#Feminism

An analytic exploration into the hashtag's ability to challenge a patriarchal system, generate activism and revolutionise third wave feminism.

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Declaration

I declare that the work described in this research paper is, except where otherwise stated, entirely my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

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Abstract

#Feminism has seen wide spread popularity on social media over the past three years. This research paper aims to analyse the real nature of change that hashtags generate in third wave feminism. With its widespread popularity, use of the hashtag is often accused of creating 'slacktivism' - and having little impact on the causes they were created to promote. By optimising social media analytics in the form of a case study, this research paper aims to critique the actual forms of change occurring as a result of the use hashtag feminism.

Points to note:

Hashtags are usually differentiated from text by using different colours as a form of hyperlink, however due to the nature of the research paper guidelines, they must remain in black and white. In order to maintain legibility, hashtag capitalisation has been used to differentiate the words from each other and to make it easier to read. It is the convention when using hashtags to use all lower case and this was used when tracking the hashtags online. This was maintained to ensure that the correct forms of hashtag tracking were achieved.

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Introduction

Keywords: hashtag, feminism, social media, activism, digital media.

The use of hashtags in social media has become an advanced way of generating currents in the large and much unexplored ocean of internet activity. "They were initially introduced by Twitter's Chris Messina in August 2007 who wanted to create a way to 'try to help people group together topics' " (CMU, 2015). Their use as a symbol already existed in chat room type situations. Zappavigna accentuates how the symbol's current use in social media circles 'may derive from internet relay chat (IRC) conventions for naming channels, i.e (#channelname), where a channel is the essential mechanism that people use to communicate with each other during an IRC sessions' (2012 p.36). The symbol is also widely in use within programming as a way for commenting on code in programming languages (eg. python - a coding language that uses the hashtag as a way of writing notes about the code to potential reviewers) so Messina's introduction was on the basis that an already existing symbol would be easily adaptable to an online environment.

The hashtag's appeal to users has been phenomenal, acting as a form of linkage data – the hashtag connects topics, ideas, photos and conversations on the web by a simple click through process. The symbol's explosion in popularity online has also seen it being used to raise awareness for various causes with the creation of social media campaigns. Hashtags like #BringBackOurGirls, #Fail and #IceBucketChallenge have dominated social media accounts since 2007 and as each hashtag fades out of popularity, a new one appears. The use of the hashtag ranges greatly - from modes of expression in conversation to raising awareness for causes and political activities. In his article *A practical and theological tracing of the hashtag on twitter* Van Den Berg describes how "this symbol has come to comprise an important expression in popular culture, and is generally associated with various dimensions of activities in the social media environment" (2014). Over the past two years, there has been a rapid increase in their use in one particular area of political activism. In a commemoration of international women's day, Twitter's official blog stated that "The conversation around 'feminism' has increased 300% over the past three years and several

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powerful discussions and campaigns began on Twitter and have brought awareness to many millions" (Filadelfo, 2015) .

2013 saw an explosion of discourse surrounding feminism in an online context with hashtags such as #HeForShe, #YesAllWomen, #FreeTheNipple and #AskHerMore populating twitter and other social media sites, all of which were created to promote and broaden the understanding of feminism as a movement. The use of the hashtag for the feminist cause is deemed extremely relevant to modern day feminism and could actually be considered a branch of third wave feminism. It is also of tremendous significance to intersectionality within feminism- i.e. the belief that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity because of the differences between race, gender, class, ability and ethnicity. In her essay *#NotBuyingIt: Hashtag Feminists Expand the Commercial Media Conversation*, Clarke articulates this when she states-

> Hashtag feminism has implications for consciousness-raising that second-wavers never imagined possible. Whereas second-wavers were frequently criticized for universalizing white women's experiences, hashtag feminism has unleashed a multiplicity of voices that demand recognition of differences across intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class, so that more effective coalition building might occur. (Clarke, 2015)

The hashtag is moving to the forefront of third wave feminism, creating discourse with an array of voices demanding change in their millions. It allows for intersectionality to be accurately represented and thus creates new dialogue with regards to feminism and the female experience in everyday life. Kimberlé Crenshaw originally coined the meaning of intersectionality in feminism in her article *'Mapping the Margins: intersectionality, identity, politics and violence against women of colour'* which she begins by stating "Drawing from the strength of shared experience, women have recognised that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices" (1991, p.1241). It could be argued that intersectionality within feminism has begun to use twitter and the hashtag as a tool - allowing anyone who wishes to voice their opinions on feminism an equal platform on which to express their views, communicate their stories and join in the movement with a simple hashtag in a tweet.

The rapid increase of dialogue surrounding feminism is also being affected by the demographic in social media which, like that of the universal gender demographic, is a female majority. The internet marketer Morra Aarons-Mele (and founder of Women Online) recently wrote in the Harvard Business review about how women globally drive 62 percent of daily Facebook activity and make up 53 percent of twitter users. Women are more likely to be 'prolific tweeters' and tend to be more active across sites such as Pinterest, Tumblr and Instagram. (Aarons-Mele, 2012). This wide female presence means that the feminist movement has seen enormous progression of both activists and everyday women who seek to raise awareness of the female's plight in achieving equality.

Networked feminism (a term coined by Tom Watson on TechPresident.com) regards the memetic[1] nature of feminism in an online environment. Morra Aarons-Mele articulates this when she states: "When a powerful meme meets a network of digitally connected women, the result is change." (2012). The actual change that is achieved is still a debatable topic- how does one quantify change? The ever changing nature of social media means that it is hard to interpret the actual change achieved through the use of hashtags in social media.

The range of hashtags used to promote feminism is unquantifiable, some stem from one person's creation of a hashtag as a form of protest, an example being #YesAllWomen – which began trending after the Isla Vista Massacre. In contrast others are campaigns started by organisations such as the United Nations, whose #HeForShe campaign was set up to fight for gender equality. Others are created as a direct reaction to a violation of women's rights such as #BringBackOurGirls which is an international movement to raise awareness of the terrorist group Boko Haram's kidnapping of 283 girls from a Nigerian Village. The differences in these campaigns are huge but all contain some element of promotion of women's rights and in turn feminism. In patriarchal society, women have fought tirelessly for the ultimate goal of becoming, not greater than - a common misconception about feminism - but equal to men. The awareness of this equality on the internet is a talking point that has spawned countless blogs, hashtags, websites and social media accounts, all of which work towards making the internet an equal social platform for both genders. Achieving equality, it seems,

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[1] Memetic which derives from meme- I.e.an idea or behaviour that spreads from person to person within a culture.

is no easy endeavour - the anonymity of the internet in an online context means that when one labels themselves as a feminist, it makes them vulnerable to online abuse and bullying from trolls. Trolls within internet culture are those who post 'derogatory messages about sensitive subjects on newsgroups, forums and chat rooms in order to vent one's feelings. The anonymity of such venues enables people to say things they would not say in person, and they often like to ratchet up emotions to generate strong reactions' (PCmag.com,2015). The use of the hashtag in online social media often attracts as many trolls as it does followers. While the universal suffrage movement fought for feminism in protests and demonstrations, the twenty first century battle is fought on keyboards and comment threads online. Social media has become an ideal platform for social debate with comments sections, tweets, and messaging, all of which allow for the individual to contribute to the wider discussion surrounding online activism. The idea of hashtags is to remain within the loop of the conversation but also to create your own stream. For feminism there is a combination at work of massive female web presence and an explosion of awareness of feminist issues, resulting in campaigns directly targeting the issues facing women today such as street harassment, wage inequality and reproductive rights.

