Feminism and Twitter

A Study of Feminist activity for social change in the global Twittersphere

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ABSTRACT

Title: Feminism and Twitter – A Study of feminism activity for social change in the global Twittersphere

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Activism had always been about networks, but since the early 2000s activism has been given a new platform: online social networks. This thesis looks at how the feminist community is using the social networking site Twitter as a tool for activism to create global change. This thesis explores several areas of this topic: how female activists are using Twitter as a tool for activism; the prevalence of Intersectional Feminism amongst the community; the global aspect of Twitter as a tool for activism; and the social impact which it has had offline.

For this study, journalism is used as the methodology. Although not a traditional methodology, this new school of thought which is being used by a small group of journals and academics, which allows for the integration of theoretical and practical journalistic work. This was combined with data collected through structured interviews and ethnographic observation.

From studying this use of Twitter as a tool for activism the successes, limitations, and problems of the concept can be seen. The successes namely lie in that activism has become accessible to a whole variety of women. The limitations are whether activism on Twitter can cause social change offline. The problems lie in that Twitter activism is only a luxury for those who can access the internet, leading to many women being under-represented in the Twitter community.

Keywords: Feminism, Social Network, Journalism, Activism, Cyberactivism, Global Journalism
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1. Introduction

1.1 Some introductory notes

This thesis came about as a part of a wider final independent project of my MA in media and communications. The project as a whole incorporates the written thesis below alongside an online web publication. The online publication that is referred to sometimes throughout this thesis is a series of written articles, and audio pieces that have been built on a web platform. The online publication is a practical journalistic work while the thesis is to be considered academic report. Still, they are built upon a common platform. In this sense the thesis can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between practical journalism and academic journalism. Whether it has succeeded is open to discussion, but hopefully it does at least provide some interesting insights on activism and social media.

The online publication can be found at: http://ace.oru.se/~emmcuh121/wordpress/

1.2 From Web 2.0 to #activism

The development of web 2.0 and social media has opened up a whole new dimension for new media. In the 1990s the internet was a place of online reference, essentially a digitalized library. However, as technology advanced into the twenty-first century the internet became more user friendly and user inclusive. Internet users were able to add and edit online references (Wikipedia), create their own web platform to voice their opinions with very little technological knowledge (blogs), and give feedback and discuss online articles written by journalists and other professionals (in the form of comment boxes and forums). The internet started to become a community that was built by its users rather than just web developers.

In the early 2000s the concept of social media became apparent and it quickly became popular amongst many internet users. Websites such as Myspace and Facebook allowed
people to connect with friends and others by the click of a button. These websites allowed for people to share their lives with each other in a way that could only previously be imagined (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

In 2006 the social networking site Twitter emerged. Twitter took social networking to a new level. Whereas previous social media sites such as Facebook and Myspace worked on a ‘friends’ basis (the two users involved would agree to link accounts on the site which allows both users mutual access to each other’s information which is displayed on their profile page), Twitter worked on a ‘followers’ basis where anyone can see, access or search any data that had been published on the site (Lasora, Lewis & Holton, 2011).

During the Arab Spring the world saw social media being used for a cause for change. Twitter and Facebook played a role in allowing protesters and activists to arrange meet-ups via social networking site, or to broadcast information, videos and images. In fact the BBC claimed that ‘Facebook Changed the World’ by becoming a tool for the Arab Spring (Newsom & Lengel, 2011). Users were able to bypass government censorship and newsrooms to broadcast news of what was happening in the Middle East as it was happening. However, the role that social media played during the Arab Spring is only one example of how social networks can play a role in social change, also referred to as #activism after the hash tag system that is used on social networking websites.

1.3 Problem discussion

Social media has thus opened up global communication to a much wider audience. Groups that throughout history who have had problems to make themselves be heard have, with the internet, been given a new, inexpensive and effective remedy. Many groups in many different societies have been given a voice that was non-existent (Harp & Tremayne, 2006).

It is well known that discrimination against women has been a part of the social structure of most civilizations. Even though within many societies women have come a long way in terms of empowerment, there are still many who struggle to achieve equality. These conflicts that women face on a daily basis are not confined to one single geographical area,
but are transnational issues that concern women in every corner of the world. Women are not only confined by identifying themselves only by their gender. Women are fighting oppression on many fronts including on grounds of their race, sexuality, physical abilities, amongst others. This type of engagement, formally known as Intersectional Feminism, is being thrown around a lot by feminist activists on Twitter. Considering social media has, as seen above, been used by excluded groups in other questions and has disrupted the normal way of conducting activism, an interesting question is posed: how are women and feminists from all different walks of life using Twitter as a means for social change on a global scale?

1.4 Aim and research questions of the project

From the above mentioned, the following research questions can be identified:

1. In which ways are women and feminists using Twitter as a form of activism?
2. In which ways does this activism cause social change through offline impact?
3. In which ways is this activism global?
4. What areas and issues are women and feminists discussing on Twitter, in particular intersectional feminism?

The aim of the thesis can be defined as:

‘To investigate the use and implication of Twitter within the female and feminist community as a form of activism.’

1.5 Scope, motives and relevance of the project

I have personally been following the development on Twitter for several years. I feel that it may have the untapped potential to be a model for other online communities and networks; I hope that with the analysis of one community on the site, this will lead to a further understanding of the impact this form of social media can have on society.
In the study only the use of the social networking site Twitter will be investigated; therefore the use of other social networking websites will not be investigated. Only feminists and women who use Twitter are investigated and observed in the project. Therefore other Twitter users are not included in this research. Women and the feminist community and movement as a whole is not being discussed either.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into chapters that follow the research process and results and conclusions that were made. The second chapter, Theory and Literature Review, explores relevant theory, research, and background information. The third chapter, Material and Method, details the methodologies which were used to collect and process the data used in the study. The chapter also deals with the scientific concept of research journalism and some practical and technical considerations. Results and analysis, the fourth chapter, presents and analyse the results of the study. The next chapter, Conclusions, explains what was gained in the project and what further research opportunities could be pursued in the future. Finally some Personal Comments on the project as a whole and what experiences were gained are made.
2. Theory and Literature Review

In this chapter, the core theory will be discussed, namely Global Journalism Theory and Feminist Theories. A literature review will be conducted. After the literature review some critical comments will be made on the areas discussed.

2.1 Global Journalism Theory

There are several different areas of thought on the concept of Global Journalism. On the one hand, scholars Ward and Wasserman (2010: 277) emphasizes that Global Journalism focuses on ‘global ethics’ which offers ethical guidelines to a wider global participation. On the other hand Stephen D. Reese (2009) questions whether global journalism is any different from foreign news, and that it can only be defined once the role of a ‘Global Journalist’ is established.

However, a more radical approach is suggested by Swedish scholar Peter Berglez. He defines Global Journalism as a separate ‘news style’ which transcends national and foreign news (Berglez, 2008: 846). In his research Berglez incorporates Beck’s concept of ‘global sense’, which essentially deals with eliminating all boundaries (Beck, 2006: 3). Thus Berglez argues that Global Journalism’s aim is to create bridges between people over transnational events and issues regardless to geographical location or national state, i.e. journalism without the boundaries that traditionally categorize it into either national or foreign news (Berglez, 2008).

Global Journalism, although a new theory, is central to this project as makes room for news regardless of its geographical location. This ‘news style’ develops away from the traditional idea of news happening in a particular spatial, political or cultural context, and focuses on the potential of news happening in a global sense (Berglez, 2008: 846, 849 & Beck 2006: 3). Global sense, in relation to journalism, refers to news without boundaries (Beck 2006: 3). Thus, Global Journalism aims to be a new way of analysing the news in relation to ‘transnational crises and threat’ (Berglez, 2008:845). In recent research into the area of Global Journalism only a few areas of journalism have been found to have articles
of a Global Journalism nature. This includes articles dealing with: climate change, the economy, and human trafficking (Berglez, 2008). All of these examples are transnational issues; the list is limited but not exhaustive.

