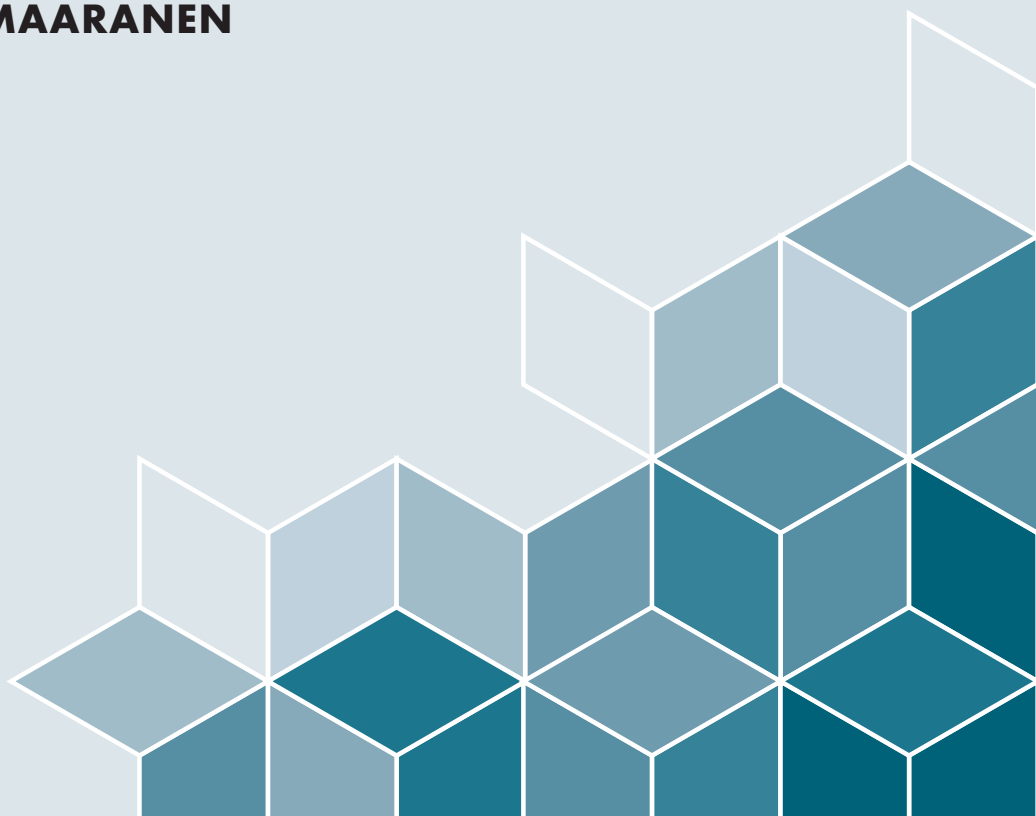
EKONOMI OCH SAMHÄLLE
ECONOMICS AND SOCIETY

Socio-technological encounters and new discursive dynamics in social media spaces

ANNA MAARANEN



Ekonomi och Samhälle
Economics and Society

Skrifter utgivna vid Svenska handelshögskolan
Publications of the Hanken School of Economics

Nr 370

Anna Maaranen

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Helsinki 2023

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Key words: social media, organization, discourse, socio-technologicality, multimodality

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The originality of this publication has been checked in accordance with the quality assurance system of Hanken School of Economics using the Ithenticate software.

Hanken School of Economics
ISBN 978-952-232-482-5 (printed)
ISBN 978-952-232-483-2 (pdf)
ISSN-L 0424-7256
ISSN 0424-7256(printed)
ISSN 2242-699X (pdf)

Hansaprint Oy, Turenki 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It took a whole bunch of smart, kind, and endlessly supportive people to complete this thesis. Thank you everyone for being there for the ride, it was one of the best ones yet!

The first and biggest thank you goes to my supervisors Emma Nordbäck and Janne Tienari. I was beyond lucky to get you two in my team - Instagram's PhD community is full of memes depicting the horrors of a supervisory relationship, and you have proved every single one of them wrong. Thank you for believing in what I had to say, and for always knowing when to offer your support and when to let me figure things out on my own.

Thank you to my pre-examiners, Professor Sine Nørholm Just and Professor Jennifer Gibbs, for your insightful comments and encouraging words which helped me complete this thesis. I am grateful for the time and dedication you gave to my work. Thank you, Professor Just, for also agreeing to be my opponent in the public defence.

Thank you to the funds that awarded me grants throughout the project – Marcus Wallenberg stiftelse, Waldemar von Frenckells stiftelse, Työsuojelurahasto, Liikesivistysrahasto, and Paulon säätiö. Your support made this journey possible.

Thank you to everyone I had the privilege of working and writing with during these past four years: Janne, Eva-Lena Lundgren Henriksson, Frank den Hond, Mikko Vesa, and Micaela Stierncreutz. Learning to write academic text oftentimes feels like learning to write all over again, but you made it fun and meaningful. I am proud to carry echoes of your academic voice in mine. And thank you, Eero Vaara, for igniting my spark for doing research – and my interest in all things Bakhtin – in the first place. Without your encouragement, I would not have ended up doing a PhD in the first place.

