private, personal Facebook Messenger application, Facebook owns the rights to all content and information that is shared in the application to personalize social networks and advertisements (Facebook, 2018). Researchers are required to protect the identities of individuals with the utmost integrity; however, they cannot assure that someone outside of the research will ever have access to the study (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Nonetheless, researchers should convey to participants the precautionary measures that are being taken to prevent or reduce the risk of releasing personal, sensitive information (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

The conversations that occurred through the application were stored privately, without access from third party individuals, and deleted upon the completion of the study. Moreover, the responses from the participants who had chosen to remain anonymous were depersonalized in order to eliminate connections to their personal profiles. The members of #sistabriefen were conveyed the following information: a personal background of the researcher, the academic purpose of the study, assurance that their responses will be privately stored on Facebook Messenger and deleted upon the completion of study, their rights to user consent and anonymity, and where the final publication will be available to the public reader (see Appendix A). In addition, users were provided the option to opt out of the study at any given time, and information that the final study will be written in the English language.

In regard to the offline observation at the #sistabriefen meeting, the creator of the Facebook event page approved the audio recording of the event, as long as it did not record personal testimonies.

The meeting was recorded on my personal mobile phone through the Apple Voice Memo application and deleted upon the completion of the study.

Lastly, it is suggested to seek approval from one's advisor to confirm the ethicality throughout the study (Swedish Research Council, 2017). In accordance with this notion, the advisor of the study reviewed the ethical implications in the social media post and interview questionnaire prior to the commencement of data collection.

## **5.8 Limitations**

The interviews that were conducted via Facebook Messenger were limited to interpretation, as in-person interviews provide an exceptional scope of real-time, nonverbal behavior, expressions, and gestures, which digital media lacks (Knox & Burkard, 2009). In-person interviews facilitate openness and trustworthiness, thus, enabling an interviewee to disclose their experiences more adequately than through online messaging approaches (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

After collecting responses from the participants, there was one flaw discovered in the interview questions and request for volunteers, as they have all referred to the members of #sistabriefen as "women". Although there may be a large presence of women, members represent themselves as women, non-binaries and trans-persons in the group description. This reflects a personal bias of the interviewer, as it may have shaped the direction of the interviews (Bolderston, 2012). Moreover, some Swedish language barriers were inevitable, which required a certain amount of decoding of misspellings and jargon.

Finally, due to the closed privacy of #sistabriefen, in which members can only gain access through colleagues or personal contacts, it is not entirely representative of all oppressed individuals working in the industry, as some people may be unaware of the group's presence, or absent from Facebook platform altogether.

## 6 Analysis

This chapter presents a set of major themes that emerged from the data collection of the #sistabriefen group: solidarity, awareness and support, inner strength, sense of security, and organizational structure. The final two sections will examine the mechanical aspects and significance of Facebook and discuss the impact of #sistabriefen on its members and the communications industry.

Each interview participant is assigned by a number (1-23) that corresponds with their identity. Sections 6.3 and 6.6 exhibit groups of informants that are categorized according to their specific tone of responses. The focus of the analysis is to address the below research questions:

**RQ1:** Are digital social movements able to effectively mobilize social change?

**RQ1.1:** How have members been motivated to participate in the #sistabriefen group?

**RQ1.2:** How do members identify themselves with the #sistabriefen group?

**RQ1.3:** How do the group features of #sistabriefen affect the involvement of members?

RQ 1.1 and RQ 1.2 are discussed together in sections 6.1 - 6.3 due to their close relationship, and RQ 1.3 is addressed in sections 6.4 - 6.5. Finally, RQ1 is examined in section 6.6, as it was deemed necessary to analyze the sub-research questions before investigating the overarching matter of the study.

### 6.1 Solidarity

One overarching theme that arose from the data is solidarity, as many members expressed their feelings of inclusion and unity among the members in #sistabriefen and the #MeToo movement. As a reminder, there were two cycles of coding involved, Initial and Pattern Coding, which enabled an identification of keywords, relationships and social processes in order to develop themes (Saldaña, 2009). After reviewing textual segments of the interviews and Facebook group posts, many members expressed their feelings of togetherness within and outside of the communications industry:

Q: Why do you feel it is important to engage with other women in the communications industry?

Participant 2: “We women in the industry must support and lift each other up. I feel the responsibility as a female leader to drive this change and support younger women in a way that I myself have not been supported. [...]”

Q: How has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) impacted your view on gender equality in the communications industry and in the Swedish society at large?

Participant 9: “[...] We are also hugely impressed by the support and love that women and non-binaries have shown each other during this storm. In the middle of it all, there is a great community that makes us feel that we are backed up if anything would happen to us. It gives us hope. [...]”

Both participants express a strong connection to the communications industry. In the interview, participant 2 revealed that she had shared experiences with other women both within and outside of the industry, but the advertising industry is especially oppressive for women, as it has traditionally been led by men. A few other respondents mentioned the exceedingly low global percentage of women working as Creative Directors, which is problematic in the workplace. Some of the other respondents who have worked in the creative department at an agency have spoken out about their challenges, saying that male colleagues have excluded or undermined their positions at work. Creative Directors are essential to the management of agencies, as they are responsible for creating, planning, and delivering a strategic campaign to the client (Graduate Prospects Ltd., 2018). Even though participant 9 is a student studying to be a creative at an agency, they recognized that a lack of female, non-binary and trans-persons representation is critical to the production of advertising messages by creating a separate social media platform to raise awareness of this particular industry issue.

These participants exhibit a distinct difference in their motivations for partaking in #sistabriefen; participant 2 emanates an uncertainty reduction as to motivation, whereas participant 9 reflects a form of motivation through self-enhancement. Self-enhancement characterizes one’s engagement in a group as seeking a positive affirmation of the self, whereas uncertainty reduction concerns one’s validation of self-conception through interacting and observing group members’ behaviors

(Hogg & Terry, 2001). Participant 2 was dismissed from their job as a result of driving changes at their agency. This person explained that #sistabriefen had given them a sense of community and empowerment through engagement, which enabled them to challenge and reflect on their offline context.

Participant 9 indicates self-enhancement in their membership, as they appear to have known about the male-dominated industry and lack of gender representation among creative professions before #sistabriefen. In the interview, this person acknowledged that men tend to support one another in the advertising industry, thereby solidifying their positions of power. The #sistabriefen group inspired them to create their own separate platform, in cooperation with another student, to incorporate individuals' testimonies into concepts that describe the structural problems of the communications industry. While they anticipate beginning a career in advertising, participant 9 and their project partner are provided with ample knowledge, and a community of industry professionals to support their advocacy for gender equality.

Although the #sistabriefen group originated from the #MeToo movement, members have articulated its dimension as a separate entity of the overarching movement:

Q: Do you feel a part of the global #MeToo movement?

Participant 2: "(...) I feel an even stronger bond with the Swedish movement."

Participant 6: "Yes, in a way. Or like this - as a part of the Swedish movement, absolutely (...) I can certainly feel a strong global sisterhood, but do not know of everything that is happening abroad."

Although these individuals may perceive #MeToo as an overarching influence in the development of industry hashtags, they emphasize the localized solidarity of #sistabriefen and its impact on Swedish society. According to the observations, one member posted that they had not been personally harassed by men at work and was more interested in ending a broader range of sexual violations, regardless of sexual orientation or gender. As a result, this person felt obliged to leave #sistabriefen, as they felt that the group was focused more on ending acts of sexual harassment committed by men. Despite their reasoning, they wished the group a heartfelt goodbye and encouraged everyone to continue fighting for gender equality at the workplace.

Comments flooded in under this person's post, as members became confused by their decision to leave the group without engaging in a group discussion. One of the commentators expressed their frustration, as they deemed #sistabriefen to be a place for support, regardless as to whether a member has been personally victimized or not. Following this, an administrator responded in the comment section by acknowledging that #MeToo is a separate movement from #sistabriefen and encouraged members to support this person's decision for leaving the group.

The process of depersonalization involves a person's assimilation to an in-group prototype (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Even though some of the members in #sistabriefen may have disagreed with the individual's reasoning for leaving the group, this individual perceived a group prototype that was not compatible with their categorized self. In comparison, one group member wrote:

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 1: "I feel sad and have been quite depressed lately. The reason is because harassment not only comes from men. In June [year x], I resigned from [company x], but this time there was harassment (suppression techniques, violations) from two female executives. This makes the situation even harder."

This participant was a victim of workplace harassment, which was committed by both men and women. This statement contradicts the previous individual's conception of the #sistabriefen prototype as an exclusive effort against predominantly male-committed sexual harassment and power abuse. In contrast, other members felt strongly about how men have a significant impact on societal structures:

Q: What was your established view of gender equality before #sistabriefen was created?

Participant 16: "That we live in a patriarchy where socially created gender roles make women subordinate in society. And that these structures permeate everything, even the working life. For example, today we do not live in the principle of equal pay for equal work. And that men violate women and we see it, but accept it."

Participant 16 views men as the responsible actors for upholding patriarchal structures, which is also reflected in many of the other participants' answers and group posts. Due to the fact that #sistabriefen restricts its membership to only women, non-binaries, and trans-persons, the group defines itself as a solidarity for vulnerable groups who feel victimized by the patriarchal structures that are instilled in the communications industry.

Additionally, members have shared a common understanding of the protocols and processes that occur in communications organizations; ranging from companies, to agencies, and individual freelancers. Participant 12 is an employee at a non-agency communications organization, participant 9 is a student anticipating work in the industry, and participant 23 no longer works in the industry:

Q: What is your impression of the agency life for women?

Participant 12: “[...] My impression is that women get the job that is not so prestigious and that they rarely play a prominent role in meeting with customers (they are often the customer). Men draw up guidelines, negotiate quotes, and are visionaries. The women produce, structure and deliver. I’m hardening it, of course, but that’s the impression I got.”