2.2 Global Feminism (Transnational Feminism)

Global Feminism or Transnational Feminism is closely related to the ideologies of Global Journalism Theory. The movement originates from need to create a feminist argument in response to the discussions about globalization that have been on-going since the 1990s (Dubois, 2005). In short, Global Feminists discuss the effects that globalization has had on women. One of the effects which are central to this theory points to the multiplicity of the world’s feminisms and to the increasing tendency of feminists to politicize women’s issues beyond national borders (Mendoza, 2002). Therefore, similarly to Global Journalism, Global Feminism deals with issues that transcend geographical and state boundaries in an era of globalization.

One example of the implementation Global or Transnational Feminism is that feminists are creating a ‘virtual, imagined, transnational community of diverse social movements’ (Dubois, 2005) through the use of the internet and in particular social networking websites such as Twitter. The aim of creating this community is to create a utopia where global unification is more important than national identity (Escobar, 1999).

2.3 Social Networking and Cyberactivism

Activism has always been based around networks and networking however since the development of 2.0, the internet has become a popular platform for those with causes to make their voices heard (Gurak & Logie, 2003).

Cyberactivism is a politically motivated movement relying on the Internet which is comprised of proactive actions with the aim of reaching a common goal, or a series of actions that work against controls and authorities (Vegh, 2003). In general Cyberactivism
falls into three different categories: awareness/advocacy; organization/mobilization; and action/reaction. All three types are outlined below (Vegh, 2003).

- **Awareness/advocacy:** This type of Cyberactivism aims to create public awareness around a certain issue in order attract public condemnation and action to resolve the issue (Vegh, 2003).

- **Organization/mobilization:** Essentially, this type of Cyberactivism is the call for a particular action: offline action (public demonstrations); action which could be taken on or offline (sending letters or emails to a public figure); or action which can only take place online (spamming or hacking) (Vegh S, 2003). In each case it is important that the correct tools and processes must be used to create a successful impact.

- **Action/reaction:** In simple terms this type of Cyberactivism involves activists responding and reacting to some sort of event (Vegh S, 2003).

### 2.4 Activism on Social Networking Websites

Social networking has provided a platform for action offline as seen in protests such as ‘Occupy Wall Street’ (Kleinfield & Buckley, 2011). However, Cyberactivism in relation to Social Networking websites has been described as relatively ineffective and over-hyped (Gladwell, 2010). Many early examples of activism, which were described as ‘Twitter Revolutions’, have now been heavily criticized by academics studying the area. For example, when protesters took to the streets in Moldova to protest against the Communist government in 2009, the action was described as a ‘Twitter Revolution’. Academics now argue that the revolution, which happened in a country with very little Twitter penetration ‘had much more to do with the elite network coordination and succession of politics than with Twitter or any other new social media’ (Hale, 2013).

### 2.5 Cyberfeminism

The term Cyberfeminism was coined in the early 1990s, and is used to describe the ideologies of the feminist community whose interests are cyberspace, the internet, and
technology (Wajcman, 2006). In other words, Cyberfeminism simply refers to feminist activity in cyberspace.

However, the theory of Cyberfeminism is riddled with problems that have caused it to be replaced, to some extent, by the next concept to be described, Networked Feminism. The most prevalent problem with Cyberfeminism is that it sees cyberspace as a utopia and that the Internet is a place free from traditional social constraints such as gender difference. Cyberfeminism also views technology as a vehicle for the dissolution of sex and gender (Wajcman, 2006). It is obvious to anyone who has ever entered the realms of cyberspace that it is not a utopia by any stretch of the imagination. This is particularly true in relation to women’s rights, as ‘every social issue that we are familiar with in the real world will now have its counter-part in the virtual one’ (Spender, 1995). The quote can be interpreted as that the Internet has not been a safe haven for women; in fact women face the same discrimination online as offline.

2.6 Networked Feminism

Networked Feminism describes a new and emerging phenomenon of women using the Internet as a platform to fight against sexism. The movement is not simply used to describe one group of feminists, but is a term used to describe the ability that feminists have to use social media and networks to make previously unheard voices heard (Watson, 2013).

According to Stern (2013) one example of networked feminism happening in practice was in 2012 during the Presidential debate between Barak Obama and Mitt Romney. A question regarding inequalities in the workplace was posed by an undecided voter:

“In what new ways do you intend to rectify the inequalities in the workplace, specifically regarding females making only 72 per cent of what their male counterparts earn?”

To which Mitt Romney responded with:

‘Well, gosh, can’t we—can’t we find some—some women that are also qualified?’ And—and so we—we took a concerted effort to go out and find women who had backgrounds that could be qualified to become members of our cabinet. I went to a number of women's
groups and said: ‘Can you help us find folks,’ and they brought us whole binders full of women.’

The comment immediately went viral. On Twitter the hash tag #bindersfullofwomen was used by thousands of feminists on Twitter to highlight the sexism in Romney’s statement (Stern, 2013).

2.7 Intersectional Feminism

Intersectional feminism is an area of discussion that believes that women should be identified and influenced not only by their gender but also factors such as their race, physical abilities, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991). If one ignores these differences amongst groups of women, this tends to cause tension within communities, so according to Intersectional Feminists one must accept, understand and acknowledge the oppressions that other women from different groups face (Crenshaw, 1991). Belleau (2007) argues that the availability for women to cooperate using intersectionality opens ups endless ways for different groups of feminists to unite together, therefore including feminists who might otherwise be isolated.

2.8 Remarks on previous research

Previous research provides a useful background and starting point. However, the approaches which have been discussed are by no means perfect. The main problem with the research in general is that it is mostly theoretical. Theory in an ideal model of something, and when applying theory to something practical it will never fit perfectly. This can assumed to be particularly true with regard to Cyberfeminism and Global Feminism who see the internet as a utopia free from gender roles. The internet is from my experience neither of these things. However, on the other hand, Intersectional Feminism embraces the notion of gender, amongst other things in order to create a range of diverse feminisms.
Some may also argue that much of the research done in the area of Global Journalism has somewhat overlooked the female perspective. However, women’s issues perhaps relate well to Global Journalism theory as the very nature of many issues women face today happen on a global scale, for example, sexism. This opens up an interesting area for further research.
3. Material and Method

In short, journalism is the methodology used in this thesis. The use of journalism as a methodology is fairly unorthodox and somewhat experimental; however, the thesis builds upon an existing emerging area of research. Journalism is used as a methodology in conjunction with ethnography allowing the gap between the online publication and the thesis of this project to be bridged. By using journalistic skills such as interviewing, observing, and collecting information to create journalistic pieces i.e. articles, conclusions can be drawn in order to answer the research questions.

3.1 Research journalism

Using journalism as a research methodology for media & communication studies might seem surprising to some. It has as a matter of fact been pointed out that journalism does not have a specific methodology (Lamble, 2004). However it uses certain techniques and incorporates methods used in other social science research: for example observational research and interviews.

It has therefore been argued that professional journalism can be treated as a way to conduct research on its own as it can lead to new ways of gaining knowledge and understanding, leading to new and improved insights (Bacon 2012: 157). This becomes particularly clear when it comes to investigative journalism which is a form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest. For example it has been shown that 'off the record' interviews of investigative journalism is more likely to reveal miscarriages of justice than conventional social science methods (Bacon 2006 a, b).

To utilize journalism as a research methodology, a concept called ‘Research Journalism’ has been developed; one of the main thinkers in the area being Australian scholar Kayt Davies PhD, at Edith Cowan University.

