The promises and pitfalls of digital activism: Fighting for #MeToo under the Great Firewall of China

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Abstract

In 2017, the #MeToo movement swept across the globally interconnected digital sphere, exposing cases of sexual assault and harassment across a plethora of industries worldwide, with Hollywood in particular dominating the spotlight. However, little research has been conducted into how this movement translates in non-Western online domains, and the efforts of survivors and grassroots activists in sustaining change online in the face of digital censorship. This essay provides critical insight into how #MeToo has manifested in the Chinese digital sphere, and how these digital movements often struggle to operate and survive within an authoritarian context. It explores how Chinese netizens have thus articulated and cultivated a participatory presence online, carving out a malleable creative space for survivors and activists that is constantly circumventing and adapting to the boundaries of online censorship. Through the evaluation of tactics used by Chinese activists in the #MeToo movement, this essay highlights the complex and dichotomous utility of digital media, through its promises and pitfalls in generating tangible sociocultural transformation.

Introduction

The innovative and tactful use of information and communication technologies (ICT) by Chinese netizens, in spite of heavy censorship, is emblematic of how ICT 'doesn't just supersize activism; it can change how it takes place'.[1] #MeToo activism first rose to prominence in October 2017, when actress Alyssa Milano called on victims of sexual harassment via Twitter to post 'Me Too'—a phrase first coined by feminist activist Tarana Burke in 2006—as a sign of solidarity among survivors.[2] Within 24 hours, the post received 66,000 replies and the hashtag #MeToo had inspired more than 12 million posts, unveiling a global movement of activism that soon transcended China's digital borders too.[3] However, little research has been conducted into how the #MeToo movement translates across non-Western online domains, and how Chinese survivors and grassroots activists sustain change online in the face of digital censorship. This essay aims to critically evaluate how #MeToo has manifested in the Chinese digital sphere, and how effectively these digital movements operate and survive within an authoritarian context.

The #MeToo chapter in China has come to represent a digital movement of determined creativity in the face of surveillance, calling for awareness and systemic change around sexual harassment. Most importantly, this essay highlights the complex and dichotomous utility of digital media in generating tangible sociocultural transformation. It begins by contextualising #MeToo in China's unique digital environment, while adopting the theoretical framework of connective action to examine the movement. The essay will then explore how the Chinese #MeToo movement has been most successful in raising awareness and affective solidarity, as Chinese netizens have articulated and cultivated a strong participatory presence online. However, it also highlights the disadvantages of digital awareness-

[1] Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally enabled social change: Activism in the internet age* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press: 2011), 29.

[2] Elizabeth Brunner and Sarah Partlow-Lefevre, '#MeToo as networked collective: Examining consciousness-raising on wild public networks', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2020): 3.

[3] Ibid.

raising, in marginalising vulnerable groups who do not share equality of access to such online platforms. The essay will then examine how Chinese activists have demonstrated ongoing resilience by carving out a malleable online space that circumvents and adapts to the boundaries of online censorship. Chinese survivors and activists have actively used creativity and international online exchanges to maintain the visibility of #MeToo in China. Finally, this essay will argue that the decentralised nature of #MeToo online has impeded its cohesion, but has also afforded freedom from online erasure. Through the evaluation of tactics used by Chinese activists in the #MeToo movement, this essay highlights the promises and pitfalls in generating sociocultural change through digital media outlets. It is evident that while the movement has successfully generated awareness and solidarity despite censorship, its capacity to create tangible ongoing transformation remains limited and has yet to fully crystallise.