Q: How has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) impacted your view on gender equality in the communications industry and in the Swedish society at large?

Participant 9: “As we have perceived it, the male perpetrator has often been a ‘star’ at the workplace - thus; no one wants to get rid of them at the agency. And when men are valued higher than women and non-binaries in the industry, we ask ourselves the question - will the agencies ever be on our side?”

Q: Has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) affected your life at work and/or outside of work?

Participant 23: “It has not affected me, but my surroundings. As my surroundings think more about it now, then I become indirectly affected. [...]”

Although these members are not employed at agencies, or even within the industry itself, they resonate with many of the other members in the group who identify and are impacted by the blatant

inequalities of the communications industry. The below participant describes how they directly relate to other members:

Participant 19: “[...] #sistabriefen quickly reminded me about the feeling of almost always being alone as a woman amongst the creators at the agencies; if every time your ideas have been ignored, to soon be presented by someone else (man) who gets all the attention; all the job interviews (for and with men) who in the end always have to squeeze in the question of how you are thinking about having children. You can continue as long as you want. Most women can do that.”

Kings (2017) defines a stark contrast between inter- and intra-categorical differences among actors: inter-categorization refers to the inequalities between social categories, whereas intra-categorization regards the overlapping qualities of two actors in a social relationship. Applying this approach in respect to the self-categorization theory, prototypes are created by the ratio of intergroup to intragroup differences; thus, enhancing the shared social qualities of group members (Hogg & Terry, 2001).

The inter-group differences between #sistabriefen members and individuals who identify with the #MeToo movement are articulated by contextual and structural differences. The #sistabriefen group distinguishes itself amongst others in the #MeToo movement by highlighting inequalities that specifically occur in the communications industry, such as the lack of non-male leadership or exclusion from creative direction.

In one instance, a member shared a webpage called *The 3 Percent Movement*, which was established to increase the 3% female representation of Creative Directors by at least 50% in the U.S. (The 3 Percent Movement, LLC., 2017). According to its website, women influence almost 80% of consumer spending worldwide, which benefits agencies with a higher proportion of female creative direction (The 3 Percent Movement LLC., 2017). Members have underlined the issues of gender misrepresentation in communication production both nationally and internationally, which has enabled them to acknowledge their own positions in challenging advertisements, campaigns messages, and brand identities.

As observed in the group, one member posted an image of a lingerie advertisement that was displayed at a busy subway station. It was criticized by group members because of its objectification of women wearing only undergarments. As a result, one of the members proudly posted their involvement in changing the company's new Christmas advertisement, which showed women standing confidently in business attire with a short-written description of the lingerie line. As one person suggested:

Participant 13: "Gender equality in the industry is something that has to be worked on every day both large and small; in meetings, in project-based groups and how we work with assignments and campaigns for our customers."

The #MeToo movement encompasses a larger solidarity movement of actors who aim to defeat all forms of sexual violence and power abuse against vulnerable members of society. In the case of #sistabriefen, however, it involves the mobilization of women, trans-persons and non-binaries in changing industry behaviors to overcome sexual harassment, sexual abuse and power abuse. In doing so, the group promotes an elimination of gender degradation in business communications output by fostering a safe professional environment and promoting a more gender equal representation among creative positions. Whether group members are motivated to participate in #sistabriefen based on notions of self-enhancement or uncertainty reductionism, their responses resonated a predominant unity in the combat against patriarchal structures within the communications industry and Swedish society in general.

## **6.2 Awareness and Support**

This theme emerged after learning about how some members coordinated with similar #MeToo hashtag groups through an intergroup support network, whereas other members were deeply affected in their personal lives by the intragroup support of #sistabriefen members.

### **6.2.1 Inter-Group Networks**

As a collective, #sistabriefen was not only created for the purpose of facilitating structural changes in the communications industry, but to also support and spread gender equality in all industries. One of the administrators of the group wrote about their cooperation with other hashtag groups, such as lawyers, #medvilkenrätt (with which right), restaurant workers and #vikokaröver (we are boiling over):

Q: How have women in #sistabriefen supported women in other industries and vice versa in the #MeToo movement?”

Participant 6: “[...] in particular, we, in #sistabriefen, have assisted [others] with communicating to the media, as well as responding to general PR [public relations] questions. We recruited a small “PR Council” from the #sistabriefen group and invited them to a larger coordination group. I personally contacted P3 News and suggested that they follow the restaurant movement #vikokaröver, because I thought it would be typical if we got all of the attention as communications women. #medvilkenrätt has assisted us in concrete terms with legal issues, anonymity, and assisted individuals who have faced challenges and been threatened with slander by employers for speaking out. We generally consult each other and try to coordinate so that our calls do not collide in the media space. Now we are working together in our second meeting with the Minister for Gender Equality, Åsa Regnér in March to come up with a common requirement list. What else? I have spontaneously trained others in media for other ‘calls’.”

The above text conveys how some members offer their expertise in public relations to coordinate and boost the media presence of other hashtag groups and, in turn, receive beneficial advice. The Social Identity Theory describes that a group categorization forms by generating distinctive traits and normative perceptions of members who belong in the group (Hogg and Terry, 2001). The categorization of the #MeToo movement shares a similar objective to the #sistabriefen group in challenging patriarchal structures that are embedded in the Swedish society. Participant 15 generated thousands of supporters for the #MeToo at Sergels Torg in Stockholm by creating a public Facebook event (Lindström, 2017). She was one of the interview respondents that enlightened the #MeToo movement in Sweden:

Q: What have you learned from other women (and the Swedish society) since the beginning of the #MeToo movement in Sweden?

Participant 15: “That we all have lived in a hidden oppression that has been so deeply rooted in our societal structures that we did not realize the breadth of ourselves. Together, we are strong, and if we just get together and agree, then we can make big changes.”

The difference between the #MeToo movement in Sweden and #sistabriefen is in the strategies employed in achieving these objectives. For instance, the #MeToo hashtag in Sweden represents patriarchal oppression both related and unrelated to professional industries, whereas #sistabriefen focuses on mobilizing against patriarchal structures within a particular industry. A couple of the respondents also made a global comparison of the impact of #MeToo in Sweden:

Q: Do you feel a part of the global #MeToo movement?

Participant 13: “Yes, I absolutely do. An interesting comparison, however, is that I worked at our sister office in Seoul, South Korea for two weeks in November, and was curious about how they talked and worked with #metoo - among the employees, society and their customers. Unfortunately, nothing was talked about there. They were not at all as apparent and open to talking about these issues in Korean culture, in my opinion. They may not be ready, what do I know. However, it needed to be lifted in more parts of the world.”

Q: How has it been ‘simple and effective’ for #sistabriefen (and #MeToo movement) to engage and spread the word? Are there any organized activities that happen outside of the group?

Participant 11: “Social media as enabled a simple and effective spread and communication of both #metoo and the communications industry’s own call, #sistabriefen. Several activities have been arranged outside of the group, such as our *TakeTwo* initiative and a seminar as late as Friday, where several organizations and trade unions [...] joined forces and presented how they together take the relay stick so that #metoo and #sistabriefen not only become a blanket, but also bring about actual action and change.”

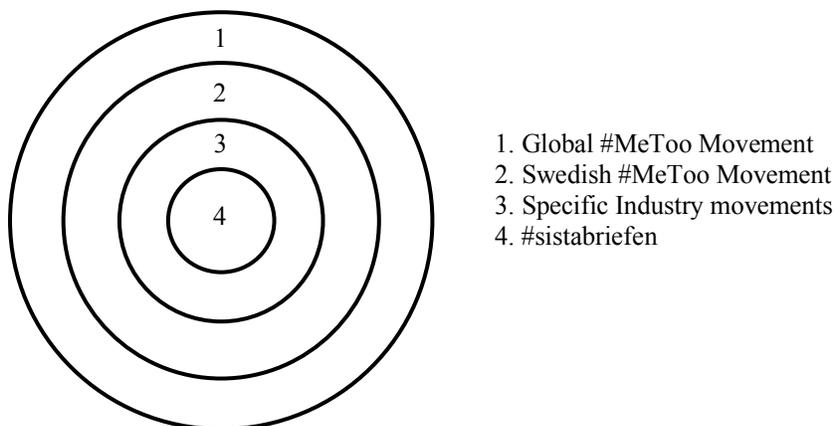
Participant 11 and 13 acknowledge the awareness that #MeToo has produced on a global and national scale and describe how it has affected Sweden and other societies, namely South Korea. As mentioned earlier, participant 11 was one of the founders of the *TakeTwo* organization, which trains and certifies media businesses and organizations to recognize the importance of gender equality (TakeTwo, 2018b). Her perspective may vary from other #sistabriefen group members,

as she is deeply involved in promoting gender equality on an international and national scale through a separate initiative. Nonetheless, her expertise provided insight into how the #MeToo movement and #sistabriefen provoked action from key organizational actors.

In relation to group observations, one of the members shared an article in *Dagens Nyheter* (2017), which described how Sweden is unique in the spread of the #MeToo movement. Åsa Regnér, the former Minister of Gender Equality, explained the waves of feminism that have occurred in Sweden, saying that women are aware of their rights in Sweden. The country is ranked fifth in the world for gender equality and continues to uphold its position as women enter stronger positions in raising their voice (Dagens Nyheter, 2017). She states:

“The fact that Sweden is relatively equal, and that we perceive ourselves in this way, makes MeToo’s great impact possible. That, along with women who know how to fight best side by side, is what writes history.” (Dagens Nyheter, 2017, para. 14).

The #sistabriefen group in relation to the global #MeToo movement can be perceived as four layers of social networks. Each of these layers represent a unique categorization in the #MeToo movement, with a distinct set of dynamics that promote awareness and support amongst various groups.