According to Davies (2012) Research Journalism aims to use journalism as an ‘academic methodology to create new understanding of issues of legitimate public concern’. Davies (2012) describes that there is a problem within journalism research that there ‘are no journals that publish journalism, only reflections and research about journalism… This
state of affairs has prompted thoughts about starting new journals that would subject the journalism they publish to a rigorous peer review process and publish the material in a way that the commercial media can use as a source. If this could be done in a way that satisfies the research requirements of the universities, and provides a new source of quality journalism, a win-win solution will have been found.’ Research Journalism focuses on new content and research in a whole range of subjects and areas (which are not focused on journalism itself), whilst using journalistic techniques and presentation.

Academic articles written using a Research Journalism methodology is primarily published in the Research Journalism academic journal, published by the CREATEC research centre at Edith Cowan University. The Research Journalism Journal publishes journalism rather than research on journalism. The approach to journalism has also to some extent been incorporated by the Pacific Journalism Review, an academic journal which covers issues in the Pacific region (Bacon, 2012). The style has also been recognized by media outlets such a PBS (Posetti, 2011).

Inevitably, this is a ‘slower’ form of journalism as it requires time to conduct research as well as analysis of the content. However, as far as I see it, this type of journalism could be used effectively when researching issues that would lie in the category of Global Journalism as it allows journalists and journalism academics to write about global and transnational news within an academic context.

The subject matter of the thesis has previously been focused on by social science researchers within the field of gender studies. As mentioned above conducting research from a journalistic angle can add new and improved knowledge to other areas of social science, as long as the work of journalism reaches a certain degree of quality. The methods used for compiling the project are accepted within other fields of social science but in this thesis they are allowed to mix within the field of journalism. The interviews have been conducted in accordance with good research practice and the twitter accounts have been studied using accepted methods. Also secondary data has been researched. The research has been conducted following a careful literature.
3.2 Outline of the methodology

I began the collection of empirical data by following around one thousand feminists and women. I aimed to follow women and feminists from different countries in order to gain a global aspect on the subject. From observing and analysing the content of the tweets that users sent I was able to gain an idea of what was being discussed within the feminist activist community on Twitter.

To gain further insight into the area of activism on Twitter, I compiled a short structured interview, appendix 1, to send out to women and feminists to find out what their attitudes towards activism on Twitter were. In order to distribute the interview, I decided that the best way to contact Twitter users was to contact them via Twitter. I did this by Tweeting women and feminists I followed personally asking if they would like to take part in the interview. I also targeted feminist groups and publications with Twitter accounts, asking them to ask their followers to take part in the interview. In general, these accounts did pass on the information. I decided to target these groups because they had large amounts of followers, thus the details of the interview would be broadcasted to a larger audience, and there would be a better chance of a more diverse range of women wanting to take part in the interview.

I received a good up take on the interview. Around fifty Twitter users replied to my Tweets expressing their interest and providing an email address for me to contact them with. I sent out the structured interview along with details to my project to all the women and feminists who were interested. I also set a deadline to when I needed the answers back; this left those interested in participating four weeks to answer. I only received around twenty replies from the fifty emails which I had sent. I put this down to people losing interest, changing their mind, or simply not having the time to complete the interview.

For the article I was to write on Intersectional feminism I wanted to create an audio piece which would incorporate audio interviews from different Twitter users who described themselves as Intersectional Feminists. I planned to conduct the audio interviews using Skype and would record the interviews using a third party application. Again, I devised a structured interview, appendix 2, by writing a short series of questions. Due to the relative
success of using Twitter to get interviewees from all over the world I decided to use the same method here. Seven people expressed their interest in taking part in the interview, providing their email. I proceeded to email those interested with the details of the project, how to connect with me on Skype, as well as the questions. I feel that it was best for the interviewee to see the questions beforehand so that they felt at ease when it came to the interview, and so that they could prepare any answers beforehand. However, only one person on the seven which I contacted decided to proceed with the interview. I was able to create an informative interview with her which included a lot of information. The structured interview developed into a semi-structured interview as I asked follow on questions in order to extract extra information which I felt may be important or interesting.

Finally, I wanted to write an article that showed the demographics of the internet and Twitter specifically. However, due to scope of this sort of research I could not gather enough primary data to solely base my research on it, so I decided that I would collect data from recent scientific research into the area of Twitter usage. I then compared this data to the relevant primary data from the structured interviews.

There were other efforts made to try and arrange live interviews with feminists are using Twitter. However, after contacting several feminist groups, no interviews were arranged. This was due to people and groups not wanting to participate in an interview. It was also difficult to find experts to conduct live interviews with who were available within reasonable travelling distance. Thus, without any face to face interviews, and a topic that online-based, it was decided that no videos would be composed, as would be expected in a journal-style web publication.

3.3 Further, practical, technical and methodological considerations

This section explores journalistic and academic techniques used in the project. It will also discuss how to perform interviews in different circumstances, write appropriately, and carry out photography and audio production. The design aspects of this project will also be discussed. Deacon, in his book Researching Communications, provides solid guidelines about how to bring together a project like this. The guidelines and recommendations that are set out in this book will be followed where relevant. When looking at web publishing
and other journalistic techniques that are closely related to the internet Bull’s Multimedia Journalism: A Practical Guide will be used. Other helpful sources will also be drawn upon.

### 3.3.1 Ethnographic Research and Netnography

Ethnographic research methodology includes a handful of qualitative methods that attempts to comprehend society in a holistic way, methodologies being observation, interviews and analysis of objects/documents (El Gody, 2012: 76). Netnography is an area of ethnography that analyses the online behaviour of individuals (Kozinets, 2010).

From extensively observing activity on Twitter through watching the Twitter-feeds off the women I followed. I was able to see what interactions women made, who were the more prominent women within this area of activism, and what areas and issues were being discussed. From these observations I was able to educate myself on this area so that I could proceed and carry out with creating relevant structured interview questions. Also from observing the behaviour of feminists on Twitter I was able to make some conclusions and generalisations.

### 3.3.2 Conducting Interviews

This project incorporates research as well as journalistic technique, so an important balance must be achieved. Whilst one wants to achieve somewhat scientific information, so that the project can answers the research questions, it must be remembered that the articles are to be produced in a journalistic style, and therefore the interview must create the potential to result in an exciting and engaging news article. The global nature of the subject also had to be considered. In an ideal world one would be able to travel and meet feminists from across the global and interview them in person. However, for this project this is not possible so most of the interviews were undertaken using the internet.

Due to the fact that I knew that I would be dealing with a number of women from different countries I decided that the interviews must be taken online: via Skype or email. I first asked on Twitter for women to participate in the research, and because I received a large response of women interested in taking part I decided that structured interviews by email would be the best way to collect the data. I wanted to use structured interviews, giving the same questions to each woman so that I could compare the different answers and therefore
be able to see what was common amongst the interviewees. In the audio interview I asked a different set of questions in order to create an individual article. This was conducted via Skype in order to give the online production another dimension.

3.3.3 Writing

During the writing process of the articles, I have strived to achieve good journalistic practice by writing balanced informative articles that are accurate. Within the articles I have tried to use as many different examples of the things that I was discussing, as well as including quotes and opinions of as many different people as I could. I aimed to use the thoughts and opinions of those I interviewed to create a story rather than my own opinions.

Within the articles I made the choice to only use the Twitter usernames of the people that I interviewed. Firstly, many of the interviewees did not want their real names to be used due to some of the sensitive topics that were covered: for example sexual harassment. Therefore I felt that I should respect this and only use their Twitter tag (with their permission). I also feel that this enhances the interactivity of the project as a whole. This allows readers of the articles who use Twitter to interact with contributors.