This research paper aims to explore the concept of feminist identity in online social media by examining how the hashtag as a form of activism is providing a critique of an outdated system, subverting the norm and attempting to revolutionise a patriarchy - one hashtag at a time.

To do this, the use of 'feminist hashtags' will be addressed so that the truth about their use in social media for achieving change can be sought.

To create a dynamic and truthful research paper the true meaning of feminism must be accurately defined, 'A feminist: (is) A person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes' (Ngozi Adichie.C. 2013). The definition of feminism is often disputed by those who say they believe in 'equality' and not feminism, Emma Watson in her UN speech accurately captured this when she described how "the more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realised that fighting for women's rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating" (Watson, 2014). This is the plight of all channels of the feminist movement, who must fight against the preconceived idea that feminism is only about female empowerment and not equality of the sexes. It will be argued that the use of

hashtags to promote feminism is a new found way of fighting against the misconceptions often associated with feminism as a movement and forge a path towards equality.

Chapter One: Background information to this study

1.1 A case study of three feminist hashtags

To fully explore the idea of activism in relation to feminism, three main hashtags have been selected in a case study of hashtag feminism. The main objective is to trace the trajectory of these hashtags in order to depict the true action in relation to the causes that they promote. Different areas of hashtags have been selected as examples of hashtag feminism and hashtag activism. The three hashtags that will be analysed are:

#BringBackOurGirls

#YesAllWomen

#HeForShe

The purpose of this study is to fully try to comprehend the extent of change which a hashtag campaign can accomplish and in turn create a critique of hashtag feminism in patriarchal society.

These hashtags are not all necessary 'feminist' -

Although #BringBackOurGirls is not a direct feminist hashtag it does directly affect the rights of women and can therefore be interpreted as a campaign that sees feminism in action. The terrorist group Boko Haram's kidnapping of 276 female students from the town of Chibok in Borno State of Nigeria is one of the most widely known hashtag activism campaigns surrounding the abuse of female rights and therefore was chosen as an example of activism for this thesis.

The hashtag #YesAllWomen was chosen more in line with the feminist theme of this research paper due to its huge popularity amongst feminists online and its reaction to the previous male driven campaign #NotAllMen (which was introduced after the Isla Vista massacre as a way for men to distance themselves from misogyny in society). Finally the hashtag #HeForShe will be examined - a UN campaign which is a testament to the

progression of feminism away from a female dominated movement towards one with an overarching aim of achieving equality.

1.2 #BringBackOurGirls - activism in action?

Given the feminist theme of this research paper it is true to say that the #BringBackOurGirls campaign was not a campaign started in the name of feminism – it is, however, directly surrounding the rights of women and was instigated to force the Nigerian government to act. The campaign encompasses everything surrounding mass participation in hashtag activism. The creator of the campaign- Ramma Mosley is a campaigner for girls education in the developing world and began the campaign with the words:

> "Together we must change the world. Oppression can only exist in the dark – where people are unable or afraid to speak up. What a moment like this has taught me is that there is power in one voice. Because one voice can speak out to the world via social media and become a million voices. And as we socialize this message, that the Nigerian school girls matter to the world, repression becomes more difficult. And then eventually it becomes impossible." (Mosley, 2014)

When the armed group Boko Haram kidnapped 276 Nigerian girls from a boarding school in the north-eastern town of Chibok, the news was reported the same as any other night. Mosley's determination, however to begin the campaign #BringBackOurGirls meant that the news would continue - not just on dedicated news channels but on every major social media platform. The hashtag which began as a small ripple on the internet grew to a tidal wave that would outlast any report given on the mainstream media. Gerbaudo in his exploration of online activism describes how "Using Twitter, activists entered into emotional conversations with sympathisers, sustaining a diffuse sense of solidarity" (2012, 16). This sense of solidarity is one of the main reasons hashtag activism can garner support and drive a momentum to an outcome of change. The rising power of Boko Haram would not only be reported on the news but also on all the individual accounts of everyone who retweeted and spread the word.

The campaign Mosley created took off rapidly and as it went viral, it gathered support from everyone, from the mass public to high-profile figures such as: U.S. First Lady Michelle

Obama, and Nobel Peace prize winner Malala Yousafzai. When the hashtag became too loud to ignore, it was reported by Aljazeera News that: "The campaign promoted support from World leaders in countries including the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, Canada and Israel all of whom offered assistance to Nigeria to free the schoolgirls, but to date no diplomatic or military action has secured their release." (Aljazeera.com, 2014). The bandwagon which the #BringBackOurGirls campaign created was not seized just by individual users of social media but entire nations. Gerbaudo describes this as "fetish collective action" which for him is when "the techno visionary discourse on social media appears as the reflection of a neoliberal ideology, incapable of understanding collective action except as the result of some sort of technological miracle fleetingly binding together egotistical individuals" (2012, 9). The 'trending' nature of social media means that campaigns can sometimes become a pledge rather than direct action. In his article *Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted* Malcolm Gladwell argues the differences between 'strong' and 'weak' ties necessary for revolutionary action. He describes how: 'the platforms of social media are built around weak ties. Twitter is a way of following (or being followed by) people you may never have met' (Gladwell, 2010). As of this day, the girls who were kidnapped are yet to be returned. There is often a political game at work in social media in regards to campaigns like this, with the intentions of governments and politicians who share an image of themselves feeding a campaign that is yet to change the fate of a young girl trapped in a militant camp. This hashtag is a clear example of collective action having little or no effect on the actual cause that it is being used to promote.

1.3 #YesAllWomen- a conversation about everyday sexism

Moving away from the idea of collective global action and towards the creation of a conversation surrounding feminism, the hashtag #YesAllWomen has been selected as it was created for the sole purpose of allowing users to share examples or stories of misogyny and violence against women from their social media accounts. Unlike the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, this hashtag was first introduced, not as a campaign that would create direct action (i.e. rescuing girls from Boko Haram), but as having the overarching aim of achieving change in the long term by creating discourse and conversation about misogyny. Its creation was also motivated in response to the Twitter hashtag #NotAllMen which overtook social media accounts following the 2014 Isla Vista killings. Rebecca Solnit attempts to address the wide need for conversation concerning feminism when she states how:

"You can use the power of words to bury meaning or to excavate it. If you lack words for a phenomenon, an emotion, a situation, you can't talk about it, which means that you can't come together to address it, let alone change it. This may be particularly true of feminism, a movement focused on giving voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless." (Solnit, 2014)

The campaign attempted to raise awareness of the sexism that women experience, often from people they know. The #YesAllWomen hashtag began to collect a body of tweets of individual examples of everyday sexism (See Figure 1.), and allowed women to share their personal stories about harassment and discrimination.

The power of the hashtag lies in its ability to link conversations together. In just one day #YesAllWomen — which didn't exist before May 24 — was attached to 1.2 million tweets, peaking at 61,500 tweets on May 25. (Hashtag.org 2014). The rapid spread of the hashtag is an attribute for the need for discourse surrounding 'everyday' forms of inequality of women. What was most disturbing, however, about this seemingly significant moment of empowerment was the large amount of abuse women received for the sharing of this hashtag.