*Figure 1. Levels of Support in the #MeToo Movement*

The layers in Figure 1 illustrate a support network: (1) the global #MeToo movement was adopted by the (2) Swedish society, which quickly spread throughout (3) specific industry groups, thus

creating support for the formation of (4) #sistabriefen. As the layers move inward, the support and awareness become strengthened on a more localized level, including the mutual supportive relationship between (4) #sistabriefen and other (3) industry hashtag groups. Even though some participants said they felt a closer connection to the #MeToo movement, many of the other respondents indicated a greater solidarity with #sistabriefen than #MeToo. Although #sistabriefen was created with similar intentions of the #MeToo movement through personal action frames, it was established by a more localized set of actors with a specific agenda.

Connective action enables a uniform collectivity through digital “organizing agents,” which in this case entails networks among Swedish industries and societal groups to organize under hashtags (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p.752). Individuals who are seeking support within a particular industry may join a hashtag group through trusted, offline relationships; thereby extending their engagement to a group of interconnected individuals. One member wrote:

Participant 5: “[...] social media has brought back the ‘small town mentality.’ The MeToo movement is a little like that - the women share and trust each other on social media like an acquaintance or a neighbor.”

Individuals cognitively perceive social categories as prototypes, which are contextually dependent on the social comparison framework (people’s perceptions, geographical location, et al.) (Hogg & Terry, 2001). In application of the above quote from participant 5, each member’s localized, offline contexts seem to play a considerable role in establishing mutual trust, promoting awareness, and support. The “entitativity” of a group articulates its distinct boundaries and outer appearance as a coherent structure, with members who share a common objective (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p.10). Thus, it can be inferred that the entitativity of #sistabriefen contains aspects of the broader #MeToo movement but is clearly defined by its perception of the communications industry. As a consequence, awareness and support for victims of sexual violence may become strengthened and reconfigured as the layers continue to develop into more localized contexts, creating a distinct category.

## 6.2.2 Intra-Group Networks

In order to comprehend the group prototype of #sistabriefen, it is conducive to analyze its intragroup core values in comparison to its intergroup characteristics among relevant in- and out-groups (Hogg & Reid, 2006). The purpose of #sistabriefen was to establish a secure space for women, trans-persons and non-binaries to share their personal stories of sexual harassment and power abuse in the communications industry and, in return, receive support from others within the industry. As a result, individuals who have shared or read others' stories on #sistabriefen become more aware of their vulnerable positions through group norms and values.

Participant 10 said that she had started contemplating as to whether she should let her family and friends know that she had been raped. This was in response to the question about whether #sistabriefen has affected her life both within and outside of her professional career, which indicates that she has reflected upon the severity of the committed act after engaging with group members.

During the observations, it was noted that a member posted about an abuse of power in the workplace. This individual felt that she was being taken advantage of by the boss, which led to her resignation. The repercussions for quitting this job were far greater than imagined, as it negatively affected this person's self-perception. At the end of the post, this person stated that she had been carrying feelings of self-doubt in reaction to the events. Hundreds of members commented on the post, condemning the way the situation was handled by the managers, and supported this individual by saying that she should not be the one to blame.

These powerful stories shed light on the impact and support #sistabriefen has made on individuals, including their conception of normative behaviors. Group norms are considered shared patterns of thought, behavior and emotions that are communicated by members in a particular context to "describe and prescribe the behavior of in-group members including ourselves" (Hogg & Reid, 2006, p.10). The two previous examples demonstrate how salient group norms may affect how members evaluate their offline contexts and the self. The process of depersonalization occurs through a transformation of oneself in order to assimilate into an in-group prototype; thus, aligning one's behavior and self-perception with relevant group characteristics (Hogg & Terry, 2001). As

a result, an individual may positively change their self-conception on the basis of others' normative perceptions (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Hence, members have the potential to improve their self-esteem through interaction and engagement in #sistabriefen. Consequently, members have increased their awareness of the ongoing problems in the industry.

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 17: "I have not been toughened, it's just as bad as it is still. But I have gone through several phases. First, it was the insight about how many we are and how extensive it is; then how incredibly built it is into our consciousness; how often we do not even think of it as being weird or peculiar. [...]" (personal communication, February 26, 2018)

Participant 7: "It feels terrible to read, and I was shocked but at the same time not surprised. How the industry looks like it does is no newflash, and it was so nice to put words on it and visualize the problem."

Q: Has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) affected your life at work and/or outside of work?

Participant 21: "I have become aware that everyone does not experience society as unequal, which has surprised me. It has undoubtedly contributed to deep and fiery discussions."

These participants demonstrate distinct types of awareness. Participant 17 was personally affected by reading the stories of other members and gave their insight into the industry and society as a whole. Participant 7 acknowledges the stories as a reminder of the current structural problems, whereas Participant 21 is astonished by the magnitude of the issue. Many of the other interview participants had revealed their awareness of the patriarchal structures that are embedded in the communications industry and recognized #sistabriefen as space in which these issues are identified and confirmed.

The salience of group norms evolves from the social interaction of individuals who aim to influence the group framework in accordance with their subjectively favored identity (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Participant 17 has a considerable influence on the creation of in-group norms, especially since they participated in drafting the group rules and #sistabriefen appeal. A few of the

respondents indicated their age or working experience in the industry, which revealed a correlation to the intragroup support. For instance, those who identified themselves as having extensive experience in the industry emphasized the need for support and awareness for members who are relatively new to the industry, and are more likely to prescribe normative behaviors by transforming the younger members' burden of guilt into a positive affirmation of their courageousness.

It is apparent that the intragroup support and awareness of #sistabriefen is highly dependent on a person's involvement and experience in the communications industry. Though, it is essential to apply Lykke's (2005) criticism of competing intersectionality, which entails the prioritization of social categories under a hierarchical categorization structure. There may be deeper, underlying reasons why certain members are more involved than others aside from their connection to the communications industry, reduction of uncertainty or self-enhancement purposes, which are narrowly examined by the Social Identity Perspective (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Nonetheless, as the evidence suggests, the #sistabriefen group provides a space of support for those who have felt isolated in their offline contexts and instills an awareness amongst members of the realities of a multi-dimensional industry environment.

### **6.3 Inner Strength**

A recurring theme among members was their acknowledgement of inner strength by partaking in #sistabriefen. This theme was derived from analyzing how some informants were able to restore self-confidence through group interaction, and how others were willing to provide beneficial knowledge to the group. One of the members wrote a compelling post about how the #sistabriefen group was able to restore their self-esteem. This individual had previously shared a story in the group about a past work experience that negatively impacted their self-worth and thanked the members for supporting them by finding a dream job at an agency that treats them with respect. This exemplifies how the members of #sistabriefen used their connections to effectively revive this person's self-confidence. Many of the interview respondents have also discovered their inner strength through the movement:

### Participation based on uncertainty reduction:

Q: Has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) affected your life at work and/or outside of work?

Participant 2: “Yes - as I have said, I got rid of my job because of my commitment. Got my eyes opened up to reality but also a strength that I didn’t know I had in me.”

Q: How has #sistabriefen influenced your view on gender equality in the communications industry and in Swedish society at large?

Participant 19: “For the first time in a very long time, I dare to believe in faster and more visible changes. I have, of course, thought and hoped for changes to take place, as ‘revolutions’ have previously done (suffragettes and other strong women’s struggles over the years) - but when it happened I was surprised by the size, the strength, the power, and what I experience as a feeling of ‘spontaneous self-esteem’ in the movement [...]”

Participant 17: “I have more hope now than before. I was more resigned then. Now I’m more uncompromising, fiercer.”

These participants have evaluated themselves by comparing their internal thoughts with group members’ actions. As Hogg and Terry (2001) denote, there are two socio-cognitive processes that transpire in group settings: the categorization of the self as a result of exhibited socio-normative behaviors, and the formation of a group identity, which is produced by an abundance of favored individual norms and stereotypes. In the above-mentioned cases, participants channeled the actions of #sistabriefen into an evaluation of the self. Consequently, these individuals were able to rebuild their confidence, and vindicate their reputation. In the following examples, respondents have also conveyed empathy with the movement, even though they were not personally affected by sexual violence or power abuse:

### Participation based on self-enhancement:

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 13: “I think it’s important and courageous that so many share their experiences. It gives a strength to all of us to dare more and not accept things that happen in your vicinity that are doubtful or obviously wrong.”

Participant 4: “I felt a strength in that the women chose to share their stories in and outside of the Facebook group. A unity has been formed among women within the movement. Additionally, I have felt disgust and anger over the fact that these sexual harassments have taken place.”

Participant 21: “[...] The old power structures where men dominated by sexual power and suppression techniques must be broken. I’m sad to see what women have been exposed to, but proud that we can join together. We are strong together.”

The above groups of participants exhibit two separate motivations toward the same objective of empowerment. Self-categorization entails the reduction of self-uncertainty by “transforming self-conception and assimilating self to a prototype that describes and prescribes perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors” (Hogg and Terry, 2001, p.6). The participants that classify under uncertainty reduction may have discovered their inner strength by receiving supportive comments on their posts or reading what other members have accomplished.

One member, for example, posted a link to *The Equality Ombudsman (Diskrimineringsombudsmannen)* (2018) referring to the law against discrimination, which describes an employers’ obligation to protect their employees from any kind of harassment by maintaining a safe work environment (*Diskrimineringslag 2008:567*, ch. 2 para. 3). Members also gave their personal advice to individuals on how to follow-up with their managers on the #sistabriefen appeal. The process of self-categorization purposefully reduces one’s subjective uncertainty by downplaying socially accepted norms outside of the group, while enhancing positive norms within the group (Hogg & Terry, 2001). The group members were able to provide knowledge and tools to vulnerable members to assess their respective work environments, and how best to counteract sexual harassment and power abuse.