3.3.4 Web Publishing

Wordpress was used to create the online publication. Wordpress allows those who do not have much experience in web design to create a professional looking website. Wordpress is well-known by many internet users and bloggers, so readers will be familiar the Wordpress-based website. It was important that the website was fully integrated with social media; not only because the area of discussion covered in this project is social networking, but also because this is the done practice on most online blogs and news publications. Comment boxes were also placed at the bottom of articles allowing feedback and discussion amongst readers; thus embracing the concept of web 2.0. The comments need to be approved by the website administrator before they can be published. This is primarily to prevent spam from entering the comments. In order to achieve social networking integration suitable Wordpress plugins were used.
The layout of the articles had to be determined specifically for web publication. It is common for readers who are reading articles online are more likely to scan read, therefore paragraphs were kept short and pictures were inserted in order to break up large blocks of text. This meant that the information could be easily and quickly consumed by the reader. The articles also had to be clearly dated of when they were published so that the reader knows when the information was presented.

Other considerations such as layout and design had to be taken into a consideration. After observing different online news publications the decision was made to use a clean layout which used a white background and a limited colour scheme. Text in the articles was in black with a readable font. The site had to be easy to navigate with simple links to click. Other information was added to the site to give the project some context for readers, for example: a page that described the purpose of the project, and a page about the author of the project with contact details. The main purpose of the website is to publish and display news; however it also must be visually aesthetic for the reader.

### 3.3.5 Audio Production

Audio recordings were made using a combination of Skype recordings and recording directly into a microphone. It was essential to make sure that the recording was of a high quality at the time of recording, particularly when recording interviews on Skype as quality could be easily compromised. Post-production, the audio was edited using the program Audacity in order to create a clean and professional sounding final copy of the audio story. When the audio pieces were uploaded onto the Wordpress platform, they were tested to make sure that the audio worked.

### 3.4.6 Graphics

Graphics are used in the online publication in two different ways. First, as a means of illustration instead of traditional photography because the online publication deals with concepts rather than physical things, therefore graphical illustrations are used. Second,
graphics are used to present data where necessary so that the read can engage better with the subject matter presented in the journalistic articles.

**3.5 Subjectivity, validity and reliability**

As I described above, journalism does not have a distinct methodology. Therefore a discussion on subjectivity, validity and reliability is needed.

Validity in this case about making sure that the gathered data is relevant, while reliability can be described as the stability or consistency of the findings (Creswell 2009, 190). Within the field of qualitative research this can be achieved by for example documenting all procedures, doing cross checks and checking transcripts (Creswell 2009, 191).

In relation to the sample of data which I collected for this project it strived to be as objective as possible. However, it became clear that the majority of the women who replied were white women. I think this reflects the demographics of Twitter. There are other limitations in the sample of women taken from the interviews. For example, only those who can speak English could engage in the interview or the Tweets relating to the interview. Age of the interviewees may have played a role in the sample taken too; the majority of Twitter users are in their twenties and thirties. Global time differences may have also affected the sample as the fast moving live nature of the Twitter feed means that the information passes through the system fairly quickly meaning that those in different time zones may have not seen the Tweets.

Also, the sample may be biased because of the types of people who took part in the interviews; these people may represent only a small proportion. The women and feminists who are more vocal on Twitter and therefore wish to engage in discussion may only represent a small proportion of the community. There may have been others who did not want to answer the interview questions for various reasons. Those who are more vocal may also perhaps have more extreme views on the subject which are outside the mainstream, again not representing the community on Twitter as a whole.

The above mentioned considerations limit the reliability of the findings. It is hard to say whether another researcher would come to the same conclusion. Also, people’s opinions
are dynamic and therefore change over time. Most likely it would not be possible to redo the research to verify the results.

Also the use of journalistic articles as a means of compiling material might give rise to some extent of subjectiveness, after all journalism is a form of art. This problem is dealt with by extracting the result from the journalistic articles. The articles are not themselves the result, but a mere medium to gain access to the result.

The problems discussed in this section are not unique to this piece of research. All qualitative social science research has an inherent problem of a low level of reliability. Basically it is not possible to verify the result against new similar data. Instead, as I see it, the reliability of the study is secured by verification by the reader. By thoroughly describing the methodology used and to argue convincingly in the analysis the reader is able to make an informed choice. If the majority of the readers agree with the author the study must be considered reliable.

The validity of the study has ensured by the making of the articles being carefully described above under the heading of “practical and technical considerations”.
4. Results and analysis

This chapter looks at the results of the research and analyses the main findings. Each of the articles written for the online publication are discussed and analysed separately below. The full length articles can be found in appendix 3. The full length articles can be viewed as a presentation of the empirical data collected during the research and because of that, this chapter should not be read as a full on description of the empirical material. This is why it merely provides a summary of the articles. Instead the chapter is focused on abstracting concrete scientific results from vast amount of data. The data has already to some extent processed in the articles, which has given the data some structure. The results will then be analysed against the research questions and related back to the theoretical framework.

4.1 Article - Armchair Activism

4.1.1 Summary

This is a written article that looks at the different ways in which women and feminists are using Twitter with a focus on activism. The core theme of the article was to look at how women and feminists are engaging in activism directly from their armchairs, i.e. on Twitter. The material for the article was collected using a mixture of the structured email answers as well as the observation of tweets, which were then used to construct the written piece.

4.1.2 Results

Four main findings can be abstracted from the article.

First, the article shows that feminists and women are using Twitter as a tool for activism in a variety of ways: for education, empowerment, and expression. For example, women were using Twitter to educate other users and dispel myths around women’s issues. This can be exemplified by the following quote:
“I use twitter to combat sexism, rape myths and homophobia. These are topics that I will ALWAYS challenge others on if I see them.” - @Psycho_Claire

This interviewee expressed how she used Twitter, as many other of the interviews did as well, as a tool to educate others in an informal online environment.

Second, the article also showed that women and feminists were engaging in different types of activism through Twitter. One example of this was that women were signing petitions which had been circulated on Twitter. The article discusses one example of an online petition that is currently being circulated on Twitter that is: ‘No More Page 3’ (@NoMorePage3 on Twitter). This Britain-based campaign calls for the biggest tabloid newspaper in Britain, ‘The Sun’, to stop printing images of topless women on page 3 of the newspaper. The petition currently has over 101,000 signatures and the Twitter account as over 15,000 followers; a clear example of how Twitter can drum up support in a cause.

This was one example of activism which was common amongst the women and feminists who were using Twitter. However, many of those who were engaging in this form of activism did not consider themselves as activists:

‘The availability of Cyberfeminism on Twitter and online in general has meant that many women are engaging in activism without realizing it.’

Third, a form of indirect activism could be identified. This indirect activism took the form of women expressing themselves in a way that went against the mainstream media, or stereotypes. This was highlighted in the article when it spoke about the Popular DJ and blogger @myarchedeyebrow tweets about plus-size fashion and the acceptance of larger body-types, an area which is often overlooked by the mainstream fashion industry.

This sort of reactionary expression allowed women to protest against the mainstream, and also breakdown the stereotypes that are often attributed to women.

Fourth, women and feminists who often felt marginalized by the mainstream media could find somewhere to have their opinions heard:

‘Marginalised groups are finding a voice, and that can only be a good thing… Traditional media gatekeeps women and controls which women get a voice, so mostly only views that fit with existing power structures (or easily dismissed opposing views) tend to be allowed. Twitter doesn't have that gatekeeping, and so allows all women a voice.’
This ability for women who are ignored by the mainstream media to talk about their views to an audience is important as it allows consumers of media to see a different side of a story.