(Figure 1. An example tweet of use of the hashtag #YesAllWomen)

In her essay *The Feminist Battle After the Isla Vista Massacre*, Rebecca Solnit articulates how "It was a shining media moment, a vast conversation across all media, including millions of participants on Facebook and Twitter — which is significant since Twitter has been a favourite means of delivering rape and death threats to outspoken women." (Solnit, 2014).

1.4 #HeForShe - feminism as more than one gender

The need for understanding about the true meaning of feminism is one of the biggest issues regarding the movement itself with feminism often being described as an 'umbrella term' that can never be accurately defined. There is also a tendency to associate the term as some kind of opposition to equality.

The #HeForShe campaign is unique as a hashtag campaign, as it seeks to bridge the male/female divide in regards to feminism- a cause that in the past has had the association of being 'a struggle for women by women'. Watson articulated this in her speech that 'this is the first campaign of its kind at the UN: we want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality. And we don't just want to talk about it, but make sure it is tangible' (Watson, 2014). The fact that it was instigated by the United Nations also highlights the importance of the issue of gender equality in regards to development of our society away from its current patriarchal state. This kind of campaign is a strategic and deliberate move by the UN in an attempt to achieve change and spread the conversation surrounding gender equality by using a hashtag as a mode of change. The selection of this campaign for the study is primarily due to its fresh approach to the promotion of feminism as a movement for equality.

1.5 The personal is political: feminism in the digital age.

"The personal is political" was a rallying war cry of feminist protesters during the second wave feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's - its origin is often thought to come from Carol Hanisch's essay (of the same title). In feminist terms, the "personal is political" refers to the theory that personal problems are political problems, meaning that the personal problems women do experience in their lives is not their fault but are the result of systematic oppression. Hanisch noted that "political" refers to any power relationships, not just those of government or elected officials. (Hanisch, 1969). The use of the hashtag in the digital age has become a similar form of online protest - its aim to draw attention to the cause and attempt to open the "personal" to a wider political realm". With a larger proportion of women operating in the online environment as opposed to men, there is a certain levelling of what is 'political' in an online context. Tom Watson describes on techpresident.com how "The freedom to share real emotion – anger, sadness, revulsion, joy – is what powers networked feminism, there is a tenacious, super-wired coalition of active feminists prepared at a moment's notice to blow the lid off sexist attacks....The strongest flavour of networked activism is deeply feminist," he writes (techpresident.com 2015). The combination of huge amounts of female users and networked feminism has caused an explosion of feminist awareness in online social media. Feminism in the digital age is one of community and inclusion. Previous forms of feminism saw a classist participation by the rich and the white. The intersectionality created by the internet meant conversations could now include everyone. Its use is universal, targeting both women and men who see the need for equality both online and in reality. The hashtag has become a simple and yet effective way of doing this.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to literature review

For this literature review the resources used and researched have been separated into different areas to critically analyse the relationship between disparate elements of research associated with this thesis. To begin with, literature surrounding the origins of feminism online will be discussed starting with a Cyborg manifesto; a defining text on gender in online environments. The rapid rate of change in social media is much debated by scholars Hogan and Quan-Haase in their journal article *Persistence and change in social media* which highlights how, on a practical level research and publication timelines continue to be slow relative to the rapid transformations occurring in social media, and describing how both popularity and privacy policies are in what they call "in a continual state of flux" (2010). Bearing in mind this state of flux, feminism must be properly considered in relation to the changing nature of social media and what this could mean for the feminist movement itself.

Currently there are a limited number of academic publications regarding hashtag feminism however there is a vast amount being written about it in both the large scale media and blogs. Publications like *Time* magazine*, The Guardian* and countless blogs are all participating in the discourse surrounding hashtag feminism, and in order to look at all the elements of this phenomenon, many of these media publications will be synthesised into the debate. It's origin as a symbol in online environments will be discussed along with the true extent of its relevance to feminist culture. Finally the concept of online activism or "slacktivism" will be drawn together in relation to feminism as a "movement" or cause in online environments.

2.2 Origins of feminism online

Before delving into the idea of how hashtags are affecting both activism and feminism in online cultures, the transition of feminism into an online environment must be first appropriated by examining the relevant literature. 'Cyberfeminism' is defined by Flanagan and Booth as 'a new wave of feminist theory and practice that is united in challenging the "coding" of technology and in investigating the complex relationships between gender and

digital culture and is concerned with the ways in which cyber technologies affect women's lives in particular (2011, 11). their text *Reload: Rethinking Women and Cyberculture* is an in depth look at the true role women play within technology and in online cultures. Their term 'cyberfeminism' is described by them [as] "a new wave of feminist theory and practise which is not a focused, unified political movement, but a specific, tactical, contradictory set of theories, debates and practices" (2002, 11-12).

The concept of gender in the online environment was carefully considered by Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg manifesto*. She examines both gender and feminism in relation to the "machine" which she separates from human nature as its own independent entity. Her idea of the cyborg separates itself from the human condition (including all forms of gender) and casts away the notion of being conformed to gender at all. Bearing in mind the era in which this text was written, it is important to note the transition to the creation of online identity with the introduction of social networking sites (SNS). Facebook's 1.39 Billion users are a force to be reckoned with - all of whom created an online identity and actively log elements of their lives onto their timelines with 890 million people logging onto Facebook on a daily basis in December 2014 (Noyes, 2015). This active participation in SNS is a move away from Haraway's concept of the cyborg being a separate entity distancing itself from oedipal narratives- "The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognise the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust (Haraway, 1991, 321). The cyborg has moved on though; would a cyborg recognise the Garden of Eden if Adam and Eve had Facebook profiles and their identity begun to become intertwined with the machine?"

Taking this research paper as an examination of feminist activism in online environments, it is important to note Haraway's critical view of the traditional model for feminism. She views the internet as a way of laying new ground - by using both men and women to move towards equality and away from the differences gender creates. Haraway takes issue with feminism as a concept - a "'traditional' feminist in her eyes places women above men reflected in statements such as 'women more than men somehow sustain daily life, and so have a privileged epistemological position potentially." (Haraway, 1991) She uses the

metaphor of a cyborg to urge feminists to move beyond the limitations of traditional gender, feminism, and politics. It will be argued in this research paper that women as feminists can harness a certain amount of power from the web as a means of expression, which has not been available to them in the past to this same extent. In *"Reload: rethinking women and cyberculture"* Sarah Stein highlights this argument in her essay '*A cyber-room of one's own*' when she describes Simone de Beauvoir's belief that within a patriarchal societal structure and when women were excluded from the financial means and the physical and mental space, "A room of one's own" is needed for creative production. Stein points out how even though there has been sweeping changes in communication networks, women still suffer under similar conditions. Even though greater numbers of women now work outside the home than at the beginning of the suffrage movement, most hold far less power and influence in their occupations than men.

For Stein, cyberspace is an escape: "the idea of transcendence and escape is important in the rhetoric of cyberculture appeal as a means of producing new forms of expression, new psychic experiences that transcend mundane uses of technology, in a fusion of technology and art with cyberspace as the medium of this transformation" (2002, 160). This 'cyber-room' within online environments is actively being used by women as a means of discourse to accurately transcend feminism to a new online and active state. The next section of the literature review will examine feminism within the realm of social media.