Self-enhancement entails the social categorization process of a group in which in-group norms are established (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Participants who motivate their participation based on self-enhancement may be more likely to drive the in-group values and norms by applying their

predisposed knowledge and values to the group in support of victims; whereas participants who are motivated based on uncertainty reduction may become more aware of the structural problems in the industry after joining the group. Participants working in respectful work environments may be more likely to drive the in-group norms toward a strong advocacy for gender equality, which encourages others to discover their inner-strength in challenging patriarchal structures.

Some members, however, feel slightly detached from #sistabriefen. The following examples from two participants provide insight into their emotions about the group:

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 3: “Compassion, sadness, strength and will to move forward. Sometimes I think the posts are a bit scattered. I do not always agree. But I feel sympathetic to everyone who shares them.”

Q: Can you describe what you meant by “the comments are a bit scattered”?

Participant 3: “They talk about highs and lows, generally and individually, from severe assaults over a gray area to dirtbags and bad upbringing.”

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 22: “I did not know that abuse occurred to such a large extent. However, I have not been violated myself, so I cannot relate to it on all levels. [...]”

The Social Identity Theory describes a social category that one falls into, and to which one feels a belonging, thereby contributing a feature of the self to the group category characteristics (Hogg and Terry, 2001). Consequently, social identities become evaluative, which enable group members to adopt and maintain in-group and outgroup comparisons (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Participants 3, 14, and 22 demonstrate an alternative perspective of the favored in-group norms of #sistabriefen. Participant 3, for instance, empathized with the movement, but felt that the posts were too dispersed, which resonated closely with participant 22’s point of view. Participant 14, on the other hand, was involved in three separate #MeToo groups, which indicated their stronger connection to

the general #MeToo movement than #sistabriefen. Although these individuals do not oppose the norms of #sistabriefen, they may not be fully committed or align themselves with the group identity; defeating sexual harassment, sexual abuse and power abuse within the communications industry.

It appears that some group members who do not work in the communications industry, or have little connection to it, were added by their friends or acquaintances to attract volume and attention for the #sistabriefen group. Despite the magnitude of members who have joined the group thus far, the ability of members to instill confidence in one another depends on their relation to the communications industry. The members who work, or have previously worked in the industry, reap the most benefits and contribute greater knowledge than the members who have joined #sistabriefen for an alternative reason.

As one member wrote in the discussion, the purpose of the group is not to oust perpetrators, but to illustrate the power disparity, sexual harassment and sexual abuse that occur in the industry. Regardless as to whether an individual has been personally affected or not, the individuals who have shared their stories are not considered defenseless, but as powerful agents who have revealed their strength in unity and progress toward gender equality.

## **6.4 Sense of Security**

The sense of security category emerged after understanding the implications of group privacy on members' behaviors, and how media leaks affected the purpose of the #sistabriefen group. The privacy of the group was created to restrict public anonymous searches, which indicates that members are only allowed to add new members through personal connections. Interview respondents have stressed the crucial element of the group's secrecy:

Q: Do you think that it's important that #sistabriefen is a private group?

Participant 1: "Yes, I think it's important that the group is private. I imagine that the tolerance level is much higher then. I would never write something that was very pronounced or personal, publicly about the #metoo cases or violations at work, if I'm to be

honest. There are too many trolls out there that like to find a fault or bring misunderstanding. I have also had leading positions for the past ten years, which makes me need to think of what I'm saying.”

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 5: “I think it’s great that there are fora where you can share in a ‘no shame’ setting and that MeToo has created a place for women to feel backed up and safe. I also feel dejected and concern about what women are exposed to everyday. And I am ashamed of men who behave in a degrading way.”

These respondents emphasize a key feature of #sistabriefen: its determination to maintain a safe space for its members by ensuring that any disclosed information will not jeopardize their employment status or reputation. Participant 1 believes that the safety of the group is crucial to its identity, as they view the behaviors and actions of the group differently than those outside of the group. Evidently, this individual engages in group activity in order to reduce their subjective uncertainty, thereby producing an internal motivation to remain in the group (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Participant 5 views #sistabriefen as a non-exclusive setting behind the barriers of support and protection from other women, trans-persons and non-binaries within the communications industry, and as a foundation for the #MeToo movement. In other words, they regard the #MeToo movement as an initiative that was based upon the privacy of individuals.

Before the public release of the #sistabriefen appeal in late November, members were posting their private experiences in the Facebook group. Almost a week prior to the release, an article was published in *Dagens Opinion* with three personal stories that were leaked from the #sistabriefen group (van den Brink, 2017). One administrator explained that she felt obliged to delete everyone’s stories:

Participant 6: “[...] The sad thing, however, was when I had to delete everyone’s stories because of the leaks from the group.”

The rules of #sistabriefen explicitly state that its purpose is to maintain a safe environment for women, non-binaries and trans-persons to post without consequences, and to prevent posts from

spreading beyond the group (personal communication, November 15, 2017). The three stories that were published in *Dagens Opinion* were retrieved without these individuals' consent, which undoubtedly led to the frustration of many group members who felt exposed (van den Brink, 2017). Accordingly, the administrators of the group created an email address and a Google document for individuals to submit their stories anonymously in preparation for the #sistabriefen appeal. As indicated by observations, one of the administrators changed the name of the group to "Share your best Spotify playlists" in order to anonymize the group's identity for increased security measures. Members were advised by administrators not to share the article and remain silent about the appeal before its release.

Following the *Dagens Opinion* article, another article was published in *Resumé* in response to the leak of members' stories in the "secret #MeToo group (*hemliga #metoo-grupp*)" within the "communications industry (*kommunikationsbranschen*)" (Thambert, 2017). The reporter questioned the journalist at *Dagens Opinion* about his intentions for using the personal stories of individuals in a closed Facebook group. The journalist replied by saying that it was his duty as a journalist to use concrete information for his credibility, and that his actions did not result in hurting anyone (Thambert, 2017). The *Resumé* article, however, exposed the group as well by naming its administrators, and incorporating quotes from members' posts who were aggravated by the leaks in the *Dagens Opinion* article. After this article was published, one of the administrators posted in the group asking members not to spread or comment on the article. Members were infuriated with the journalist's choice of words, including his demeaning reference to #sistabriefen as a "club," and his reasoning for using "concrete" material without harming individuals (Thambert, 2017, para. 7-8). The administrators also addressed the issue that their names were stated in the *Resumé* article without their consent.

In retaliation to the leaks, one administrator (2017) wrote an opinion piece in *Nöjesguiden* about the ethical violations that #sistabriefen had to overcome. She explained in the article that #sistabriefen was created in secrecy to include women, non-binaries and trans-persons all over Sweden by inviting trusted friends, colleagues and acquaintances. The integrity of the group was to ensure the anonymity of members by offering secure ways to submit their stories, and retrieve their consent (Stridsberg, 2017). She explained that the controversy over the leak in *Dagens Opinion* was not regarding the process of creating an appeal before it was published, but the fact

that victims' identities were exposed without their consent (Stridsberg, 2017). In addition, they condemned the rhetoric of the *Dagens Opinion* journalist in *Resumé*, as it demonstrates a severe lack of respect of the #MeToo movement and for victims' accounts of sexual violence.

The common category membership of a group promotes intersubjectivity, as it renders a framework for people to share their interpretations of the social world in compliance with the group normative (Hogg & Reid, 2006). In order to produce a group normative, a group prototype must be emplaced, as it instructs members on how they ought to behave in a group context (Hogg & Reid, 2006). The secrecy tool used for Facebook groups constitutes the #sistabriefen in-group prototype, as it instills a common category membership among women, non-binaries and trans-persons who have a general connection with the communications industry in Sweden. The leaks that transpired in *Dagens Opinion* and *Resumé* breached the rules of #sistabriefen, and its purpose. The articles threatened the core framework of #sistabriefen by infringing on member's personal identities; therefore, safety is a vital characteristic of #sistabriefen, as its members rely on the protection of their identities in order to deepen their involvement and sustain mobilized efforts.

## 6.5 Organizational Structure

An essential component in the sustainability of #sistabriefen is its organizational hierarchy, as noted by its members. The correspondence with informants, combined with an analysis of Facebook, were used to conclude how social networking sites may affect various levels of member involvement and coordination efforts.

According to Facebook (2018), administrators are able to approve or deny membership requests; approve or deny written posts in the group; remove posts and comments; pin or unpin posts; remove and block people from the group; make another member an administrator or moderator; remove an administrator or moderator; and manage group settings, such as changing the cover photo or adjusting privacy settings.

One of the interview participants who is an administrator mentioned their involvement in mobilizing efforts:

Participant 6: “[...] I took the initiative to launch the Coordination Group, for all metoo calls (67 now) so I’ve gotten a close look at what’s happening. [...] During the 3 weeks [prior to the release of the appeal], it took up all of my time awake except when I worked. Now, it has calmed down. Trying to find some kind of balance in being a driving person in the movement and the rest of my life.”

As group administrators, both participant 17 and 6 had responded differently to question #3 in the interviews as opposed to other respondents:

Q: How have you engaged with others in the #sistabriefen group? Have you written personal stories, read other’s stories, and/or commented on other women’s posts?

Participant 17: “In particular, I have managed. Protected, watched, listened, facilitated, formulated and created opportunities to talk about it.”

Participant 6: “I was with and managed the ‘call’ so I’ve done it a little differently. Read stories, wrote the appeal, contacted media, wrote in the group, commented on posts, written to people who have contacted me privately, and more.”