#MeToo arrives in China

Given the vast expansiveness of digital platforms that #MeToo was born out of, it was not long before the movement reached China, where sexual harassment and the stigmatisation of victims remains a widespread issue. A report critiquing China's sexual harassment laws found that across China's court judgements between 2010 and 2017, only 34 cases out of more than 50 million concerned sexual harassment.[4] This indicates not the absence of sexual harassment, but rather, a systemic challenge evident in underreported cases and silenced victims. In a first step towards change, on 1 January 2018, engineering student Luo Xixi posted her #MeToo experience of sexual harassment, exposing her former academic supervisor Chen Xiaowu on China's largest microblogging platform, Weibo.[5] The post received almost 4 million views and 16,000 shares by the following day.[6] It triggered flows of solidarity posts and allegations that swept over Chinese social media platforms. In a rare but inspiring turn of events, Beihang University sacked Chen within two weeks of Luo's viral post, and the Chinese Ministry of Education pledged zero tolerance to sexual misconduct, promising to combat sexual harassment in the sector.[7] The initial orientation of #MeToo around the Chinese education sector reflected not only a considerably youthful demographic of impassioned participants, but also the 'increasingly internationalised network' of students who, like Luo, were Chinese students based overseas and exposed to uncensored critical feminist theories.[8] Wu and Dong highlight how 'made-in-China feminism' is now largely led by young feminists, who are ready to employ their technological savviness to challenge gender inequalities, despite government surveillance against public collective activism.[9]

Given that the proliferation of information communication technologies (ICT) enables public participation in a plethora of public discussion forums, the internet has become 'not just a contested space, but a catalyst for social and political transformation'.[10] The number of Chinese internet users has rapidly grown to 904 million in the first quarter of 2020, signifying the internet's potential to shape a highly influential and inclusive public participatory space in China.[11] Thus, the rising number of active

[4] Minghui Liu, Yili Lin, and Ying Li, 打破沉默，拒绝妥协——中国防治职场性骚扰法律与司法审判案例研究报告 [*Breaking the silence and refusing to compromise: A case study report on China's laws and judicial trials to prevent workplace sexual harassment*] (Beijing: Beijing Yuanzhong Gender Development Centre, 2018), kuaibao.qq.com/s/20180726A1O14U00?refer=spider.

[5] Xixi Luo,我要实名举报北航教授、长江学者陈小武性骚扰女学生 ['I want to report harassment of a female student by Professor Beihang and Changjiang scholar Chen Xiaowu'], *Sina Weibo*, January 1, 2018, www.weibo.com/ttarticle/p/show?id=2309404191293831018113.

[6] Jason P. Abbott, 'Of grass mud horses and rice bunnies: Chinese internet users challenge Beijing's censorship and internet controls', *Asian Politics & Policy* 11, no. 1 (2019): 165.

[7] Simina Mistreau, 'China's #MeToo activists have transformed a generation', *Foreign Policy*, January 10, 2019, foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/10/chinas-metoo-activists-have-transformed-a-generation/.

[8] Jing Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action: A study of the anti-sexual violence and anti-sexual harassment campaign on Chinese social media in 2018', *Journalism Practice* 14, no. 2 (2020): 179.

[9] Angela Xiao Yu and Yige Dong, 'What is made-in-China feminism(s)? Gender discontent and class friction in post-socialist China', *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2019): 479.

[10] Xiao Qiang, "The battle for the Chinese internet', *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 60.

[11] 'Statistics: China internet users', China Internet Watch, 2020, www.chinainternetwatch.com/statistics/china-internet-users/.

netizens using the internet has led to what the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences identifies as a 'new opinion class'.[12] To contextualise #MeToo in China, we must first understand the 'Great Firewall of China': the strict censorship program that limits the operations of activism online.[13] King, Pan, and Roberts' study found that the primary purpose of Chinese censorship was not to suppress all criticisms toward the government, but to 'reduce the probability of collective action by clipping social ties' wherever collective organisations may materialise and threaten social stability.[14] Consequently, activism mostly occurs in fragmented digital spaces, and will rarely successfully overcome censorship to mobilise mass collective action. As noted by King, Pan, and Roberts, 'the Chinese people are individually free, but collectively in chains'.[15]

Given this unique context, this essay will evaluate the #MeToo movement through a connective action theoretical framework. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) first conceptualised connective action as the emergence of 'inclusive and diverse large-scale personal expression rather than through common group or ideological identification', due to a shift from group-based societies to networked individualism connected through ICT.[16] Connective action is propelled primarily by digital media, which act as 'organising agents' facilitating content distribution across social networks.[17] Therefore, given China's restrictive online environment, ICT has served as a 'critical, and sometimes sole conduit' through which #MeToo activists can facilitate networks of creative resources and connective action to generate awareness and social change.[18]