### 4.1.3 Analysis

Overall, the findings of article confirm that there are many women and feminists engaging in activity on Twitter. More often than not this activity can be described as some sort of activism, thus many women who would not describe themselves as activists, are in fact activists. The areas within which women were using twitter are classical feminist areas of importance to equal treatment. This is not surprising as the results are related to the concept of Cyberfeminism, basically a form of feminism online, albeit with freedom of the in theory genderless technology.

The results also show that the women are engaging in the types of activism that Vegh (2003) discusses: awareness/advocacy. This type of activism was seen when Twitter users were using the site to educate other users about women’s issues. The article also includes an example of the second type of Cyberactivism that Vegh defines as organization/mobilization. In essence feminist activism online is not that different from other forms of Cyberactivism.

However, the findings do not give examples of the third types of activism that Vegh defines: action/reaction. This is interesting as feminism normally has been focused on change. It is not possible to rule out that the result is caused by a bias of the sampling. If not, it may be explained by the fact that online feminism is fairly new and as we will later see, not widely spread over the world. Research on “life cycle”-feminism might provide a more detailed answer and is an interesting further research proposal.

### 4.2 Article - Click for Change

#### 4.2.1 Summary
This is a written article that looks at three different projects that are based on Twitter and whether they have been a success or not. The three campaigns that are looked at in the article all relate to feminist activism. It also looks at the limitations to online activism in general.

4.2.2 Results

The main findings are:

The article found that women and feminists are using Twitter as a forum to establish campaigns and projects that strive for social change such as the Everyday Sexism Project, Let Toys Be Toys, and No More Page 3 that are outlined in the article.

It was further established that these projects were working on a global scale, i.e. women were uniting on common campaigns even though they are situated in different countries. This was seen in the Everyday Sexism project. Although the project is established in fifteen different countries, sexism was being discussed from all these different countries via the project.

It was also shown that campaigns attracted a large amount of followers and that the online petitions received many signatures. For example, an interviewee wrote:

‘The petition has gathered over 100,000 signatures so far, with an aim of 800,000 signatures.’

Projects could however have mixed impact offline. For example the ‘Let Toys Be Toys’ campaign has had success offline according to its organisers:

‘This campaign has had successful offline impact. Through signing of petitions which are circulated on Twitter and by contacting companies on Twitter, the campaign has managed to get many major British toy retailers and supermarkets to change signage in their stores.’

However the ‘No More Page 3’ campaign was shown to have achieved a lot of impact online, and it has also had a lot of mainstream media, but not actually achieved any sort of social change.
4.2.3 Analysis

Overall, the material confirm that twitter is being used as a platform for activism using campaigns, but does not give a clear answer to whether activism via Twitter works, i.e. if it causes social change. According to me the data does however indicate that the impact is limited. That said, the data did show twitter campaigns could have some successes, as shown in the ‘Let Toys be Toys campaign’. This kind of success seems to be dependent on the companies which the campaigns were targeting. This was the case in the ‘No More Page 3’ campaign, where no social change had taken place, despite the amount of support the campaign had. This lack of real progress could be due to several reasons: the type of company that this campaign is working against or that this form of activism on Twitter is a new concept and needs time to develop.

These online campaigns could be seen as a form of Networked Feminism; a section of feminism previously discussed in which women use the internet to fight sexism. This is particularly true with regard to the Everyday Sexism project, however all three projects tackle sexism to some extent. By engaging in Networked Feminism, women are also engaging in Cyberfeminism by advocating women’s rights and making others aware of women’s rights and prejudice against women, which is in line with Vegh’s theory of Cyberactivism.

The findings do have some limitations. First, the examples of campaigns used in the ones that were mentioned by the women that were interviewed, therefore not all projects are covered. Second, all the projects that were looked at originally started in Britain, although some now have a global scope now. Third, this form of activism is relatively new, therefore, all the case studies of campaigns are relatively recent, and still in progress; however, this opens up opportunity for further research into the area.

4.3 Audio Piece- Intersectional Feminism
4.3.1 Summary

Intersectional Feminism is one of the core subjects of debate amongst activists using Twitter. In this article Tweeter, Niz Bennet a Twitter activist who is well-known amongst other feminist tweeters, and who identifies herself an intersectional feminist, has been interviewed. I ask her what intersectional feminism is for her, why is it important for her, and why it had become such a prevalent subject for discussion on Twitter.

4.3.2 Results

The interviewee, Niz Bennet, stated that twitter had made Intersectional Feminism accessible to her, as information was easily available on Twitter itself through discussion, or that other users could direct you to information.

The interviewee also described that Intersectional feminism had allowed more women to engage in feminist society. She described how Intersectional Feminism had allowed her to engage with feminism not only on the basis of her gender, but also with regard to her ethnicity and physical ability. According to her this made Twitter discussions regarding feminism more diverse.

4.3.3 Analysis

Intersectional feminism is an area which is being discussed on Twitter that opens up women’s issues that incorporate other forms of oppression. It is therefore not a purely theoretical concept. This can be shown through its practical application on Twitter where women are able to engage in feminist activism on terms that were not simply confined to their gender. The fact that the interviewee felt that she was able to discuss issues other than her gender: her disability and ethnicity on Twitter, shows that feminists on Twitter are engaging in topics outside of gender related issues. This relates back to the theory of Intersectional Feminism as it is a physical manifestation of Crenshaw’s (1993) definition of the movement.
4.4 Article- Global Women

4.4.1 Summary

This written article looks at the women who tweet using the data collected from structured interviews. It explores the demographics of women on Twitter in relation to the data collected through interviews, i.e. it explores where women come from, and how they identify themselves. The data from the structured interviews are compared to secondary data for Twitter in general.

4.4.2 Results

For Twitter in general, the use of Twitter by women was more prevalent in developed countries rather than in developing countries. The majority of female Twitter users came from a country where English is the official language. Overall the global demographics of Twitter were balanced; particularly in developed countries the gender distribution was relatively equal. However, in developing countries, only a small proportion of women made up the demographics.

The sample of data taken from the structured interviews somewhat matched the secondary data which looked at the global demographics of Twitter; the main divergence being that only women was represented in the primary data. As to other statistics, women living in the developing world were not being represented. Further, most women were white people from developed countries, mastering the English language.

4.4.3 Analysis

The results raise a question on to what extent feminist activism on Twitter can be considered global. As women from different countries are using Twitter for activism,
feminist activism on Twitter is global in the sense of not being concentrated to one nation’s geographical area. Twitter is also global in its nature by being on the World Wide Web.

Despite this the ‘globality’ of Twitter can be questioned. Although the secondary data does not concentrate on women who use Twitter as a tool for activism, one can see that there are gaps in the demographic of women in general using Twitter. As these demographic gaps are also found in the primary data collected, a valid hypothesis seems to be that these findings can be generalized to women using Twitter as a form of activism. Due to the relatively small amount of primary data collected it is however not possible to come to a conclusion of any significant strength. That said, the study does indicate that Twitter is mainly a medium for western women’s empowerment. If this will change with the diffusion of internet in poor areas remain an open question available to future research.

This relates back to Global Feminism theory which teaches that women’s issues are globalized, and transcend national borders. Therefore, the lack of representation of all types of women should not be an issue. This may be so in theoretical terms: women experience the same types of oppression wherever they are in the world. However, as we have seen above, this is not always the case in reality. Western women have access to Twitter, which previously has been shown to be a new vehicle for women making their voices heard. In other words, the women’s issues might be global, but the availability of means to battle oppression are not the same.
5. Conclusions

This study aimed to ‘investigate the use and implication of Twitter within the female and feminist community as a form of activism’ through the answering of four research questions within this aim.

From collecting and analysing data and from the construction of the journalistic articles it can be concluded that women are using Twitter as a tool for activism to a fairly large extent, at least in developed countries. Women were using Twitter as a tool for activism namely through activism that required low amounts of effort: for example signing petitions. Women and feminists were using Twitter to voice their own opinions as discuss not only issues surrounding women, but intersectional issues too.