Participant 6 and 17 are expected among group members to monitor, maintain, and contact the media on behalf of the group. Their responsibilities in the group signify a distinctively high level of involvement in comparison to other members of the group. A couple months following the release of the appeal, there was a member who wrote in the group discussion asking the administrators why their own personal story, and others’ stories had not been published on the #sistabriefen website. Although this person acknowledged that the reason behind this may have been due to the administrators’ lack of time, media leaks, and that personal stories were no longer relevant to the current stage of mobilization, they perceived the idea of sharing stories as a form of therapy. An administrator responded by saying that administrators had to make a decision on which stories to share on the #sistabriefen website depending on how the stories were shared, and what the stories entailed.

According to group observations, before the leaks, members submitted their stories via email or Google form, which were either shared by administrators in the Facebook group with the individual’s permission, or posted directly in the group. After the leak, the stories that were posted

in the group were deleted and saved, and members were restricted to sharing their stories by email or Google form. In regard to stories that were posted directly in the group or sent via email, they require administrators to contact individuals to anonymize their stories and request for approval to share. The members who shared stories via Google form could give their permission to publish by checking a box, which quickened the administrative process. The administrators had to select among over 350 stories to convey the brevity of problems in the industry within 2-3 weeks leading up to the release of the appeal. As a result, the administrators lacked the time to edit, select and anonymize all of the stories, which left out a considerable portion of the stories to be published on the #sistabriefen website. This essential role of the administrators could have a considerable impact on the involvement among members in the group, as members rely heavily on their leadership and coordination to facilitate action.

There were a few other non-administrative members who expressed high levels of engagement by representing #sistabriefen at their workplace and sustaining gender equality initiatives:

Participant 11: “[...] I’m a mentor, responsible for gender equality and have started ‘TakeTwo’ together with [person x] and Help Freedom Offices (When I freelance) to write answers to #sistabriefen.” (personal communication, March 24, 2018)

Participant 21: “I have been engaged in issues regarding gender equality in the advertising/communications industry for many years. And previously operated a network for female creators [...]”

Participant 8: “I have written about my own experiences, driven questions in my agency, answered to the movement on the agency’s behalf and also for the industry union, debated, written comments etc.”

Participant 10: “Mostly just wrote on the call and raised the question in the union board I’m on now.”

Participant 11 describes a connection between the *TakeTwo* organization and #sistabriefen, which may have produced a mutual impact on the spread and awareness of these two initiatives. She and participant 21 show their active involvement in gender equality movements prior to #sistabriefen by contributing critical knowledge and providing an extensive network for the group. By relaying

the #sistabriefen message to their colleagues and bosses, participant 8 and 10 convey their commitment to mobilizing and representing the group in offline contexts.

Additionally, there are members who express their motivation to become more involved in promoting gender equality:

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 18: “My involvement in the call increases as I get to know what others have been feeling. I feel motivated to engage myself further.”

Participant 13: “It gives a strength to all of us to dare more and not accept things that happen in your vicinity that are doubtful or obviously wrong.”

These participants show that they are willing to become more involved within and outside of the group as a result of their engagement in #sistabriefen. There have been exceptions, however, among group members in terms of involvement, as they may feel a stronger bond with the #MeToo movement than #sistabriefen:

Q: How have you engaged with others in the #sistabriefen group? Have you written personal stories, read other’s stories, and/or commented on other women’s posts?

Participant 3: “Not so much. Have read a lot, commented on a couple, but did not share or create any of my own posts.”

Participant 4: “I have read other women’s posts. Since I am relatively new in the industry, I thought it was interesting, and above all important, to take part of other’s stories.”

Participant 12: “[...] I do not work in the agency industry, but all the communicators know that in the agency industry it’s extra tough to be a girl. [...]”

Q: How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?

Participant 20: “I do not feel a part of the group and have nothing industry specific to contribute to it [...] to me, #metoo is much more about fundamental attitudes and human rights than among different occupational groups.”

The stark contrast among the above participants shows that there are various levels of involvement in #sistabriefen, which could have been affected by the group values instilled by administrators. As Hogg and Reid (2006) describe, people may go to great lengths to fit into a specific group category. In a group with six administrators, participant 17 and 6 have conveyed that they have a considerable influence in shaping the primary group category. Despite the lower involvement among participants 3, 4, 12 and 20 in terms of sharing and commenting on others' posts, they still remain in the group, which indicates that their membership is a result of having close ties with other members working in the industry. Participant 12 conveys a peculiar perspective in the group by referring to #sistabriefen as a group comprised of predominantly agency employed persons.

After the appeal was published, a few group members noticed that the media articles were only referring to #sistabriefen as an appeal for addressing the public relations industry, which excluded the members who do not work at an agency organization (i.e. freelancers, marketing firms). However, the group rules state that #sistabriefen is a platform for individuals working in the public relations, advertising and communications industry, which in no way excludes persons working outside of agency contexts (personal communication, November 15, 2017). This issue was brought to the attention of an administrator through a group post, to which they were able to contact the media organizations and edit the misleading information.

Outgroup norms may have a significant impact on in-group behaviors (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2006). In order to prescribe group norms, members are obligated to verbally or nonverbally communicate amongst each other (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Members were able to effectively voice their concerns about the media articles in a group discussion, which brought the matter to the attention of an administrator who coordinates the group's external communication.

An accurate representation of the group's external identity was clearly an important aspect to the members' perception of the in-group group identity, as it can affect the in-group behaviors. The members of #sistabriefen have also used their online platform to meet at AW (After Work) meetings, where members were encouraged to bring their friends and colleagues to receive updates on #sistabriefen. After one of the administrators created a separate event page for an AW in Stockholm, another member took the initiative to create one in Gothenburg as well. According to

the event pages, 69 people attended the AW in Stockholm, while 42 people attended the one in Gothenburg. Although these turnouts are quite low for a group of over 6,000 members, the Facebook pages for these events do not accurately represent the actual number of people who attended. In another instance, an administrator created a Facebook event page to organize a group photo with the members in Stockholm for a well-known daily newspaper. The administrator continually updated members on the location, time and place to meet with the photographer.

In addition to the observations, administrators created several Google documents, which contained an email contact list of managers and executives from over 500 companies, agencies and institutions to send the appeal to; their responses to the movement with concrete action plans and implementations; a petition for members to sign under the appeal; and submission portal for personal stories. After receiving stories from hundreds of members, the administrators edited and anonymized the posts, and used the platform, The Golden Wave Award (*Guldvågenpriset*), to publish them. This website was established by two women in 2015 to recognize companies and agencies that promote a gender equal work environment (*Guldvågenpriset*, n.d.). *Guldvågenpriset* cooperated with the #sistabriefen movement to share individuals' voices on their website platform and created an email address for members to submit their stories in an alternative format. There appears to be an intriguing connection between *Guldvågenpriset* and *TakeTwo*, as the two organizations have worked together in the past (TakeTwo, 2018c). After observing the #sistabriefen meeting in Stockholm, there appeared to be a close collaboration among the organizational actors of *TakeTwo*, *Guldvågenpriset*, and the #sistabriefen administrators.

Clearly, there is a hierarchical structure in the #sistabriefen group, with administrators promoting the group's presence in the media and among politicians. Participant 6 mentioned that she, and a few representatives from #sistabriefen, are scheduled to meet with Åsa Regnér, the former Minister of Gender Equality, in March 2018 to discuss a political plan of action. In addition, she and three other administrators of the group were recognized at *The Agency of the Year (Årets Byrå)* (2017), an awards gala that focuses on client-agency relations for over 180 agencies in Scandinavia. These administrators maintain the group's internal and external activities by frequently posting or commenting on other members' posts and representing #sistabriefen in the media. One administrator, for example, gave advice to the group on how to approach questions from journalists to ensure a consistent group message. In this regard, #sistabriefen exhibits characteristics of the

connective action logic through organizationally enabled networks, as the group encompasses “informal organizational actors” who facilitate some dimensions of a traditional organization in terms of mobilization and alliance building (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 757). The group’s effectiveness in a large-scale network is determined by their networking capacity to recruit members and affiliated partnerships for a sustainable action plan.

It is essential to recognize that, without the efficient leadership of the group administrators, the coordination of the appeal would not have reached a large-scale network, and group activity would not have been sustained. Even though members were primarily responsible for sending the #sistabriefen appeal to authoritative figures, addressing their colleagues in work meetings about the demands of the group, and ensuring that actions are being executed and maintained at their workplace, the group administrators established the framework for mobilization. Thus, the involvement of members is highly dependent on the hierarchy of organization within #sistabriefen.

### **6.5.1 The Mechanics of Facebook**

A core feature of connective action is the digitally mediated communication that mobilizes and organizes offline efforts (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). This action logic considers the mutual relationship between technology and humans, as this affects behaviors, interactions and interconnectivity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The #sistabriefen Facebook group displays a sidebar with an About section, discussion timeline, list of members, administrators and moderators, events, videos, photos and files.

The ‘About’ section highlights the top posts of the group, photos of mutual friends, and the list of members containing moderators, administrators, friends, mutual friends, members living near your vicinity, and recently joined members. The ‘Events’ section displays all of the related events and offline meetings for #sistabriefen members, including events related to the #MeToo movement. Videos and photos are added to the group’s shared photos as individuals upload them to the ‘Discussion’, which generally feature organizational responses to the appeal, media articles and other publicity for the group. Surprisingly, the Google documents that were used throughout the coordination of the appeal were nowhere to be found in the shared files section of #sistabriefen.

Throughout the observations, members were posting on the group's discussion timeline asking for information, such as how many agencies have replied to the appeal, where to submit their personal stories, how to address the media, and how to lead discussions at their workplace. Although administrators had posted occasional updates, there appeared to be lack of general knowledge and accessible information for group members. Further, if a member were to scroll down in the earlier, more active months of the group between October and December, there is a clear reconfiguration in which the posts were published. As members became active by posting more frequently, the chronological order of the timeline was changed by the algorithmic features of Facebook. For instance, if one post received a hundred more likes and comments than another post that was posted on the same day, the post with less activity becomes obscured or displaced toward the bottom of the group discussion.

