

Title of Project:	Social Media Influencer’s Role in Digital Feminist Activism: A Scoping Review
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Undergraduate Students	2 FIMS Undergraduate students will each be hired for 2 terms at \$1,250 per term (4-5 hours per week)
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Required Skills: excellent verbal and written communication skills, ability to work in a team environment, organizational skills, strong research skills (including familiarity with Western Libraries and/or literature reviews)

Term of Employment: September - December 2023; January – April 2024

FIMS Investigators:
Anabel Quan-Haase , Professor & Associate Dean Graduate and Postdoctoral, Faculty of Information and Media Studies

Co- Investigators:
Molly-Gloria Patel, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Faculty of Information and Media Studies

Graduate Students
Charlotte Nau, Media Studies PhD Jinman Zhang, Media Studies PhD

Description of Project

Social media platforms are key tools in digital feminist activism (Nau et al., 2023). Women and girls across cultures have turned to social media to protest sexism and gender inequality, form activist communities, and facilitate social change by dismantling dominant narratives surrounding important causes like women’s rights and sexual misconduct (Quan-Haase et al. 2021). Our research team has conducted a review of the published research on the hashtag #MeToo and identified how social media has been used as an important tool in creating awareness around sexual violence around the globe. A unique aspect to digital activist movements in recent years has been the role of influencers.

Influencers have been found to be instrumental in participating in and promoting digital feminist activist movements (Tufekci, 2013). Social media influencers are “a subset of digital content creators defined by their significant online following, distinctive brand persona, and patterned relationships with commercial sponsors” (Duffy, 2020). Considering their impact on public opinion and their ability to persuade, scholars have started to delve into the role of influencers in other domains, such as their role in digital activism (e.g., Eriksson Krutrok & Akerlund, 2022; Hurley, 2022). According to Tufekci

(2013), these influencers are defined as “politically motivated actor[s] who successfully use affordances of social media to engage in a presentation of his or her political and personal self to garner attention to a cause” (p. 857).

Not all influencers participate in digital activism with genuine intentions. For example, as found by Eriksson Krutrok and Akerlund (2022) in a study of the Black Lives Matter movement, influencers can use a social movement for self-exposure or personal gain by posting content that shows solidarity with the movement, but do not post content that would suggest they were doing something more substantial (e.g., protesting). In addition, with social media algorithms promoting content similar to that in which social media users engage, it can create a one-sidedness where individuals disproportionately see influencers with a certain viewpoint (Hernandez, 2022; Huber et al., 2022).

Research objectives:

RQ1: What role do influencers play in digital feminist activism?

RQ2: How are scholars studying (conceptualizing and operationalizing) influencers involved in digital feminist activism?

This project will provide new insights into how social media platforms are being used by influencers for digital activism as well as the ways narratives shared across different social media can shape feminist activism across the globe.

Support and development of Undergraduate Student Fellows

Students will work and learn in an interdisciplinary team. They will learn about social media and how to critically approach the study of social media platforms. This will prepare students for the workforce and provide them with an in-depth understanding of influencers and their role in society. They will obtain hands-on experience in the research process. Support and training will be provided throughout the project by Dr. Quan-Haase, the postdoctoral fellow and graduate students. Students will learn the process of literature collection, designing the search strategy, selecting key databases, performing searches, refining queries, collecting and exporting documents, cleaning the data, coding the data, and writing up core themes.

How to Apply

To apply, please submit your resume, an unofficial transcript, and a cover letter that explains your interest in the role and relevant skills via email to Karen Kueneman (kueneman@uwo.ca). Deadline for applications is August 16, 2023, 4:00 pm ET.