Building awareness and solidarity

The most remarkable achievement of China's #MeToo movement is its use of social media platforms to generate widespread awareness, transform the public sphere, and foster a sense of solidarity. Social media platforms have become the preferred feminist activism tools because of their 'economical, convenient, and politically low-cost' nature.[19] Street-level collective engagement carries high risk in China, as shown by the infamous arrest of 'The Feminist Five' in March 2015 for 'disturbing public order' while protesting against harassment on public transport.[20] Supplanting Western social media platforms with their own equivalents, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tightly governs a 'hybridised "local" Internet'.[21] According to Lü Pin, founder of Chinese feminist group *Feminist Voices* (which was shut down by authorities in March 2018), China's #MeToo movement mainly used 'Weibo, which allowed broad outreach; and WeChat, which created private groups and more direct channels of communication'.[22] Jürgen Habermas's notion of a 'public sphere' describes a deliberative space of public debate between citizens online and offline.[23] However, feminist scholarship, notably 'cyberfeminism', challenges this concept, arguing that digital public spheres reflect offline exclusionary

[12] Ibid, 58.

[13] Cara Wallis, 'Gender and China's online censorship protest culture', *Feminist Media Studies* 15, no. 2 (2015): 225.

[14] Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, 'How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression', *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 2 (2013): 1.

[15] Ibid, 14.

[16] W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, 'The logic of connective action', *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 744.

[17] Ibid, 752.

[18] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 175.

[19] Qianying Zhou and Hongfeng Qiu, 'Predicting online feminist engagement after MeToo: A study combining resource mobilization and integrative social identity paradigms', *Chinese Journal of Communication* 13, no. 4 (2020): 3.

[20] Jia Tan, 'Digital masquerading: Feminist media activism in China', *Crime Media Culture* 13, no. 2 (2017): 171.

[21] Abbott, 'Of grass mud horses and rice bunnies', 163.

[22] Siodhbhra Parkin and Jiayun Feng, '"The government is powerful, but it can't shut us down": Lü Pin on China's #Metoo movement', *SupChina*, July 12, 2019, supchina.com/2019/07/12/the-government-is-powerful-but-it-cant-shut-us-down-lu-pin-on-chinas-metoo-movement/.

[23] Michael Salter, 'Justice and revenge in online counter-publics: Emerging responses to sexual violence in the age of social media', *Crime Media Culture* 9, no. 3 (2013): 225.

patriarchies, leveraging men's voices above women's in debate.[24] Feminist scholars have also long recognised how 'affective solidarity' in 'frustration, rage, and the desire for connection' form a necessary precondition for feminist activism to gain and maintain prominence in an inherently patriarchal public sphere.[25] Connective actions comprise of affective personal narratives within broader networks, where social media platforms become 'conduits for connection', facilitating a collaborative rather than collective identity.[26] For example, after publicising allegations against Chen on Weibo, Luo gathered victims with similar allegations in a WeChat group called 'Hard Candy'—named after a film about a teenage female vigilante—to discuss further actions.[27] Campaign hashtags make effective vessels for disseminating ideas, discussions, and resources online. The #MeToo hashtag itself shapes an inclusive participatory culture, through which 'online users are not passive receivers of information, but active creators of meanings'.[28] In China, waves of #MeToo stories perforated social media, exposing sexual harassment cases ranging from the media sector to the non-profit sector.[29] By late July, the phrase '*xing sao rao* 性骚扰' (sexual harassment) had appeared on WeChat more than 30 million times.[30] Evidently, the #MeToo hashtag has transformed the traditional concept of a public sphere, placing women's voices at the centre of their own experiences and placing the narrative power in their hands. The personalised nature of shared #MeToo stories contributes to an awareness-raising, 'collectively authored' text that is an integral element of connective action.[31]