The implication of this activism was in some cases offline impact. Some of the activism projects that women were engaging in were having positive results and were creating offline impact. However, the projects that were looked at were fairly new in conception, and it would be interesting to see how these projects fare in the future.

This activism was global to some extent, as some of the Twitter-based projects were working simultaneously in several countries at once, and women from different countries were able to discuss similar issues regardless to their location. However, the users of Twitter are very concentrated to a few developed countries, therefore limiting how global the use of Twitter actually is.

Finally, this project opens up several areas for further research. I feel that there is a strong relationship between Global Journalism and women’s issues, and this would be an interesting area for further discussion. Also the representation of women from the developing world may also be an area to look into. This particular area of feminism and activism is relatively new, and prone to change, therefore an on-going analysis and exploration of the area would give us a clearer picture of what the feminist global Twittersphere is like.
6. Personal remarks

I had read all the feminist greats, I felt strongly about women’s rights, and I was a woman, so I thought I was clued-up when it came to feminism. I had called myself a feminist for as long as I could remember in rebellion to my strict Catholic upbringing, but when I embarked on this project I didn’t expect that I would learn anything, or that my perspective would be changed.

Although I have been an avid user of Twitter since its creation in the mid-2000s, I had never used it to its full potential. I followed mostly real-life friends, celebrities, and mainstream feminists who had made their name through journalism and books. These white, middle-class, privileged women were what I though feminism was. I lapped up their every word thinking that feminism was all about hairy armpits and body-shaming Rihanna. However, as I started this project I felt that I needed to meet the real women of Twitter, the real feminists, and so the list of whom I followed quickly expanded to over one thousand women from across the globe.

The global aspect of the project was crucial. I argue that women’s issues could be used as an example of Global Journalism because the injustices and oppression that women face every day transcended geographical and political boundaries. Issues like sexism are not strictly confined to one area of the globe. Society’s attitude towards women is fairly consistent throughout the world—women are second-class. Therefore to prove this I needed to follow women from all over the world, from different backgrounds, professions, and beliefs. I tried to create a mixed and diverse range of women of whom I followed so that I could paint a realistic picture of the world using the Tweets of women.

From following this diverse range of women I think I have been able to experience a fairly accurate picture of what the world is like for women. Of course, there are huge gaps in representation: I was only looking at English language Tweets, and there are low numbers of women engaging in Twitter from developing countries. But I was able to see a global discussion on issues such as poverty and domestic violence that affect women across the globe.

Further, I was introduced to the concept of Intersectional Feminism, essentially that feminism cannot be separated from gender, race, or privilege. That is it for all women to look out for all other women, a 21st century approach to global feminism. Thus the women
on Twitter must stand up for those who are not there too. This concept of intersectionalism really stuck with me. It was my job to acknowledge my own privileges and fight for all women. Twitter is a community where all women can come together.

Although I have experienced enlightenment, this has been somewhat overshadowed by the somewhat dark-side of the female community on Twitter. I found it difficult to integrate myself, to get replies from some of the women who had acquired large numbers of followers. Whether this was because they were overwhelmed with the amount of tweets they get or because they were part of the clique.

Twitter is in general self-regulated. Thus this leaves it wide open for people to bully and abuse each other. This was rife in the women community on Twitter. There was no ‘live and let live’ attitude on different opinions. I saw countless numbers of examples of women disagreeing with each other and setting their followers on the other person. These forms of bullying are sad to see in a community which needs to strive together to create global change.

To some extent is seems as though many of the women and feminists are preaching to the choir on some issues. After observing many twitter users’ accounts that dealt with women’s issues or feminism, I noticed that in general only other women, feminist or women’s activists followed these accounts, rather than those who perhaps are not familiar with the issues. The subjective nature of Twitter comes to light here; people will read only what they want to read. For example, I do not follow any Twitter accounts that relate to animal welfare because this is an area of activism does not interest me. This really questions the validity of Twitter as a form of activism.

But it cannot be denied that many of the campaigns that have operated on Twitter have had some successes. But I feel that these campaigns work well because of the clever marketing of the project, and the help of mainstream media. I feel that Twitter alone cannot cause change. It can help it but there’s only so much one can do from their sofa.

After all its problems, for me, Twitter has been an eye-opening experience and enlightenment for me, not only on a global scale, but on a personal scale too. I have discovered a lot about myself, and have conquered some of my own demons, yep, that’s about as cheesy as it gets. In the Twitter community I could confide and find support in people I didn’t know. On a more positive level it has made me want to grow into a real
activist because I have come to recognize new issues and problems that women face which I have never learned before delving into the Twittersphere. But, I realize that I can’t just do it from sitting at my desk, there’s a hell of a lot more to life than Twitter.
Glossary of Terms

The purpose of this section is to clarify the definitions of key words and phrases that will be used throughout the report.

**Feminism**
Feminism is a wide and complex concept that incorporates a number of different movements, and different interpretations. For the purposes of this thesis a general and inclusive definition of feminism will be used. Feminism is in the thesis used in the sense of ‘the advocacy of women’s rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.’ (Oxford Dictionary)

**Social Media**
Social Media is defined as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.’ (Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, 2010)

**Social Networks**
Social Networks are defined as; ‘web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.’ (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)

**Twitter and Tweets**
Twitter is the social network site where users micro-blog by post short text-based messages called ‘tweets’ that are limited to 140 characters. The site also allows users to follow other users and conduct discussions and conversations on a live public feed.

**The Twittersphere**
The Twittersphere simply refers to Twitter as a whole: all users and posts on the website.

**#activism**
#activism can be used to describe any form of online activism using social networking. The hash tag originates from the hash tagging system used on Twitter to link posts with similar content.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Structured Interview Questions:

1. Your @Twitter:

2. If I chose to quote you in my article do I have permission to use your @Twitter?

3. Would you describe yourself as a feminist?

4. Would you describe yourself as an activist?

5. What do you Tweet about?

6. What types of people/accounts do you follow on Twitter?

7. Is your overall experience of Twitter positive or negative, and why?

8. To what extent do you feel that Twitter is a tool for empowering women?

9. Has Twitter empowered you? If so, how?

10. Do you follow any feminist/female journalist on Twitter?

11. If so, how would you describe their tweets?

12. Have you been involved in any Twitter campaigns or projects that involve women empowerment?

13. Have you experienced any limitations as a female Twitter user?
Appendix 2: Audio Transcript

You might have heard the phrase ‘Intersectional Feminism’ thrown around a lot, particularly amongst activists on the Twittersphere. Intersectional Feminism has become one of the main discussion topics on women and feminists of Twitter.

But what is it?

Intersectional Feminism is: ‘the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations’.

This is great if you’re planning to write a PhD in the subject. But in terms of practical application, this doesn’t give much away.

But if you ask the right people on Twitter, you may get a helpful answer or a link to a blog explaining the basics.

After trawling the Twittersphere for a clear definition, I was directed to this definition, from Canadian feminist blogger, Anna Carastathis:

Intersectional Feminism allows women to identify themselves as more just being a woman.

“Intersectionality is a way of taking into consideration all of the factors that together make up feminist political identities: our gender, our race and ethnicity, our class and status in society, our sexuality, our physical abilities, our age, our national status, and so on.”

However, Intersectional Feminism is not only about self-expression, it is also about accepting that women are subjected to other types of oppression, not just sexism and misogyny. Women suffer from racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, classism, and other forms of bigotry. Women cannot be free until all types of oppression are eliminated, and this must be acknowledged regardless to your own identity.