*Time Magazine* reported a claim from Facebook that the average user has access to about 1,500 posts per day, but only views 300 of them (Luckerson, 2015). Eventually, a user may see all of their friends' posts if they scroll endlessly to the bottom of the newsfeed, but this is highly unlikely due to the amount of accumulating user traffic (Luckerson, 2015). The algorithm considers the type of post (i.e. photo or a link), the time it was posted, the friends who are involved in it, and the relationship to the poster (Luckerson, 2015). This technological algorithm shapes how members engage and establish relationships, cultivating the salient group norms of #sistabriefen.

Members may alter the in-group prototype through their actions, so that the group context becomes more subjectively meaningful, and the favored self-identity becomes salient (Hogg & Terry, 2001). The interactivity and engagement among #sistabriefen members will determine which content will be highlighted, and therefore have an impact on their experiences in the group. This feature could deter members from engaging in group discussions, as they may perceive their activity as insignificant due to a lack of acknowledgement from other group members. On the other hand, this algorithm may also encourage others to post more frequently if they accumulate a substantial amount of interaction on their posts. Facebook algorithms may therefore govern to a certain extent the degree of motivation among members to participate in #sistabriefen.

## 6.5.2 The Significance of Facebook

One of the founders of #sistabriefen was interviewed in the study. This person explained their reasoning for using Facebook as the group's primary channel:

Q: Why did you choose Facebook as your platform for the #sistabriefen group?

Participant 17: "To some extent because the other calls we watched did it, mostly because it is by far the most efficient and most available tool for networking, communicating, spreading and sharing information. For better or for worse. You can see who is who, and who knows who, and get started and follow discussions in real time."

Regarding participant 17's reference to other calls that have used Facebook in the #MeToo movement, this study included another significant figure to explain their choice of social media methods in the Stockholm #MeToo manifestation.

Q: Why did you choose Facebook as your primary platform to create the manifestation?

Participant 15: "For me it was the most natural way to create an event where I could share information to keep track of how many people answered "yes" etc. As far as I know, there is no easier way to reach out to a big mass other than this."

In terms of sharing information on a mass level, these individuals would agree on using Facebook as an effective platform. According to the Internet Foundation in Sweden (2016), a staggering 5 million Swedes use Facebook (71%), which makes it the most popular social networking site in Sweden. The participants' logic behind using Facebook makes sense, as it appears to connect a sizeable portion of Sweden's population of approximately 9.9 million people (The World Bank, 2018).

However, there is a noticeable difference between their responses, as participant 17 points out the fact that Facebook enables its users to view each other's profiles. For instance, members may view each other's personal profile pictures, educational and occupational information, and whether they have mutual friends or common interests. The transparency among group members is a vital aspect of #sistabriefen, as it encourages members to become more involved in discussions and activities

by sharing elements of their identity in a closed setting. As a reminder, a group prototype demarcates a group's boundaries by the maximized ratio of intergroup differences to intragroup differences (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Although the selection of Facebook for the implementation of #sistabriefen may have been modeled after similar widespread events, such as the #MeToo manifestation, it also caters to the specific group prototype. The transparency and privacy features of #sistabriefen members strengthens its intra-group similarities for a pronounced in-group identity of women, non-binaries and trans-persons associated with the communications industry. Facebook may have been the optimal choice for #sistabriefen, as it not only provides the necessary tools for reaching a widespread network, but also enhances the #sistabriefen identity for successful mobilization.

## **6.6 The Impact of #sistabriefen**

After analyzing participant responses, posts and comments in the Facebook group, and attending the meeting in Stockholm, this theme demonstrates how #sistabriefen and the broader #MeToo movement have shaped the actions and behaviors of various organizational actors in the communications industry. Although informants have shared mixed responses concerning the impact of the movement, industry organizations have demonstrated a deeper level of commitment to facilitating structural changes in the communications industry.

### **6.6.1 Participant Responses**

The #sistabriefen appeal, which advocated for more gender equal organizations, educational institutions, and societal members, was sent via email to over 500 men and women who have a significant level of responsibility in executing plans of action. According to the group's shared Google document, over 100 organizations have shown their support for #sistabriefen; however, approximately 30 organizations out of this number have not implemented concrete actions in response to the appeal (personal communication, March 9, 2018).

One interviewee shared details from an email that was distributed to all of the employees at their organization following the appeal, which included the following: the responsible manager to contact in case of an assault, harassment or violation; a telephone line and web page that enables employees to report cases to the agency's parent company; establishing a code of conduct that is specific to the agency branch; adding a presentation to their introduction week for new employees to understand the implications of sexual harassment and discrimination; ensuring that freelancers comply with agency rules; and holding an organizational meeting in the near future to address further actions. The below respondents also noticed positive changes in their professional and personal lives:

### Positive Reactions:

Q: Have you noticed any behavioral differences and/or actions in your workplace and/or personal life since #sistabriefen was created? If so, can you describe them?

Participant 10: "A couple of male colleagues have raised concerns that they may be accused of something that they did not know that they had done wrong. They have wanted to bump gray zones with me. And said that they are now beginning to think about what sexual harassment is and what it is not."

Participant 4: "At my workplace, the movement has been acknowledged and management has announced that they are looking at the question with the utmost seriousness; and they have notified what to do if you experience something as a harassment. Before this, I did not know about any action plan (don't know if it existed); now I see that there could be a difference in action."

Participant 16: "Yes, my senior boss has taken a clear position. But also, reassuringly from the top middle-aged men."

Participant 23: "[...] we have had group discussions for those who wanted to discuss. Voluntarily and by gender, so men have had their own groups and women alike. They have incorporated an outside group that has worked with this [issue] all over the world and for large companies. Now, it's the first time they are working with creators so to speak. We have had a large compulsory gathering where we listened, discussed around the questions. And now, for four weeks, we will participate in an anonymous survey where we will check

yes/no questions every day, write if we have seen something, been exposed, [and] how we handled it. Tomorrow is the first day.”

The above participants have been directly affected the impact of #sistabriefen and reflect positively on its mobilized efforts. The below groups, however, classify the participants who were skeptical or doubtful of any immediate or long-term changes:

### Mixed Reactions:

Q: Have you noticed any behavioral differences and/or actions in your workplace and/or personal life since #sistabriefen was created? If so, can you describe them?

Participant 8: “[In the] short-term better. Now it’s going back to normal. But I think the women have become better at networking and staying together.”

Participant 22: “Nothing more than having more open conversations on the subject, which however, has cooled down.”

Participant 21: “[...] some of the men I know are raising the question of sexual harassment and gender equality more seriously. For example, my husband has worked with a gender equality plan at the newspaper he is an editor for. Unfortunately, I have also met with men who have reacted in the opposite way and hate #metoo due to the fact that some names have been hanged out in the media. [...]”

### Negative Reactions:

Q: Have you noticed any behavioral differences and/or actions in your workplace and/or personal life since #sistabriefen was created? If so, can you describe them?

Participant 14: “Unfortunately, no.”

Participant 1: “Haven’t noticed any difference at all. As I have said, I resigned as [other] women were unhappy at the company, with the “dudeness” and other things.”

Participant 5: “Again - have had very good personal experiences from MeToo, but not #sistabriefen in particular.”

Participant 20: “Nope. But I haven’t worked in the advertising industry since Aug 2018, and in the industry I’m in now, I haven’t noticed the problems of #metoo at all.”

The participants who reacted positively to #sistabriefen appreciated its efforts for engendering a solidarity among members, and promoting an industry transparency; whereas, the participants who had mixed feelings about the movement foresaw a more gradual change in the effort toward gender equality. The participants who reacted more negatively to the effects of the movement distinguish themselves from the other two group classifications by expressing a greater solidarity with the general #MeToo movement or noticing unchanged behaviors in their environments. Although each group insinuates a certain dynamic of changes that have resulted from the movement, these answers do not uniformly correspond with their personal frames of action. In other words, not all of the respondents in the study have actively participated in advocating for #sistabriefen by emailing their managers or executives. Thus, actors who have been devoted, or somewhat devoted, to driving changes in their workplaces may have reacted more positively to the outcome of the movement, as opposed to those who have sat idly by in the online group. Nonetheless, the group of participants who responded positively indicated that #sistabriefen has established an entrenched network of women, non-binaries and trans-persons associated with the industry.

An intriguing aspect from the participants is that there are elements of both connective and collective action incorporated into the mobilization of #sistabriefen. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012) note, some action networks may cycle through the three models of connective action “self-organizing networks” and “organizationally enabled networks”, and collective action “organizationally brokered networks” (p.756). The spread of the #MeToo movement from the U.S. to Sweden was carried out by an abundance of personal stories involving sexual harassment, sexual abuse and discrimination via digital networks. During this stage of the movement, the hashtag #MeToo could be classified as a self-organized network, in which people could express their interpretations with access to a large-scale network.

Eventually, the #MeToo hashtag was reconstructed into sub-hashtag social movements in industries and organizations throughout Sweden. This next phase of the movement, in which #sistabriefen is classified under, incorporates the logic of connective action through organizationally enabled networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Facebook is an influential

organizational actor in facilitating member involvement and activities, as group members heavily rely on a digital gathering space for coordination. A couple of other organizations involved in the coordination of #sistabriefen include Google and the *Guldvägenpriset* website, which are both managed by independent entities.