However, the #MeToo movement has been criticised for excluding experiences of marginalised, less-privileged women, which is reflective of broader societal inequalities.[32] The online public sphere of feminist activism still remains relatively insular in China, with tertiary-educated urban Chinese women comprising its most prominent participants.[33] Urban women from a higher socio-economic background are more exposed to critical feminist theory through online channels or international exposure, whereas rural Chinese women with lower education and fewer resources are less likely or able to participate.[34] The criteria for a 'credible and media-worthy victim' in China's #MeToo campaign also remains limited to educated and tech-savvy 'elites',[35] although this is not an isolated challenge in China alone. In November 2019, #MeToo founder Tarana Burke wrote, 'in 2006, I launched the "Me Too" movement because I wanted to find ways to bring healing into the lives of black women and girls. But those same women and girls, along with other people of colour, queer people, and disabled people, continued to be marginalised in the movement'.[36] Given the online space that #MeToo predominantly operates in, it appears that access to media, limited by class and geography, continues to pose a challenge to the true inclusivity and accessibility of #MeToo globally.[37] As Rottenberg highlights, 'when we think of

[24] Kimberly J. Lopez, Meghan L. Muldoon, and Janet K. L. McKeown, 'One day of #feminism: Twitter as a complex digital arena for wielding, shielding, and trolling talk on feminism', *Leisure Sciences* 41, no. 3 (2019): 207.

[25] Zhou and Qiu, 'Predicting online feminist engagement after MeToo', 5.

[26] Zizi Papacharissi, 'Affective publics and structures of storytelling: Sentiment, events and mediality', *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (2016): 314.

[27] Mistreau, 'China's #MeToo activists have transformed a generation'; Luo, 'I want to report harassment'.

[28] Ying Xiong, Moonhee Cho, and Brandon Boatwright, 'Hashtag activism and message frames among social movement organizations: Semantic network analysis and thematic analysis of Twitter during the #MeToo movement', *Public Relations Review* 45, no. 1 (2019): 20.

[29] Javier C. Hernández and Iris Zhao, 'A #MeToo reckoning in China's workplace amid wave of accusations', *The New York Times*, July 26, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/world/asia/china-metoo.html.

[30] Han Zhang, 'One year of #MeToo: How the movement eludes government surveillance in China', *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2018, www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/one-year-of-metoo-how-the-movement-eludes-government-surveillance-in-china.

[31] Brunner and Partlow-Lefevre, '#MeToo as networked collective', 6.

[32] Jing Zeng, 'You say #MeToo, I say #MiTu: China's online campaigns against sexual abuse', in *#MeToo and the politics of social change*, ed. Bianca Fileborn and Rachel Loney-Howes (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 78.

[33] Tan, 'Digital masquerading', 182.

[34] Xin Shi and Yong Zheng, 'Perception and tolerance of sexual harassment: An examination of feminist identity, sexism, and gender roles in a sample of Chinese working women', *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2020): 226.

[35] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 186.

[36] Tarana Burke, '"Outing perpetrators doesn't get to root of the problem": MeToo founder', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 13, 2019, www.smh.com.au/national/outing-perpetrators-doesn-t-get-to-root-of-the-problem-metoo-founder-20191108-p538x0.html.

[37] Tan, 'Digital masquerading', 182.

#MeToo we not only need to think of whose voices are suddenly being heard, but also of which voices continue to be silenced'.[38]

Creativity as a weapon against censorship

When the #MeToo hashtag was quickly banned in China after it first arose, Chinese netizens demonstrated immense resilience in continuing to distribute stories and resources online through a number of creative digital and wordplay tactics. Zeng highlights the tactic of 'camouflaging', in which censorship is evaded through diverse content modification.[39] #MeToo activists in China have been able to quickly adapt their online strategies by using wordplay and images. For example, when the #MeToo hashtag was first banned, netizens converted to using '*#mi tu #*米兔' ('rice bunny'), which is homophonous with 'Me Too'; consequently, images and emoji symbols of a rice bowl and bunny became resistance symbols for Chinese women.[40] Similarly, posts relating to the accused CCTV host Zhu Jun used the hashtag '#猪菌' ('*#zhu jun*') which sounds phonetically similar to his name, but also translates to 'swine bacteria'.[41] The wordplay strategy is especially unique to Chinese digital activism, given the language's dependence on tonality and context for meaning.[42] Censored phrases were also revived through strategic embedding in images, since China's censorship identification mechanism is primarily text-based and slower at scanning images.[43] Activists have also modified images containing text by deliberately distorting or rotating the images to elude detection.[44] With social media closely monitored and topical feminist hashtags disabled on Weibo, prominent Guangzhou feminist activist Zhang Leilei describes the battle against censorship as an 'arms race against the authorities' image filtering techniques'.[45] Such innovative and creative practices are emblematic of 'the persistence and dedication of Chinese netizens fighting censors' in a highly surveilled environment.[46] Today, #MeToo remains censored in Chinese search engines, but its voice survives in malleable creative forms online.