To see how Intersectional Feminism works in practice. I spoke to Tweeter Niz Bennet via Skype, a woman who identifies herself as an Intersectional feminist, and we are exploring what it is important to her:
(Interview questions- answered by interviewee)

2. Can you describe what Intersectional Feminism means to you?

3. Why do you identify yourself with Intersectional Feminism?

4. How can our audience educate themselves on feminism?

5. Intersectional Feminism has become a central topic within the feminist community in social media, particularly on Twitter. Why do you think social media has become such an important platform for Intersectional Feminists?

...Thanks so much for sharing your thoughts with us today...

Intersectional Feminism is providing an important platform for an increasingly globalized and cosmopolitan world, it allowed women to identify themselves by more than their gender. It also enabled feminists to work together to work towards eradicating various forms of oppression. Social media especially Twitter has enabled much discussion for this particular movement, and more importantly it has become a tool for activism.

Intersectional Feminism remains as an important focus for discussion online. But it will be the impact that it has to cause social change that people will judge it by.
Appendix 3: Written Articles

Armchair Activism

*There’s a community of women who are tearing down the patriarchy and fighting for women’s rights across the world all from their armchairs and in 140 characters.*

Twitter is the community that never sleeps. It is estimated that there are over 4500 tweets per second, adding up to over 400 million tweets per day. These tweets come from over 450 million active Twitter users of which 59% of users are women. Within this 59%, there are a number of women, some identifying themselves as feminists, who use Twitter to aid the advocacy of women’s rights and use it as a form of Cyberactivism. Welcome to the world of armchair activism.

Educating and Challenging Yourself and Society

Education is often regarded by many as empowering; this seems to be the case for many women on Twitter. Twitter has become a platform for educating others about women’s rights in many different ways. Firstly, by following different women from around the world from different societies with different backgrounds one can learn about their daily experiences as well as what they campaign for. One such Tweeter is @Psycho_Claire a PhD student and blogger who identifies as a Neo-Feminist. Although @Psycho_Claire Tweets on a range of topics, she also uses Twitter to educate others and tackle the misconceptions and prejudices of others:

“I use twitter to combat sexism, rape myths and homophobia. These are topics that I will ALWAYS challenge others on if I see them.” - @Psycho_Claire

Challenging others on their prejudices has become a very prevalent area of Twitter through individuals such as @Psycho_Claire as well as organized projects such as @everydaysexism. @everydaysexism is a fast growing global project that encourages Twitter users to Tweet their experiences of sexism that happen on an everyday basis.

One of the most famous examples in which women have called out someone on sexism using Twitter was in 2012 during the Presidential debate between Barak Obama and Mitt Romney. A question regarding inequalities in the workplace was posed by an undecided voter:
‘In what new ways do you intend to rectify the inequalities in the workplace, specifically regarding females making only 72 percent of what their male counterparts earn?’

To which Mitt Romney responded with:

‘Well, gosh, can't we—can't we find some—some women that are also qualified?’ And—and so we—we took a concerted effort to go out and find women who had backgrounds that could be qualified to become members of our cabinet. I went to a number of women's groups and said: ‘can you help us find folks,’ and they brought us whole binders full of women.’

The comment immediately went viral. On Twitter the hash tag #bindersfullofwomen was used by thousands of feminists on Twitter to highlight the sexism in Romney’s statement. This form of online activism is to ultimately change society’s attitude towards women and promote a change in behavior offline.

But is this type of education really changing attitudes? It’s hard to tell. But if you follow a diverse range of people on Twitter, you might be surprised at how much you may learn.

**Not a feminist. Not an activist.**

Not all women describe themselves as feminist. Many women see ‘Feminist’ as a ‘dirty word’ or feel they might be branded as a ‘men-hating radical’. However, many women on Twitter who do not describe themselves as feminists engage in some sort of advocacy of women’s rights. @Annerichards16 who says that she would never describe herself as a feminist, but says ‘I want a fair deal for women’ and tweets about issues in the workplace, academia, and media that affect women. From observing activity on Twitter, the reality is that many women do not identify themselves as feminist, but feel that it is important to use Twitter to express their opinions which relate to women’s rights.

Similarly, this is also the case when women identify themselves as an activist. @Annerichards16 also says that she is not an activist. From observing women using Twitter many who engage in Cyberactivism so not describe themselves as activist. This is perhaps because people do not describe themselves as an activist in the traditional sense, i.e. someone who engages in activities such as live demonstrations. However, the availability of Cyberfeminism on Twitter and online in general has meant that many women are engaging in activism without realizing it.
One example of online activism is the signing of online petitions that have been set up by individuals, organizations or charities. These online petitions aim to collect as many online signatures as possible in order to help start offline change. Offline change may include talking to a government minister or attracting mainstream media attention which can lead to real change in the area of campaign. These petitions are often promoted on Twitter through Twitter accounts, Tweets and Retweets, making it easy for twitter users to engage with issues that are important to them. One example of an online petition that is currently being circulated on Twitter is ‘No More Page 3’ (@NoMorePage3 on Twitter). This Britain-based campaign calls for the biggest tabloid newspaper in Britain, ‘The Sun’, to stop printing images of topless women on page 3 of the newspaper. The petition currently has over 101,000 signatures and the Twitter account as over 15,000 followers; a clear example of how Twitter can drum up support in a cause.

In many ways Twitter can be the first step for change because it enables campaigners to connect with large audiences of people who may not normally partake in any form of activism. It seems as though people are more likely to spend a few minutes clicking away on the web than attending a live demonstration.

**Expression outside the Mainstream**

This is one of the most positive and vibrant areas within the feminist community on Twitter. There’s plenty of discussion between feminist Twitter users about hobbies and interests that are particularly male-dominated for example science-fiction or football. Expression is perhaps not a direct form of activism, but it can be interpreted as a protest against the mainstream. For example, the popular DJ and blogger @myarchedeyebrow tweets about plus-size fashion and the acceptance of larger body-types, an area which is often overlooked by the mainstream fashion industry.

For many Twitter has also provided a space for those who are often ignored by the mainstream media. @SabineB1uEYE is a transgender woman who tweets about feminism, transgender rights, and pop culture expressed her positive experiences with Twitter, and how Twitter provides an important platform for those who are overlooked by the media:

‘I started by just connecting with other trans* people, and it allowed people who rarely encounter each other due to our scarcity, geographic dispersion and social isolation to share experiences. I quickly found my list of follows expanding to include feminists, ethnic
minorities, disabled people, and other voices that don't get heard in the media. I get the sense that marginalised groups are finding a voice, and that can only be a good thing... Traditional media gatekeeps women and controls which women get a voice, so mostly only views that fit with existing power structures (or easily dismissed opposing views) tend to be allowed. Twitter doesn't have that gatekeeping, and so allows all women a voice.’

By giving those who are not heard by the mainstream media a voice, Twitter is providing a powerful platform for those who suffer social injustices and discrimination to show the online community what is going on away from the mainstream media.

**Empowerment**

Many of the women I asked agreed that the use of Twitter had made them feel empowered for a number of reasons. Tweeter @superlativelyLJ felt that Twitter was a supporting and empowering place when she faced an incident of sexual harassment:

‘I got felt up when I was giving blood and linked to a blog post I wrote about it on Twitter. I got tens of RT's and my hits went through the roof- and a huge majority of the women who read me that day got in touch to encourage me not to feel silly or crazy for reporting it. I did, and felt like I couldn't have found the inner strength and confidence to do that were it not for the fact my Twitter ladies came to my emotional rescue.’ ~ @superlativelyLJ

This sort of empowerment may appear to be on a small scale, however, it enabled @superlativelyLJ to feel strong enough to report the sexual harassment. It just shows how powerful simple words between strangers can be.