Lastly, there is a final component to the mobilization of #sistabriefen: the involvement of traditional organizational actors. Formal organizations are bound by their physicality, hierarchical structures, mission and stakeholders (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The members of #sistabriefen are not only members of the movement itself, but also employed individuals; thus, inherently incorporating formal organizational networks into the mobilization of #sistabriefen. The collective action logic entails formal organizations using social technologies for managing participation and coordinating objectives and building interpersonal relationships for a stronger action network (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Organizations that received the #sistabriefen appeal through social communication technologies had responded either through personal email or on their home websites to express their solidarity with the movement. The members were also encouraged to speak with their colleagues about unacceptable behaviors, which reflects an importance in developing interpersonal relationships for a greater collective action unit (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). As the #sistabriefen appeal states at the end:

“This is the most important assignment you will ever get. It is not the first time you have been made aware that something is wrong. Make sure it's the last one.

This is the last brief, #sistabriefen.” (personal communication, December, 2017)

This compelling, final statement signifies a continuance of the movement into stronger, more resourceful formal organizational networks. The members of #sistabriefen implored formal organizations and politicians to acknowledge and comprehend their objectives and facilitate a more egalitarian society. The coalition of #sistabriefen has facilitated an awareness amongst hundreds of significant organizational actors who have the authority to enforce structural changes, with the aim of altering behaviors and gender perspectives.

Although the impact of #sistabriefen may not have positively influenced everyone's view of the workplace, the responses from organizations have been overwhelmingly supportive. The online

movement has generated a massive network of individuals to share their support, and develop relationships with women, non-binaries and trans-persons all across Sweden.

### **6.6.2 #kommunikationskoden**

Following the media coverage of #sistabriefen in late November, The Swedish Communication Organization (*Sveriges Kommunikatörer*) contacted 11 other industry organizations to coordinate a meeting in response to the appeal (Törner, 2017). According to the board representatives from the industry organizations at the #sistabriefen meeting, they met with each other for the very first time in early December to discuss a plan of action (personal communication, March, 23, 2018). Together, they have created the hashtag called #kommunikationskoden (The Communications Code) (2018), and its corresponding website to establish a unified platform. The hashtag was referred to as a conversation point and an overarching concept that encompasses issues of harassment and discrimination in an array of organizational contexts (personal communication, March, 23, 2018). As each workplace has its own unique environment with a different set of rules, this hashtag aims to include all employees and organizations in the communications industry.

Although the #kommunikationskoden website has not yet been launched, it aims to overcome the silent culture by encouraging people to voice their concerns. One of the board members at the meeting referred to the issue of silence in the industry, in which individuals are discouraged to report inappropriate behaviors or discrimination (personal communication, March, 23, 2018). The #kommunikationskoden website will soon provide a guideline for individuals and organizations on how to address certain ambiguous situations with behavioral strategies, and contact references. As one representative mentioned, the #kommunikationskoden is a continuance of #sistabriefen (personal communication, March, 23, 2018). This collaboration among various industry organizations is significant, as each one of them offers a different set of expertise within the industry.

During the meeting, one of the spokespeople from an industry organization said that they are arranging seminars and full-day educational events, at which individuals can speak to an expert in employees' rights, an expert in employee working conditions, and a psychologist. Another

spokesperson stated that they have had facilitators meeting with 40 different agencies since December 2017 to converse with leaders on strategies for maintaining and achieving safe work environments. Previously, many of the industry organizations distributed material for association members only. Now, the spokespersons claimed that they are providing educational material for members and non-members, and guidelines and checklists for employers on how to handle and prevent harassments and discrimination, which are available on their home webpages and partnering websites. In addition, 10 industry organizations and The Documentation Information and Culture Trade Union (DIK) have collectively created a telephone hotline and email for members and non-members to report cases and seek assistance for issues specifically concerning sexual harassment and discrimination at the workplace (DIK, 2018).

The coordination of 12 distinct industry organizations, which are each comprised of thousands of members and a multitude of businesses, demonstrates an effective transition from the connective action logic of #sistabriefen to the collective action effort of multiple organizations. These industry organizations would not have gathered to create #kommunikationskoden and formulated strategic solutions to progressively improve the conditions of the industry without the efforts of #sistabriefen.

Traditional organizations, in terms of collective action, may carry out the facilitation of a movement that was originally formed by a logic of connective action in order to supply additional resources (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). As the industry spokespersons mentioned in the meeting, they intend on extending the purpose of #sistabriefen and #MeToo by establishing a unified platform. According to Bennett and Segerberg (2012), the connective and collective action network logics may be applied simultaneously. In this case, #kommunikationskoden represents a dual application of connective action and collective action, as the hashtag was created by the collective effort of industry organizations in order to influence agencies, businesses and association members. The reaction to #sistabriefen has not only formed a close-knit community among the industry organizations but has also created accessibility to educational information and support for both members and non-members. Consequently, #sistabriefen has activated a prolongation of the movement, which resulted in a joint logic of collective and connective action through the #kommunikationskoden initiative.

## 7 Discussion

### 7.1 Effectively Mobilizing Social Change

Social media has provided the tools and space to produce a widespread, rapid mobilization for the members of #sistabriefen, other similar hashtag groups, and the general #MeToo movement. The purpose of #sistabriefen was to change the norms of the industry and visualize the problems through digital storytelling. Since members were asked to sign the #sistabriefen appeal, regardless of their experiences working in the industry, this movement demonstrated a solidarity of the members as they stood beside each other throughout the publication and release of the appeal. The members who have been marginalized, sexualized, or exploited by the industry were supported by colleagues, and other members who understood the norms of the communications industry. The magnitude of the stories that were released alongside the signatures had a significant impact on the media and organizations, which would not have otherwise generated as much attention if the stories had been shared without the solidarity of group members.

The most prominent impact from the mobilized efforts of #sistabriefen proved to be the reduction of the norm of silence. According to the interviews and data analysis, many of the members noticed a more open conversation among their colleagues, acquaintances, managers, organizations, society, and even their spouses/partners about gender equality, marginalization, degradation, and sexual violence. In addition, industry organizations are now striving for a safer industry work environment by training employers and encouraging individuals to come forward with their experiences. The end of the silence culture marks the end of people's inability to seek help. The #sistabriefen group not only provided a space to connect, but an open atmosphere in which to discuss the normative boundaries of accepted and discriminatory behaviors.

## **7.2 The Motivation of Group Members**

Whether a person joined the group to confirm their perception of the industry, or to gain knowledge and support, the Facebook group supplied a space for members to connect and boost their confidence. The individuals who chose to share their stories in the group before the leaks, or via email or Google forms, were considered the powerful agents in this movement, as they risked their identities for the sake of expressing their internal thoughts and personal experiences. By reading and commenting on others' posts, members were able to gain a new perspective of the industry and a deeper understanding of the brevity of the structural issues. As a consequence, members have increased their confidence and strength through interacting, and/or reading discussions in the group; in the process of forming a reliable, close-knit community. Members are likewise motivated to remain in the group for its support and encouragement in their offline activities.

## **7.3 The Identity of Group Members within #SistaBriefen**

There was one key characteristic that resonated in the data findings, which was the relationship between the members and the communications industry. The analysis indicated that members who are directly involved with the communications industry by proxy of their current or previous occupations are more likely to engage with the group and notice its impact than the members who do not have a direct relationship with the industry. Additionally, members who have extensive experience working in the industry appear to offer more expertise on situations, such as how to lead conversations on gender equality at the workplace, how to address issues with an employer, or how to follow-up on the #sistabriefen appeal. As a result, these members contribute to the creation of in-group norms by prescribing normative behaviors (Hogg & Terry, 2001).

The entitativity of #sistabriefen, which entails the demarcation of a group according to its set of contextually dependent social categories, strongly correlated to the localized settings of group members (Hogg & Reid, 2006). According to the data, the awareness and support among the members for the group increased in correlation with their connection to the communications industry. Although the entitativity of #sistabriefen embodied aspects of the #MeToo movement, such as the digital storytelling concept, the group was defined by its purpose to raise awareness

and fundamentally change the distinct patriarchal structures that are embedded in the communications industry.

## 7.4 The Effects on Member Involvement

The #sistabriefen group was established based upon the premise of providing a safe, confidential space to share and engage with others in the industry. Prior to the leaks in *Dagens Opinion* and *Resumé*, members felt that they could post their stories in the group without any repercussions. Due to the privacy breach, administrators were forced to alter the channels for story submissions, which resulted in their overexertion to ensure anonymity and retrieve permissions before publishing members' stories on the #sistabriefen website. Although the leaks did not hinder the group from publishing and coordinating its appeal, they did, however, jeopardize the group's critical safety feature and core purpose. Perhaps as a consequence of the leaks, the activity in the #sistabriefen Facebook group has considerably declined, which implies that this particular digital space may soon become idle.

The coordination of the group during its initial stages suggested that a hierarchy of involvement was apparent among the members. The administrators were responsible for protecting members' identities, monitoring group activity, creating and sending the appeal to members' email addresses, coordinating media representation, and partaking in political agendas. In this case, the administrators can be considered informal organizational actors, as they played a critical role in facilitating group activities and creating alliances with other hashtag groups, without imposing a traditional collective identity brand (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). As for the members, they were responsible for creating the #sistabriefen hashtag identity, signing the appeal, showing up for a group photograph, sending the appeals to their managers and executives, creating and leading conversations at work about #sistabriefen and gender equality, and fostering a supportive environment in the #sistabriefen group. Although members were given the responsibility to carry out actions and maintain the relevance of #sistabriefen to their localized contexts, their involvement was highly dependent on the administrators of #sistabriefen.

According to the interviewees, Facebook was considered a suitable platform for its transparency, privacy features, and widespread usage. However, the social media site presents obstacles for many members due to its algorithms. The algorithms may reduce or encourage a #sistabriefen member from engaging further in the Facebook group, since it determines which posts are highlighted or hidden from the group discussion during times of high member activity. As a result, this feature promotes the salient in-group norms, and strengthens the most dominant intra-group identity by enabling some members to enhance their self-favored subjective meanings (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Nonetheless, Facebook was considered the optimal space for #sistabriefen, as it provided resources to reach a massive network across Sweden, and promoted transparency to increase member involvement; thereby enhancing its intra-group identity.