2.3 Feminism in social media

Moving on to online feminism in its current state, it would be an understatement to describe its presence in social media in recent years as simply "a talking point". Cyberfeminism is a growing network consisting of a variety of age, race and genders. Feminism has become 'trendy' in online social media due to a huge amount of female participation for various feminist causes, along with the wide coverage by the media of feminists plights, many of which have started with a hashtag. Old ideas of what makes a feminist are being reworked due to the influence of popular culture and the increasing

debate caused by the creation of certain hashtags created to provide discourse. New media and feminism are using the universality of the internet to create a better perception of feminism as a movement. The term community is often appropriated to feminist online participation. The Bernard centre for research on women publish an annual journal (entitled #FEMFUTURE), which aims to mobilise online feminists to begin "harnessing the power of online media to discuss, uplift, and activate gender equality and social justice" (Martin, 2015). The feminist cause often expressed as the "war on women" has created the momentum among feminists to fight back. Martin describes the war on women as "a climate where women's health, economic security, and sex lives are all under attack by politicians who clearly missed the memorandum that women are the majority of potential voters, not to mention taking into consideration what is morally right." (Martin, 2015).

In online environments women dominate all social media networks apart from Linkedin, (Duggan et al. 2015) and this populated community of feminists are on a road towards change. The hashtag has become a sort of "call to arms" by feminists with each campaign usually begun to highlight and promote a different area of violation of women's rights.

Time magazine's article *Behold to power of hashtag feminism* listed various examples of how the hashtag is being optimised for change and advocacy to the feminist cause. The hashtag #WhyIStayed was used as an example of a hashtag attempting to open up conversation surrounding domestic abuse - a matter that usually is silenced by nature. Beverly Gooden who began to hashtag, described how domestic violence "can make you feel voiceless", but as the hashtag began to go viral, it collected thousands of both women and men's stories, with Gooden stating that the reason she created it was because "I want people to know that they have a voice." (Time.com)

2.4 Activism online - #feminism

The movement of feminism away from online participation and towards actual action is another area that needs to be considered with regards to this research paper. By examining real data it will attempt to draw together conclusions on the impact of hashtags in regards to changes in feminism. *Tweets and the Streets* is a recent and defining text on the use of social media for real life protest and activism. Paolo Gerbaudo claims that social media has

been chiefly responsible for the construction of what he calls "a choreography of assembly"- a process of symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualised constituency (2012, p.5). Gerbaudo's study of collective action by the optimisation of social media chronologically depicted "The Arab Spring, The Tahrir square protests and Occupy Wall Street as social movements that optimised social media for collective action'. (2012, p.4) This research paper looks at three separate hashtags, one of which (#BringBackOurGirls) was directly created in the hope of direct action in the rescuing of women. The relationship between the hashtag and direct action is an ongoing debate in relation to the rise of "slacktivism" in social media culture. The comparison of numbers of shared hashtags to any actual change achieved is one of the main preoccupations of this research paper and Gerbaudo's text is taken as a form of inspiration in the fact that his book is accompanied by a significant amount of qualitative data mainly pertaining to social media. The need for actual qualitative data when talking about change in social media is a clear and precise way to consider change in regards to the movements and in turn, numbers. Gerbaudo's text seeks real qualitative data surrounding hashtags and attempts to use it to provide an argument surrounding the power of the symbol in the course of change. The idea of monitoring feminism as a political movement in comparison to Occupy Wall Street and other large collective movements is not as feasible however.

Feminism as a term is not so clear to define because the ranging views and interpretations of the term feminism - so many that it is often described as an "umbrella term". This research paper will take into account the need for formal protest to properly stop the "war on women" and not just the impact social media can have on a cause i.e. the difference between actual activism and the online version.

2.5 Hashtags and their influence

One notable change in the promotion of feminist movements online in recent years is undeniably the hashtag. Bernadette Lim's article *The hashtag revolution: Activism or complacency?* Articulates how "the hashtag is becoming not only the preferred form of social protest, but the only form of social activism and social justice of our generation." (Lim, 2015). Many people are beginning to see sharing a hashtag as a means of

participating in or protesting for various causes. To do this actual examples have been selected in order to understand their influence to the feminist cause whilst also critiquing them as forms of protest and attempting to understand their role in creating actual change.

Lim states how "hashtag activism for social and political causes will simply be a form of lazy protest, merely demanding change virtually through words and failing to follow up with adequate and deliverable action" (Lim,2015). To garner enough evidence on the rate of change that can be achieved through use of the hashtag symbol, appropriate research has been undertaken with regards to tracing the symbols origins and looking at its relationship to the web as a form of hypertext. The use of the hashtag was officially put into effect in July 2009 by the Twitter platform, to be followed in 2011 by Google+ and Instagram, whilst Facebook began to make use of this idea in June 2013 (Social Media Today 2014). By definition Seward (2013) sums up the use of the hashtag as follows: Any word(s) preceded by a hash sign '#' are used in Twitter to note a subject, event, or association. Hashtags are an integral part of Twitter's ability to link the conversations of strangers together. This symbol has been generating discourse recently and their influence must be thoroughly explored in order to understand any change achieved.

2.6 Conclusion of literature review

In regards to the originality of this research it is understood that there are no main texts or dissertations surrounding the area of hashtag feminism. Smaller pieces of academic work on areas relating to hashtag feminism have been published such as Priscilla Kilili's *Feminism in the Digital Age: How Hashtag Feminism is Revitalising the Feminist Movement Using Social Media.* This essay is the most relevant work in relation to the subject matter of this research paper. Kilili stresses the importance of the need for analytical studies in regards to social media, and accurately depicts the revolution caused by social media and the development of feminism online.

To add to the theories surrounding hashtag feminism in social media, this research paper ensures that there is an added body of knowledge to this area of research. It contains

research on more than one feminist hashtag and aims to properly analyse the impact of hashtag symbols on mainstream feminism with in-depth qualitative data. In order to sustain the developing nature of social media in academia, a multidisciplinary approach has been taken so that the scope of the research can be developed further. To collect qualitative data in relation to this subject, hashtags have been tracked in an online environment in the hope that the analytics gathered will allow insight into the understanding of both the nature of online activism and the impact of hashtags within feminism.

Chapter Three: Design and Methodology of hashtag case study

3.1 Introduction to case study

The purpose of this chapter is to create a solid set of qualitative data surrounding the hashtags #HeForShe, #BringBackOurGirls and #YesAllWomen so that the analytics can be discussed in relation to the causes that the hashtags were created to promote and change. The use of analytics are often optimised in the discussion of social media's impact, and social media sites often publish analytics as a way of presenting trending issues to the public[2] . In *An Introduction to Social Network Data Analysis*, Charu Aggarwal articulates how 'social networks are extremely rich in content, and they typically contain a tremendous amount of content and linkage data which can be leveraged for analytics' (2011, 1). The optimisation of analytics can be used to support a wide range of studies, and for this case study they are to be gathered and used to argue whether or not hashtags can generate change. Aggarwal sees the availability of massive amounts of data in an online setting as being of huge benefit to the study of social media and describes how 'it has given a new impetus towards a scientific and statistically robust study of the field of social networks' (2011, 2). To clarify the rationale behind the choice of these hashtags in the case study, this chapter will identify the data to be collected, provide a detailed description of the case given, articulate the themes and issues around the hashtags that will be analysed, and finally, interpretations about the case will be proposed.