**Problems**

Although the majority of what I had discovered about women’s use of Twitter was positive, some negatives were highlighted. The biggest problem that women seemed to face was some sort of online harassment or bullying. Many women explained that they had received abusive Tweets from other users which were based on their gender, beliefs, race or appearance. Many also went on to describe that they felt that Twitter did not have enough safeguards in place to protect and stop abusers on Twitter.

The vast amount of data which is created in the Twittersphere is daunting, however, after observing around a thousand feminists and women on the site I started to gain an insight into what topics are hot for discussion and what the purpose of Twitter is for women. Over
the months in which I have tried to emerge myself into this community on Twitter I have learned about the importance and prevalence of diversity within the feminist community. However, my observations also highlighted the problems with in the community. After observing and interviewing women and feminists in the Twitter community I was able to understand the similarities and diversities. One thing is certain; Twitter has made activism and social change more accessible to women than ever before. It’s amazing what you can do from your sofa.

Click for Change

The objectification of women, gender stereotyping, and sexism. These are some of the things that women are fighting against using Twitter. Three online projects with offline impact take centre stage to if their changing attitudes and behaviour.

‘...A customer at my bar job indicate to his friend rather crudely that he would like to put his face in my chest...’

‘My sister is only girl in her music & sound production course. Classmates call her 'one with the vagina' instead of her name.’

‘I was told by a teacher to marry an engineer instead of becoming one.’

This is the sexism that women face every day. These are just a fraction of the Tweets that hundreds of women send to the @everdaysexism account on Twitter. The Everyday Sexism Project is a global project which encourages victims of sexism to Tweet their experiences. The project aims to show the world that ‘sexism does exist, it is faced by women every day and it is a valid problem to discuss’ thus the project strives to create impact offline. Although the project originally started in Britain, it has now expanded to fifteen countries with plans for continued expansion.

The project was founded by Laura Bates, an activist and journalist who felt that it was increasingly difficult to talk about women’s rights and sexism in a society that perceives itself as having achieved gender equality. By allowing women to share their experiences via the project, Bates is creating awareness online and offline that sexism still exists and therefore needs to be discussed.
Another Twitter-based project which has seen online impact is Let Toys Be Toys (@LetToysBeToys on Twitter). This project aims to highlight the issue of gender stereotyping children’s toys. Here, supporters of the campaign Tweet pictures of the gender stereotyping, as well as tweeting companies and demanding change. The campaign aims to stop toys being marketed at a specific gender, for example chemistry sets being marketed for boys. This campaign has had successful offline impact. Through signing of petitions which are circulated on Twitter and by contacting companies on Twitter, the campaign has managed to get many major British toy retailers and supermarkets to change signage in their stores. This is great news for the Let Toys Be Toys campaign as it continues to fight the gender stereotyping in children’s toys.

One campaign which has used Twitter to promote and circulate a petition is the No More Page 3 campaign. This organization campaigns against the objectification of women, particularly in the use of topless photos of women on page three of the British tabloid ‘The Sun’. Although the project has yet to force a change in the newspaper, the petition has gathered over 100,000 signatures so far, with an aim of 800,000 signatures. Although this campaign has attracted a lot of attention online and in the media, it is unclear if it will be able to make a real change. Attitudes are clearly hard to change, for example, British Prime Minister, David Cameron took a ‘turn the page over’ if you don’t want to see it approach.

This campaign has a lot of difficult battles to face in front of them. ‘The Sun’ is owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and protesting against such a powerful company is no mean feat. Despite the presence of nudity in the newspaper, ‘The Sun’ remains Britain’s bestselling daily. So whether the campaign will either change the views of The Sun’s 10 million readers, or its editors will remove the daily feature is yet to be seen, this particular project has a long hard campaign in front of them.

The accessibility of Twitter has meant that some activist causes which may have gone unnoticed in the past have been able to establish themselves. However, Twitter allows users to reach a global audience and quickly create a buzz, leading to people supporting things without reading the small print. This was the case when the charity Invisible Children took Twitter by storm when they released their #KONY2012 campaign in 2012. Although this campaign received a lot criticism in many ways, people activists in general felt the biggest issue with campaigns such as Kony2012 lead social network users think
that problems of this scale could be solved by simply Retweeting the video, thus questioning the significance of Cyberactivism via social networks.

It’s impossible to judge the successfulness of Twitter in terms of offline impact, but it is clear that some online campaigns are managing to make progress. Women’s rights activists have been able to have their voice heard by using the site. However, the campaigns that have been discussed have been projects that aim create awareness, or persuading corporations. Although the #KONY2012 campaign wasn’t a specifically women’s rights centered campaign, it did highlight the problems of Cyberactivism. In many cases a problem cannot be solved with a few clicks. The real change comes from those working on the front line.

**Global Women**

*Twitter has provided a platform for women to discuss, debate, unite and be activists regardless of their geographic location, making Twitter a global community. But does the female community on Twitter a true demographic representation of women?*

Representation of women is important to feminism. Not only women are represented in in all areas of society, but also that all types of women are represented and have their voices heard.

This is also the case on Twitter. If Twitter is to be a successful and democratic tool for activism for women, it must represent a whole range of women from different countries, backgrounds and ethnicities. If Twitter fails to represent the whole female community, it becomes a useful tool for activism for only a few.

The Internet is global by nature, and thus so are social networking sites such as Twitter. However, most of us presume that sites such as Twitter as global; that they are available to all and all have access to them. But this is not the case, as it is estimated that only around 34% of the population have access to the internet, the majority of this figure living in developed countries.

After interviewing several women who use Twitter, I was able to see where they came from, or where they lived. I found that the majority of the sample came from Britain and the USA, with only one person from South Africa. This result is perhaps not surprising, seeing as I collected the interviewees by requesting interviews via Twitter. I naturally
tweeted in English, seeing as it is my native language and the only language that I speak fluently.

However, if this result is an accurate representation of the global Twittersphere, it is worrying news. This means that only women from developed countries are represented on Twitter, mostly from native English speaking countries.

However, my research into this area is only very small, but there have been some bigger studies into the global demographics of Twitter. One company whom has carried out such research is Beevolve, a analytics company who specialize in social networking analysis. In 2012 the company published ‘An Exhaustive of Twitter Users Across the Globe’ which studies the demographics of Twitter.

In their study of Twitter demographics, the company’s data has highlighted that the USA, UK, and Australia have the most Twitter users. In fact, one in five Twitter users are American and over 75% of Twitter users come from countries where English is the official language. Therefore, it is perhaps not so surprising that my own research came up with such results. However, this does highlight that Twitter is only widely used in a few developed countries.

The research done by Beevolve does highlight the gaps in Twitter usage. With such a large percentage of Twitter users in the USA and the UK, it leaves Twitter usage throughout the world fairly sparse, for example in Africa and Asia.

The research also shows the gender inequality of Twitter usage in developing countries. For example in India where less than 20% of Twitter users are female, and in Brazil only around 35% of Twitter users are female. But in developed countries, the usage of Twitter is fairly even between men and women. This unequal distribution of gender on Twitter in developing countries is not exclusive to Twitter. It represents a wider issue of women not having access to the internet in the developing world. According to Intel, whose Women and the Web project aims to bridge the internet gap in developing countries discovered that there are 23% less women than men using the internet.

It is disappointing to see that the female community on Twitter does not represent women from throughout the world. But perhaps this is no surprise. For now, the Internet remains a
luxury to the privileged. In order for there to be a wider representation of women on Twitter, it is not simply a case of marketing the site to under-represented groups. The cause of this under-representation runs deeper: lack of infrastructure, attitudes of society, education and so on.

One cannot simply dismiss Twitter as a tool for activism because many women are not represented there, but it should be remembered. For there to be a Twitter revolution, one first needs an internet connection.