## 8 Conclusion

According to the interviews and group observations, it appeared that a large portion of comments and posts referred to women, rather than a broader scope of the group to include non-binaries and trans-persons. It could, therefore, be beneficial to investigate further into how these persons were represented in #sistabriefen, similar hashtag groups, or the general #MeToo movement in order to gain a deeper understanding of the intersectional perspective of the movement. Since this study was conducted into #sistabriefen as an ongoing social movement, further studies involving the implications of #MeToo would also be a major contribution in the field of digital social movements.

Regarding limitations, participants may have been more likely to volunteer for the interviews due to a higher level of commitment to the group, or close relationship with other participants. For that reason, the interviews represent a somewhat narrow scope of a group with over 6,000 members. Nevertheless, the depth of the interviews provided an extensive insight into members' motivations, and how they identified themselves in the group.

The #sistabriefen group was successful in transcending its power and influence on the communications industry organizations under the hashtag #kommunikationskoden, demonstrating that digital social movements possess the capacity to effectively mobilize social change. The

billion Swedish Kronor industry is powerful indeed, which is why many members feel motivated to participate in a movement that pursues an end to the perpetuation of oppressive norms and behaviors in the communications industry. Although the #sistabriefen group itself may no longer be as active as it once was in the beginning stages of the movement, its lasting impression on the communications industry has brought forth measures and awareness among powerful organizations, laying down a foundation for a more gender equal industry, and influential sector of the Swedish society.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A Interview Invitation

### Swedish Version:

Hej!

Jag heter Miranda. Jag jobbar på en kommunikationsbyrå i Stockholm och läser min sista termin på masterprogrammet “Digital Media and Society” vid Uppsala Universitet. Jag skriver min masteruppsats om #MeToo-rörelsen i Sverige och har för avsikt att göra en fallstudie om #sistabriefen i syfte att analysera:

- 1) Hur medlemmar i gruppen #sistabriefen identifierar sig med rörelsen #MeToo
- 2) Hur sociala medier har tillhandahållit verktygen för #MeToo-rörelsen att stärka kvinnor
- 3) Huruvida kvinnor som deltar i #MeToo-rörelsen känner sig om en del av en långsiktig och hållbar social förändring

\*\*Jag söker individer som kan tänka sig att svara på 8 enkla frågor via Facebook Messenger. Frågorna ställs på svenska och får besvaras på antingen på svenska eller på engelska. Sammanställningen av alla svar i studien kommer att anonymiseras och skrivas på engelska.\*\*

Jag är införstådd med de forskningsetiska reglerna och kraven enligt svensk lag som jag som uppsatsstudent måste följa för att skydda de individer som deltar i min studie från skada. Därför kommer ingen information som kan spåras till en person att släppas. Inga direkta citat kommer att användas utan uttryckligt samtycke. Konversationerna sparas i min personliga och privata profil på Facebook Messenger och raderas så snart studien är avslutad, såvida inte ni dessförinnan begär att få lämnas utanför, varvid konversationen kommer att tas bort omgående.

Min färdiga uppsats kommer att finnas allmänt tillgänglig för läsare på DiVa-portalen: en databas för forskningspublikationer och studentuppsatser som författats på 47 olika universitet och forskningsinstitutioner i Sverige.

Avsikten med denna studie är att bidra med ökad kunskap om betydelsen av #MeToo-rörelsen i Sverige och dess konsekvenser för svensk jämställdhet, i arbetsliv, politik och vardagsliv. Denna studie genomförs endast för akademiska ändamål och för slutförandet av min masterexamen, och intervjuerna kommer inte att användas för några andra ändamål.

Om du är intresserad av att delta kommer jag att skicka över frågorna via Facebook Messenger.

Jag uppskattar om ni har möjlighet att svara så snart som möjligt från det att detta inlägg lagts upp. Er tid och delaktighet kommer att uppskattas djupt!

Varma hälsningar,  
Miranda Andersson

#### English Translation:

Hey everyone, my name is Miranda and I work for a communications agency in Stockholm and in my last semester of my Master's degree in Digital Media and Society at Uppsala University. I am writing my thesis on the #MeToo movement in Sweden, and intend on doing a case study on #sistabriefen to analyze:

- 1) How social media has provided the tools for #MeToo to empower women
- 2) How members in groups, such as #sistabriefen, identify themselves within the #MeToo movement
- 3) Whether #MeToo shows indications of a long-term, sustainable social change

\*\*I am looking for individuals who would be interested in 8 questions via Facebook messenger. The questions will be asked in Swedish and may be answered in either Swedish or English. The conclusion all answers will be written in English\*\*

I understand the ethical implications in compliance with Swedish law, and will not release any information that could lead to an anonymous search on your profile, nor will I use any direct quotes without user consent. In addition, your conversations with me will be privately stored in my

personal Facebook Messenger, and will be deleted upon the completion of the study. You are also allowed to opt out of the interview at any time.

My thesis will be publicly available for readers on the DiVa Portal: a finding tool for research publications and student theses written at 47 different universities and research institutions.

The purpose of this study is to contribute knowledge on the importance of the #MeToo movement in Sweden, and its consequences for gender equality, working life, politics, and everyday life. This study is conducted only for academic purposes and for the completion of my master's degree, and the interviews will not be used for any other purposes.

If you are interested in participating, I will send you the questions via Facebook Messenger.

I would appreciate if you have the time to respond as soon as possible. Your time and participation will be much appreciated!

Warm Regards,

Miranda

## **Appendix B      Interview Guide: #sistabriefen Members**

### Swedish Version:

- 1) Varför gick du med i #sistabriefen och hur fick du kännedom om gruppen?
- 2) Känner du dig som en del av den globala #MeToo-rörelsen?
- 3) Hur har du engagerat dig i #sistabriefen? Har du skrivit personliga berättelser, läst andras berättelser, och/eller kommenterat på andra kvinnors inlägg?
- 4) Vad känner du när du läser andras berättelser och delar med dig av dina egna berättelser i en privat grupp?
- 5) Vilken roll anser du att sociala medier har spelat i #MeToo-rörelsen?
- 6) Hur har #sistabriefen (och #MeToo) påverkat din syn på jämställdhet i kommunikationsbranschen och i det svenska samhället i stort?

- 7) Har #sistabriefen (och #MeToo) påverkat ditt liv - på jobbet och/eller utanför?
- 8) Har du lagt märke till några beteendemässiga skillnader och/eller handlingar på din arbetsplats och/eller i ditt personliga liv sedan #sistabriefen-gruppen skapades? Om så är fallet, kan du beskriva dem?

English Translation:

- 1) Why did you join #sistabriefen, and how did you become a member of the group?
- 2) Do you feel a part of the global #MeToo movement?
- 3) How have you engaged with others in the #sistabriefen group? Have you written personal stories, read other's stories, and/or commented on other women's posts?
- 4) How do you feel when you read stories from others and share your own stories in a private group setting?
- 5) What role do you think social media has played in the #MeToo movement?
- 6) How has #sistabriefen influenced your view on gender equality in the communications industry and in Swedish society at large?
- 7) Has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) affected your life at work and/or outside of work?
- 8) Have you noticed any behavioral differences and/or actions in your workplace and/or personal life since #sistabriefen was created? If so, can you describe them?

## **Appendix C    Interview Questions: Participant 9**

Swedish Version:

1. Hur fick du idén att skapa #Ordrättvisan?
2. Hur kom du på orden som du har lagt upp på #Ordrättvisan?
3. Hur har kvinnor engagerat sig på #Ordrättvisan?
4. Vilka är några av de stora strukturella förändringar som du strävar efter att lyfta fram med Ordrättvisan?

5. Delar du erfarenheter med kvinnor som jobbar i kommunikationsbranschen som är särskilda för just denna bransch? Dvs. erfarenheter som kvinnor inom andra branscher inte upplever alls eller i vart fall inte i samma utsträckning.
6. Varför valde du Instagram som din plattform för #Ordrättvisan?
7. Vilken roll anser du att sociala medier har spelat i #MeToo-rörelsen?
8. Hur har #sistabriefen (och #MeToo) påverkat din syn på jämställdhet i kommunikationsbranschen och i det svenska samhället i stort?
9. Har #sistabriefen (och #MeToo) påverkat ditt liv - på jobbet och/eller utanför?

#### English Translation:

1. How did you get the idea to create #Ordrättvisan?
2. How do you come up with the words to post in #Ordrättvisan?
3. How have women engaged themselves on #Ordrättvisan?
4. What are some of the major structural changes you aim to highlight with #Ordrättvisan?
5. Do you share experiences with other women who work in the communications industry that are specific for this business? In other words, experiences that women within other industries do not experience at all or at least not to the same extent?
6. Why did you choose Instagram as your platform for #Ordrättvisan?
7. What role did social media play in the #MeToo movement?
8. How has #sistabriefen (and #MeToo) impacted your view on gender equality in the communications industry and in the Swedish society at large?

## **Appendix D Interview Questions: Participant 15**

1. How did you connect with the #MeToo movement, and why was it important to spread it in Sweden on a larger scale?
2. What was your purpose in creating the manifestation event?
3. What are your techniques/tips in creating a successful space for collective action?
4. Why did you choose Facebook as your primary platform to create the manifestation?

5. What have you learned from other women and the Swedish society in general since the beginning of the #MeToo Sweden movement?
6. Do you have an ongoing cooperation with the other women who reached out to you about starting similar manifestation events around Sweden?
7. How have you sustained the #MeToo movement in Sweden? What are your plans of actions for the future?