In order to examine the use of feminist hashtags, a case study was constructed around the three hashtags as outlined in earlier chapters. These purposeful samples were chosen as it was felt they reflected three separate areas of the hashtag as a method for producing change. #BringBackOurGirls is a leading campaign which requires a direct form of action and response from governments to save and rescue the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria. The Hashtag #HeForShe was created by the UN as a way to promote gender equality worldwide in a campaign that requires male participation and discourse

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[2] For an example see Time Magazine's article "Watch the conversation spread about bring back our girls on twitter". Which displays Twitters heat map about the hashtag #BringBackOurGIrls. Avliable at: http://time.com/89775/boko-haram-kidnapping-twitter-bringbackourgirls/

surrounding feminism in an online environment. Finally #YesAllWomen was chosen to be tracked because of its simple yet effective way of collecting stories and garnering support for feminism.

To collect enough data and to gain a general understanding of the power of feminist hashtags within social media, controls were set up for this experiment so that the same amount of data was collected for each of the hashtags. This data was then synthesised into the debate on whether hashtags can promote change by creating discourse and promoting action for users of social media.

It must be noted that the rate of change in social media means that conducting studies like this one are sometimes based on an extremely difficult topic to measure. In their article *'Social Media and the Persistence of Change'* Hogan and Quan describe social media as a 'moving target' which can make it 'impossible to provide concrete answers to many research questions and to resolve conclusively existing debates about the long-term trajectory of social media' (Hogan and Quan-Haase, 2010). This long term trajectory of social media is unknown but there is no denying the massive influence it is having on all those who use it. With this as an impetus, it is imperative to document social media's influence in different areas, including feminism and activism in an online context.

3.2 Objectives of Case Study

The overall objective was to collect a sufficient amount of quantitative data surrounding the sample hashtags so that a conclusion could be drawn about the actual change that the hashtags created. As Twitter is the most popular and original site for sharing hashtags, as well as the original source for the feminist hashtag, this was the main platform from where the analytical data was recovered. It must be noted that other social media sites such as Tumblr, Instagram, and Facebook were also involved in the sharing of these hashtag campaigns but due to the restriction of time, this case study was focused on just one social media platform. The three examples of 'feminist hashtags' were tracked using online software from Keyhole. The parameters for the data were set to a specific time period from the 27th of April 2015 to the 3rd of May 2015. Twitter was scanned for the three hashtags

#HeForShe #BringBackOurGirls and #YesAllWomen in a one week period so that a small slice of data could be analysed.

The overall objectives of this case study were as follows:

1) To gather an accurate amount of analytic data from an online analytics site (keyhole.com)

2) Track the three hashtags in the same period over the course of one week.

3) Use the data to obtain more information of the power of the hashtags in social media

4) Draw conclusions from the data in order to understand whether the hashtags were having any impact on the changes they created.

On reaching these objectives, the case study would hopefully allow further insight into feminist hashtags and create a small basis of knowledge surrounding the hashtags themselves. In a larger body of research it would be better suited to gather historical data relating to the hashtags, however due to restrictions of time, funding and technical constraints, this was not attainable for use in this research paper.

The nature of this case study is entirely based around 'moving target research' so by gathering a week's worth of data it was hoped that adequate information could be gathered in order to provide a solid background of knowledge relating to the three chosen hashtags.

3.3 Rationale for methods of research

This research paper takes the form of a case study that is based upon an overall qualitative case study that draws conclusions by using quantitative data gathering software. To justify the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods it must be stated that this case study requires data collection and analysis in order to reach a conclusion on whether hashtags can actually inform change. Change is a difficult outcome to both quantify and interpret so in justification of any change achieved, the analysis of the data must be informed by qualitative methods. Qualitative research aims to understand a research problem from the perspective of the people it involves (Babbie & Mouton , 1998). The main research problem here is whether actual change can be generated from the sharing of a specific hashtag. Given the large body of analytics available, the hashtags were used as the main

participants. The samples chosen for this case study are hashtags that that encompass the online feminist movement. All of these hashtags have the ultimate objective of creating some form of change and an analysis of this change will be synthesized by comparing the analysis within the body of literature referred to in the literature review.

3.4 Analytical methods - Description of the tracking site Keyhole

There are a number of free analytics websites that optimise Twitter's API in order to allow users access to data from Twitter records [3]. Rather than access the Twitter API directly, it was decided to instead optimise the free analytic data that can be collected online using hashtag tracking websites. Research was conducted on every major free analytics website online[4], however the highest rated site with the most optimised features was found to be Keyhole.com. Keyhole is a subscription-based tool that allows you to input and measure the traction around various hashtags. It works by optimising Twitter's analytic API to gather data on specific hashtag's and presents the data in various charts.

As stated on its website Keyhole allows you to:

1. See who is using your hashtag

2. Watch hashtag traffic by day and hour

3. Measure the hashtag's reach (Keyhole.com)

For this case study the trial version was optimised and extended in length by the sharing of the software on a personal twitter account so that one week's worth of data could be collected. The full subscription service is widely used within marketing and business circles as it also offers real-time tracking, flexible date ranges as well as downloadable reports. As the downloadable reports were not included in the trial version, a full screen page grab was taken of the final results for each of the hashtags instead. Academically, the use of social media analytics are still under development, and as stated continuously throughout this research paper, the basis of the research is still a 'moving target'. Social media is less likely to be used within academic research so in studies like these there must be an crossover in

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[3] https://dev.twitter.com/rest/public
[4] hashtagiy.com, hashtracking.com and talkwalker.com, were all researched however these hashtaging sites were all optimised for marketing purposes.

techniques used to gather the data. Keyhole was the best regarded and most highly recommended hashtag tracking software. A review of the data by Omnistudio monitoring software describes how 'social media measurement is still a science in development, but Keyhole is better than most other tools (…) providing insights into activity around a campaign in a way that uses data to tell the users story'. (OmniStudio, 2013)

The main idea behind the research was to gather enough real time data for the dates for each hashtag so as to compare them to each other in terms of reach, posts, demographics and general content. A certain amount of public data is also available from the site - anyone who uses the hashtag is recorded in doing so, and this data can be accessed fully. However for ethical academic reasons, this information was withdrawn from the case study as individual permission would need to be sought from the those who wrote the tweets. The full reports can be seen in the appendix section of the thesis. For the sake of legibility and clarity the information was also placed in a table for referencing within the thesis. The three hashtags to be set up were #bringbackourgirls, #heforshe, #yesallwomen, no capitalisation was used when inputting the data to the tracking site so variation of the hashtags would not be counted within the case study (i.e #BringBackOurGirls is occasionally used by users of twitter in order to better distinguish the words however this method of writing hashtags was disregarded for the study). After the account was set up, it was allowed to run in real time gathering data on each of the hashtags. On the final day of the week the data was gathered and an entire screenshot of the webpage was taken in order to gather the required information.

3.5 Limitations of case study

Due to restrictions on time and space, the sample data to be analysed would be gathered over the course of one week for three feminist hashtags. The three examples of feminist hashtags would be tracked using online software from Keyhole, which gathers the data and sets up reports based around the data. Although the dataset was not exceptionally large, it did create a small but precise window of data which can be analysed in relation to the research question.