The creativity of Chinese netizens in defying censorship is also evident through their use of ICT to connect with and distribute resources to Chinese activists abroad. ICT has enabled social movements to 'break geographical boundaries to reach broad audiences'.[47] Chinese diaspora—especially in North America—have played pivotal roles as information 'brokers', linking the uncensored #MeToo movement abroad to their home country via the internet.[48] For example, Chinese students in New York City frequently translated domestic Chinese #MeToo resources into English, sharing Chinese stories on uncensored English-based media platforms.[49] The Weibo online group, JoinFeminism, also translated English resources from abroad to post on Chinese sites.[50] This demonstrates the constant flow of information both inwards and outwards from the Chinese #MeToo movement through ICT. Furthermore, Lü Pin highlights that the geographically boundless online nature of #MeToo meant 24-hour online traction in China because of overseas Chinese activists.[51] She recounts how in student

[38] Catherine Rottenberg, '#MeToo and the prospects of political change', *Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 2 (2018): 45.

[39] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 182.

[40] Mistreau, 'China's #MeToo activists have transformed a generation'.

[41] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 184.

[42] Kevin M. Deluca, Elizabeth Brunner, and Ye Sun, 'Weibo, WeChat, and the transformative events of environmental activism on China's wild public screens', *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 330.

[43] Tan, 'Digital masquerading', 176.

[44] Abbott, 'Of grass mud horses and rice bunnies', 166.

[45] Mistreau, 'China's #Metoo activists have transformed a generation'.

[46] Deluca, Brunner, and Sun, 'Weibo, WeChat', 330.

[47] Xiong, Cho, and Boatwright, 'Hashtag activism and message frames', 10.

[48] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 181.

[49] Shen Lu, 'Silenced at home, finding a voice overseas: China's feminists cultivate the expatriate community', *South China Morning Post*, October 8, 2019, www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3031924/silenced-home-finding-voice-overseas-chinas-feminists-cultivate.

[50] Bin Wang and Catherine Driscoll, 'Chinese feminists on social media: Articulating different voices, building strategic alliances', *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 33, no. 1 (2019): 7.

[51] Parkin and Feng, 'The government is powerful, but it can't shut us down'.

petitions, 4,000 signatures were gathered from overseas through an internationally available Google form, which was then merged with domestic WeChat petitions.[52] The ability to communicate remotely through the sheer diversity of available platforms has become a pivotal advantage of digital activism today,[53] steering the domestic Chinese #MeToo movement outwards and enabling anyone around the globe to participate regardless of locality. Ultimately, the Chinese #MeToo movement has shown astoundingly effective creativity towards censorship, in maintaining visibility locally and abroad.

A fluid and decentralised movement

Rooted in the digital realm, #MeToo in China emerged as an amorphous and diversified movement, rendering tangible change difficult, but also helping #MeToo adapt and survive in the Chinese authoritarian context. It has been consistently found across multiple online campaigns that social media often creates 'chaotic campaigns' that are 'diffused, messy, with differing agendas at play and differing influences', which can hinder enduring success.[54] #MeToo originated from the connective actions of a 'disparate and shifting, loosely connected collective of individuals' sharing related goals but lacking united collective direction.[55] Many participants in #MeToo are momentary grassroots activists, building public awareness and affecting solidarity through the connective distribution of personal stories online. One can contribute as much or as little, as often or as infrequently, as they deem appropriate. Lü Pin argues that the ability of #MeToo to generate structural change beyond awareness-raising was unfortunately limited, due to its lack of steering organisers, coordinated responses, and collective agendas and goals.[56] The fragmentation of the movement meant, regrettably, that there was 'no cohesive force to mobilise China's #MeToo campaign into a broader collective action'.[57]