The feminist hashtag has been evolving with every social media trend. Hashtags can go viral extremely quickly and become as non-existent just as fast. The nature of social media means that the 'rate of change' with respect to popular hashtags ranges widely. To gain access to the data of these sites a number of website tracking services were optimised in order to elicit when and where these hashtags were being used. Software programs used in this research project cost huge amounts of money to gain access to 'historical data'. Therefore, it was decided early on in the case study to use as much free software as possible. Keyhole was used on these hashtags for a period of seven days in order to gain insight into what kind of coverage a hashtag can have around the world. There are many types of online software that offer users the ability to track specific hashtags online for a variety of reasons. Tracking a hashtag should be a relatively easy process, however the format in which it is presented varies greatly with each data gathering software. Hashtag media campaigns can allow businesses to talk directly with their consumer or potential customer so hashtag tracking services are usually optimised for marketing purposes. Hashtags have an ability to allow people to follow wide dynamic conversations on a global scale.

In this case a free software was used to track three main hashtags in order to create some form of data surrounding the use of the hashtags themselves. The academic use of hashtags is not rare in research yet and therefore there are no proper standardised guidelines on using them in research, meaning that there is a certain level of customization used when creating this study.

The aim of this research project is to find the academic relevance of the hashtag to the political movement of feminism. Due to the 'moving target' analysis of this type of research, a real understanding of the true extent of hashtags is hard to achieve when they are still so relatively new to social media.

4.3 Description of information collected

The number of posts for these dates.

Figure.1 is the entire number of tweets created in the week with either the hashtag #bringbackourgirls, #heforshe or #yesallwomen contained within them.

Number of users	This is the number of users who have used the hashtag on twitter.
Reach	Reach is described as the total unique users on Twitter to where posts pertaining to the search term were forwarded.
Impressions	Impressions pertain to the actual interaction or engagement after the tweet has been delivered to various Twitter streams.
Demographics	This measures the genders of each of the users to create a male to female demographic. For each user who tweets either #bringbackourgirls, #heforshe or #yesallwomen within the sample data the gender from their account is recorded.
Related words used in tweets	This part of the analytics site records and tracks words that appear again and again when certain tweets are used online.
Related hashtags used in tweets	Its a common feature when using hashtags to use more than one hashtag in order to gain as much coverage as possible. This allows users of twitter to engage with more than one thread. For instance when tweeting #heforshe a user might also add the hashtag #feminism as a way of linking the two conversations. Keyhole analytics tracks the different hashtags seen repeatedly online and records the most frequently occurring hashtags.
Share of posts	This part of the analytics site captures the different ways information is repeated in the online media platform twitter. For example retweets (RT) are a way of re-sharing information and means you're re-sending someone else's tweet to all of your followers. An original post is just the post itself being shared and replies are when you join in the conversation by including and '@' and the name of the person who wrote it.

Chapter Four: Analytical results

Table 4.1 Entire data set of analytic data
(For full results see appendix)

Hashtags Tracked:	#yesallwomen	#bringbackourgirls	#heforshe
Number of posts for these dates	1,634	2,095	2,674
Number of Users for these dates:	1,261	1,513	1,247
Reach (number of unique followers the user has)	2,137,247	11,840,660	3,648,425
Impressions:	2,951,223	18,570,807	11,644,840
Demographics:	59% Female 41% Male	56% Female 44% Male	48% Female 52% Male
Share of posts:	67.9% retweets, 22.5% Original post, 9.6% Replies	31.5% original posts, 64.5% retweets, replies 4%	85.7% retweets, 11.9% original posts, 2.4% replies.

Table 4.2 Related words and hashtags

	#yesallwomen	#bringbackourgirls	#heforshe
Frequently used words with tweets containing:	women men rape violence people domestic	women men rape violence people domestic	Emma Watson Men Speech Sexy Support
Frequently used hashtags with tweets containing:	#feminism #heforshe #everydaysexism, #humanrights ,#feminist, #domesticviolence	#nevertobeforgotten, #bokoharam, #chibokogirls #nigeria #heroinesoftheinternet	#emmawatson, #conferenceignite , #genderquality #feminism #yesallwomen

Chapter Five: Discussion of results

Introduction to results

The resulting data which was gathered by tracking the hashtags online allows us a small window of insight into their impact in the social media platform twitter. It must be stated that with the rapidly developing nature of this area of research, social media has not yet thoroughly been explored and documented as a form of science. The purpose of this research paper is to attempt to portray whether hashtags can create actual change in relation to the feminist movement. As a symbol the hashtag is becoming intertwined with activism and the creation of change in relation to feminism, however change is not an easy thing to quantify or measure. However, by comparing and contrasting the numbers gathered in this selective case study, we can attempt to draw conclusions about the nature of change in feminism in an online environment. Overall the numbers of those who used the hashtags in these dates ranged between 1,634 and 2,674 with impressions nearing 18.5 Million. These numbers will be synthesised into the debate in order to draw a conclusion on the power of hashtag in regards to both feminism and the effects of online activism. The overall conclusions on the creation of change on social media will be presented under the headings: 'Activism means action', 'Activism by conversation' and finally 'Proof that change occurring'.

Activism means action.

The creation of change in the social media environment requires hashtag activism to be more than just 'raising awareness'. Hashtag campaigns like #BringBackOurGirls were created with the overall objective of returning the kidnapped Nigerian girls to their homes. In appreciating this hashtag example it is fair to say that activism must be complemented by physical action outside the sphere of cyberspace. Hashtag activism which attempts to raise awareness for active or 'physical' causes has very little effect in creating direct action and therefore change. Out of all of the results, the #BringBackOurGirls figures were by far the most wide ranging in the actual number of posts and the possible impressions achieved. Even though the number of posts or tweet count (2,095) is quantifiable similar to the two other hashtags - the number of impressions (18.5 million) is significantly larger than in the

other examples. Tweet count refers to the total number of tweets sent by any one account, while the impression refers to the sent tweet that actually generated interaction or replies from others online (Hashtag.org). This is a strong example of the weak ties that Gladwell described as existing in social media. Even though this hashtag generated a huge amount of reaction on twitter during this case study, it has little effect on the actual cause that it was created to promote. This campaign is directly involved with the violation of women's rights in the world, yet it appears from the results that hashtags have little effect on creating momentum for change outside the cyber sphere; therefore there is a necessity for real political action and change to complement and reinforce such hashtag campaigns. The use of the hashtag on social media has made it even easier for participants in social media to get behind campaigns. Gladwell articulated this when he stated: "(social media) makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact" (Gladwell, 2010). Out of all three of the hashtags within this case study, it could be interpreted that this hashtag has the least effect on the feminist movement and fails to create any real form of action.

Activism by conversation

Moving away from direct action and towards the use of the hashtag to break the silence on social media, it could be argued that the hashtag #YesAllWomen is providing change by allowing the use of the hashtag as a means to draw attention to their plight. By sharing personal stories of gender inequality these women and men are contributing to a narrative within an online context. This narrative is one that can be interpreted by the words being collected as data. By use of the Keyhole tracking service the most shared words and hashtags were recorded in the case study. When you look at the related words and hashtags found in table 4.2 you can see the relationship between the words used - the words rape, violence and domestic are frequently being used in the tweets containing #YesAllWomen and this data articulates the kind of conversations taking place when this hashtag is being used. This gives us a certain idea of the main topics of the tweets using this hashtag - all of which seem to focus around violence against women. Hashtags recorded included:

#feminism

#heforshe

#everydaysexism

#humanrights

#feminist

#domesticviolence

The use of the hashtag on the web has become a way, not just creating channels relating to topics, but also as a way of creating a connection between them- the fact that two hashtags #YesAllWomen and #HeForShe were both collected as data in each set of analytics is proof of this networked feminism that Tom Watson described originally.