However, the very self-directed nature of this constantly shifting and fleeting movement has also worked in favour of #MeToo in China. Since the resistance manifests in a decentralised and fluid manner, it is difficult to target through censorship.[58] #MeToo is an 'always incomplete text without discrete authorship or boundaries' and operates without an identifiable core.[59] For this reason, one can never effectively silence or erase its voices. For movements to survive in China, they need to have flexibility, adaptability, and resilience, avoiding unified and coercive action frames that could be easier for the government to target.[60]

After 12 months of #MeToo campaigning in China, small glimpses of institutional hope began to glimmer, as the Supreme Court added sexual harassment to its 'causes of action', enabling victims to formally seek remedy.[61] Furthermore, the CCP announced a Civil Code which was adopted in May 2020, requiring employers to implement appropriate measures to address workplace harassment, although the Code only includes one article on this matter.[62] Remedial justice for individual #MeToo cases has also had little success so far.[63] Nonetheless, Zeng emphasises that activism in China requires

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Hester Baer, 'Redoing feminism: Digital activism, body politics, and neo-liberalism', *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016): 18.

[54] Peter Dauvergne, 'Is the power of brand-focused activism rising? The case of tropical deforestation', *Journal of Environment & Development* 26, no. 2 (2017): 140.

[55] Brunner and Partlow-Lefevre, '#MeToo as networked collective', 6.

[56] Parkin and Feng, 'The government is powerful, but it can't shut us down'.

[57] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 186.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Brunner and Partlow-Lefevre, '#MeToo as networked collective', 7.

[60] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 175.

[61] Yaqiu Wang, '#MeToo in the land of censorship', *Human Rights Watch*, May 8, 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/08/metoo-land-censorship.

[62] Changhao Wei, '2020 NPC session: A guide to China's civil code', *NPC Observer*, May 21, 2020, /npcobserver.com/2020/05/21/2020-npc-session-a-guide-to-chinas-civil-code/.

[63] Lily Kuo, '"It is not hopeless": China's #MeToo movement finally sees legal victories', *The Guardian*, November 4, 2019, www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/04/it-is-not-hopeless-chinas-metoo-movement-finally-sees-legal-victories.

patience and hope, as 'while this disorderliness may lack momentum and efficiency on the surface, it accrues strength and meaning over time'.[64]

Conclusion

In assessing the effectiveness of digital activism in China's #MeToo movement, this essay explained China's censorship of cyberspace, adopting 'connective actions' as an appropriate theoretical framework to assess domestic activism. #MeToo's greatest success is elevating awareness of sexual harassment and generating solidarity among victims, through its participatory culture of connective action. To counter censorship, netizens have also creatively adapted media content and exchanged materials internationally. Additionally, this essay debated the diffused and decentralised essence of the #MeToo movement in China, recognising the limitations of social media–based campaigns in coordinating cohesive collective action, but also the merits of an elusive, dispersed campaign in navigating the authoritarian cyberspace of China. #MeToo's impact in China has been most profound in elevating public awareness and constructing solidarity, but very few institutional and structural changes have crystallised.

Due to the viral and widespread mobilising capacities afforded by social media, we often expect institutional changes to follow instantly, and blame social media for failing us when changes do not immediately ensue. In Papacharissi's exploration of digital activism, she highlights this fallacy in our reasoning, arguing that perhaps 'it is not social medias that have misled us, it is our own expectations'.[65] She shares her own understanding of the effectiveness of social media tools, 'not as a function of their affordances, but more so as the outcome of our own expectations from technology'.[66] Therefore, operating within contested public spheres, digital platforms utilised for activism are 'neither elixir nor poison'.[67] China's #MeToo movement has demonstrated that these digital platforms continue to be harnessed as mechanisms of sociocultural transformation by both government and impassioned activists, in a 'combative dance' of censorship and creative opposition.[68]

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[64] Zeng, '#MeToo as connective action', 186–187.

[65] Papacharissi, 'Affective publics and structures of storytelling', 321.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Deluca, Brunner, and Sun, 'Weibo, WeChat', 324.

[68] Ibid.

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