Proof that change is occurring

It can be seen that the hashtag #HeForShe seems to be having some form of impact in relation to bridging the gender gap that is frequent in feminism. 'A struggle for women by women' is an old and difficult perception to change. #HeForShe was set up by the UN for exactly this reason. By interpreting the data from the case study, it can be established that during the time that this sample data was taken, more men than women were using the #HeForShe hashtag in their tweets. This is only a small data set but taking this as a concept of progression in feminism, it can be understood that that the need for male participation in feminism is an integral precondition of the feminist movement if it is to orientate itself towards a state of equality. This campaign by the UN had the particular aim of changing the misinterpretation of what feminism means as a movement. The need for male participation in achieving equality in society is great, it is only when people realise the importance of feminism being about men and women that the actual change will be achieved. The overall trajectory of social media is still unknown, but by interpretations of the analytics of social media, a change in demographics indicates the course of change.

Chapter six: Main Conclusion

Overarching findings have emerged within and across disciplines because the study of social media has, from its early beginnings, necessitated a multidisciplinary approach. (Hogan and Quan 2010, 309) By using quantitative and qualitative methods it was hoped to achieve some form of insight into the relationship between the hashtag and the concept of change in regards activism and feminism. Lord Kelvin, A 19th century Irish-born engineer, stated "If you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it". The nature of social media means that a vast amount of analytical data is recorded every day and can be optimised to measure change in regards to specific academic areas. The hashtag is just one more way to create some form of order on the internet. That order provides a way for optimising the immense amount of quantifiable data that social media collects and in turn measure the change social media is creating. It was hoped that through the case study undertaken that the nature of change could be garnered in relation to the feminist movement which has seen growth on the internet by over 300% in the past three years. This increase is just one quantifiable analytic on the internet. By gathering analytics surrounding three main hashtags created in relation to the feminist movement, we can begin to depict the changes surrounding around the movement itself. With this kind of data available you can detect the changes to any worthy cause. The exploration into use of social media analytics in regard to academia is still an entirely new form of science. Therefore, to garner an accurate amount of information in a field that changes impossibly fast, it is hard to predict what will 'trend' and for how long,

The need to study social media in relation to academia is extremely relevant where most mass conversations regarding politics, war, social injustices and large scale movements like feminism need to be properly studied and analysed.

With social media being synthesised into news, politics, education and this needs to be accurately researched in academia to provide future generations a schema of how social media morphs over a period of time. Social media is more than just a technology – increased participation online has meant that it is also becoming a part of society. Feminist identity in online social media is shifting because of the hashtags generating of online activism which is ultimately providing a critique of an outdated system, subverting the norm and attempting to revolutionise a patriarchy - one hashtag at a time.

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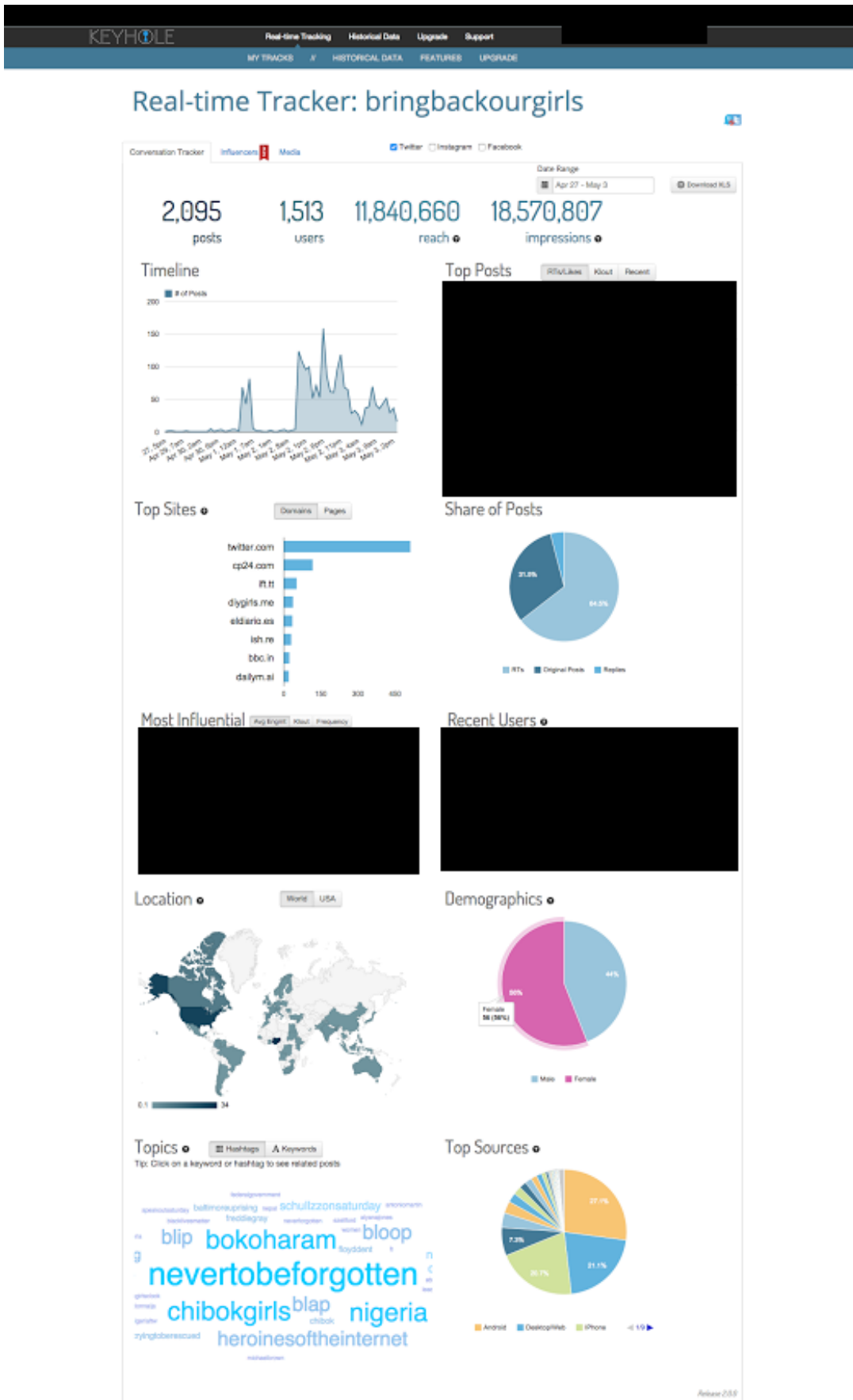
Related words and hashtags for #BringBackOurGirls

Topics ❷ | ⠿ Hashtags | A Keywords | | Download | </> |

Tip: Click on a keyword or hashtag to see related posts

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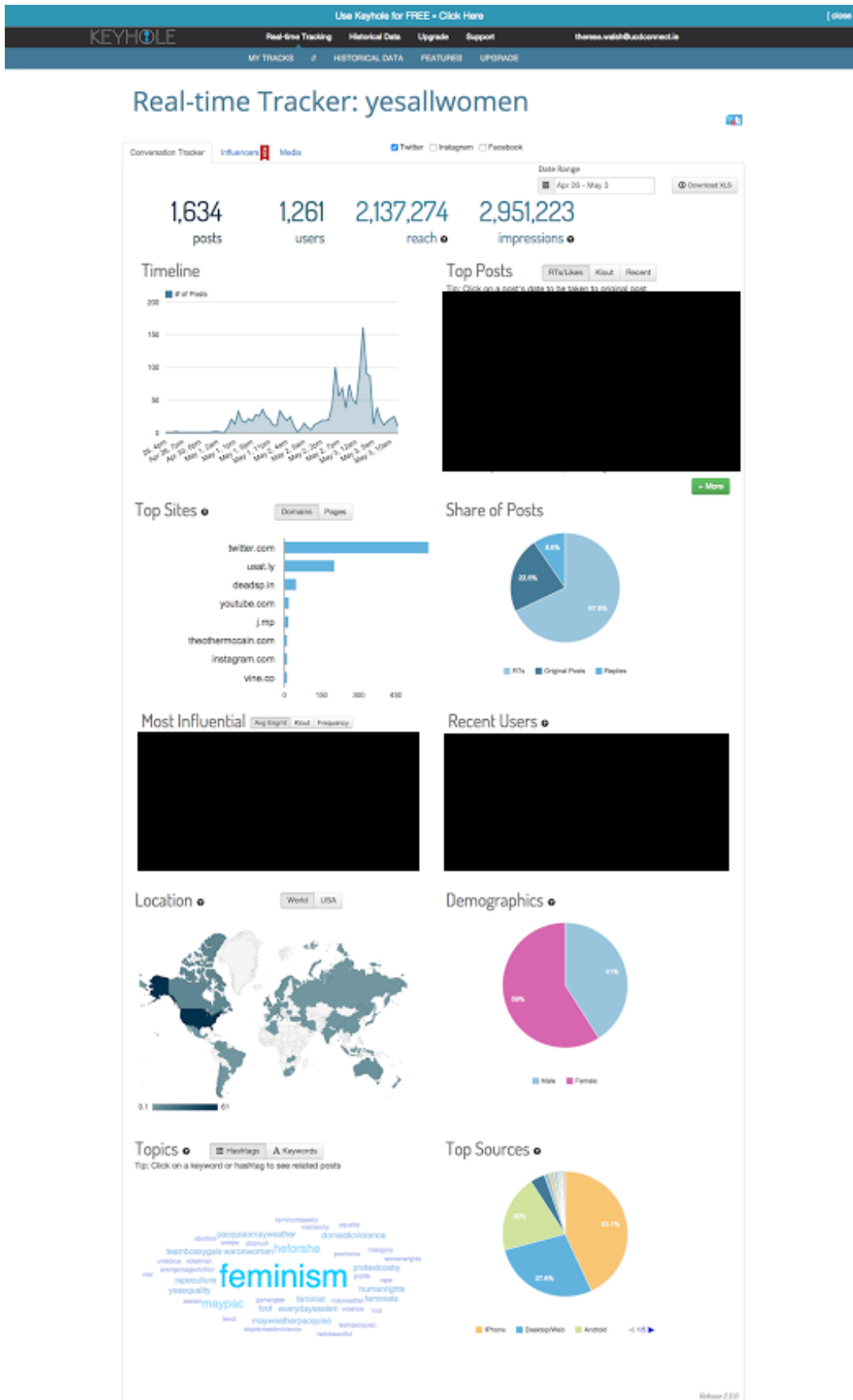
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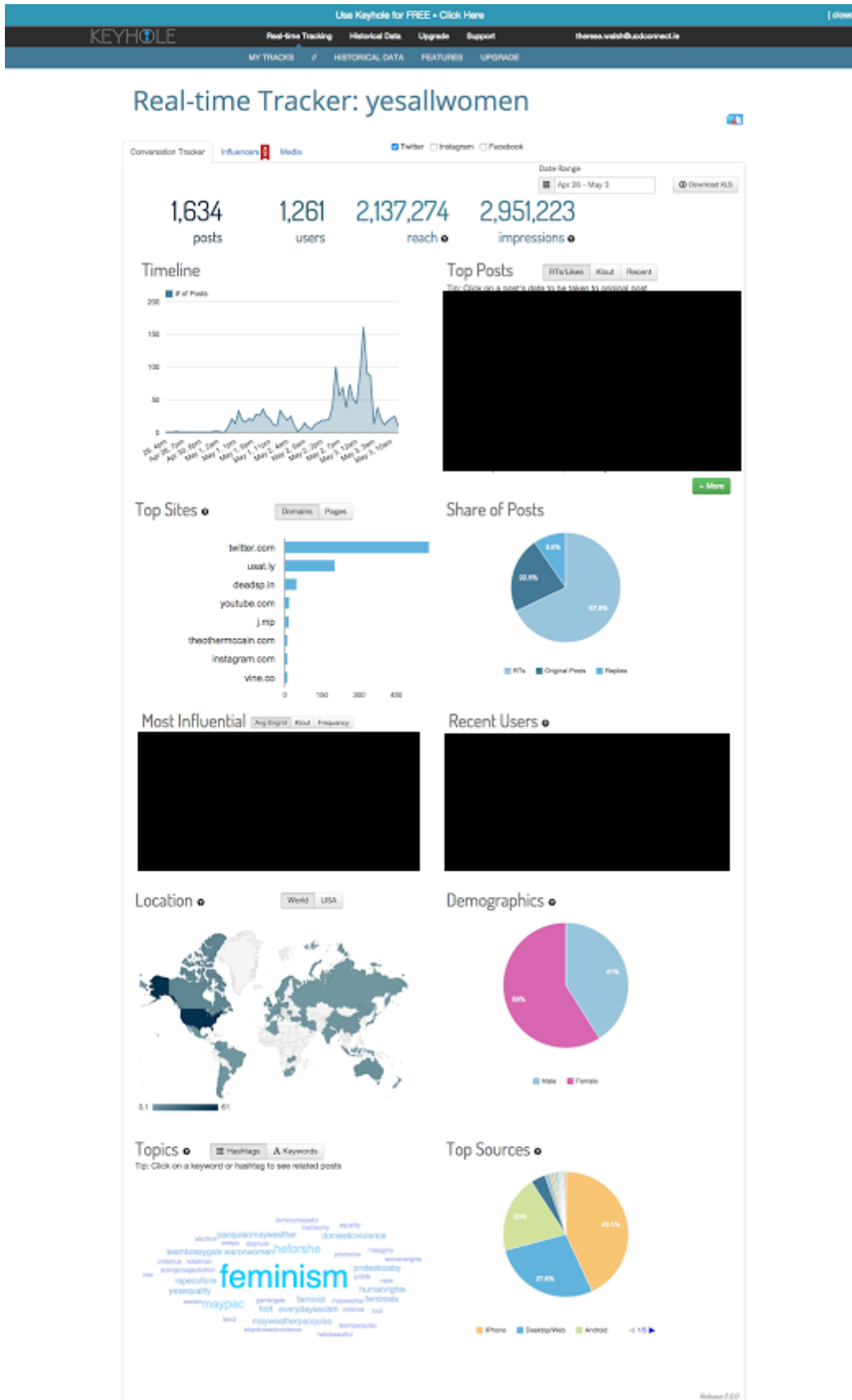
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