Thank you to everyone at the department of Management and Organisation at Hanken for not only supporting me with the thesis project but also for welcoming me into the community so warmly. Doing a PhD in the midst of a pandemic was weird at times, but you made it special. Thank you Neema for all the conversations on writing and everything else, Natalia for always cheering me and everyone else on, Mikaela for all the help with, like, everything, Inkeri for figuring out with me how to keep our GG community going through remote times, Stefan

for being the best (most) annoying roommate, and to everyone else who made this such a fun ride. A special thank you to Eva-Lena – you became my work bestie long before we first met face to face, and I am certain you are to me what Anne of Green Gables would call a kindred spirit.

A big thank you to my family and friends outside of Hanken. Thank you, mum and dad, for teaching me that one should always be kind and curious and read as much as possible – all three seem to apply to doing a PhD as well as they do to doing life in general. Thank you to my friends all across the world – you are pure gold. Heini and Hanna, a special thank you for helping with all the English and Swedish language checks and for always responding to my panicky late night WAs. Iiris, thank you for all the non-work lunches around Töölö. Vilma, thank you for the study dates – it was during them that much of this work came into being. And OPG, thank you for being the most amazing, giant group of best friends one could ever ask for.

Finally, Simo, my love, thank you for everything. You made my wish of becoming a researcher a priority long before I dared to dream it out loud. Thank you for the hugs and the kicks on the butt, and for always knowing which one to go for.

On an ending note: thank you, Taylor Swift, for providing a soundtrack for this journey. Through the stressin', obsessin', and the perfect storms, your songs have set the pace for me.

In Espoo on December 8th, 2022

Anna

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1 INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: pondering my orb

In October 2021, the above depiction of a wizard staring at a blue crystal ball, captioned *pondering my orb*, was shared on the social media platform Twitter by user *@thatsgoodweb*. A few weeks later, versions of it had been shared thousands of times across different platforms. In December of the same year, online media outlet *Thrillist* listed *pondering my orb* as their choice of the number one viral meme of 2021 (Thrillist 2021). The original illustration by Angus McBride is from the cover of a 1993 Lord of the Rings role playing journal issue *Valar & Maiar: The Immortal Powers*. Most of those who shared it probably do not know that, nor does it probably matter. What matters is the fact that for a fleeting while, the man and his orb were the buzz on what is known as the global social media.

A multi-billion user space and multi-billion euro sector of the global economy, public social media platforms have become an important part of the contemporary world. Many of us live large chunks of our lives online, communicating through our mobile phone screens, our interactions enabled by social media platforms. This is the new socio-technological structure that is inevitably and inseparably woven into

the canvas of today's social life. According to Bercovici (2010), the term 'social media' stems from the early 1990's and 2000's emerging web communication tools which are typically referred to as social networking sites (SNS) in research (e.g., boyd & Ellison 2007; Baym 2011). Today, it is commonly used to refer to the modern-day, publicly available mobile- and web-based interactive platforms where content is created and shared by users with little to no editorial control (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre 2011). These are sometimes referred to as 'Web 2.0' to differentiate from the first wave of 'Web 1.0' (SNS) and emphasize the fundamentally collaborative and participatory nature which characterized the platforms emerging in the early 2000's and which remains in the core of social media today (Beer & Burrows, 2007; O-Reilly 2005). Increasingly, the term 'Web 3.0' is also used to suggest the evolution from collaboration between human users to cooperation between users, data, and technologies in an even more complex way (Fuchs et al., 2010; Watson, 2009).

These interactive, collaborative, cooperative platforms of today range from the established giants Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to quickly growing newer platforms like TikTok, BeReal, and Clubhouse. Some social media are aimed for a specific audience and topic (e.g., LinkedIn for professional networking), some are anonymous (e.g., discussion forum Reddit), and some center around a specific communication format (e.g., video-sharing platform YouTube). While different in scope, format, and topic, common to these platforms is that they are reshaping the space,logic, and discourse of human interaction (Bouvier, 2018; Leonardi, Nardi & Kallinikos 2012; Treem, Dailey, Pierce & Biffl 2016; Van Dijk and Poell 2013).

In organization and management research, social media spaces and technologies in general have attracted research attention in recent years (e.g., Etter & Albu 2021; Kane 2017; Leonardi 2017; Vaast, Safadi, Lapointe & Negoita 2017; Wang, Reger & Pfaffer 2021). For example, the link between organizational identities and social media has sparked interest (Dawson 2015, 2018; Sias & Duncan 2020). However, much of the work carried out is still focused on the so-called internal or enterprise social media platforms used within a single organization for internal purposes (Ellison, Gibbs & Weber 2015; Leonardi, Huysman & Stienfield 2013; Madsen 2016). While the basic technological features and user-centric logic of these platforms are similar to those of public social media, these are different in that they are accessible by a limited number of

users within a specific organizational context such as a company or an office, and typically mostly designed and used for work-related communication purposes.

The somewhat modest focus on public social media spaces is surprising as generally, the notion that global digital realities permeate contemporary organizational lives is well established (Höllerer, van Leeuwen, Jancsary, Meyer, Andersen & Vaara 2019). Organizations operate in a world where people and data exist and are connected in various ways online. Along other digital spaces, public social media have become a site for work, free time, and social lives in general (Tsao, Chen, Tisseverasinghe, Yang, Li & Butt 2021). Unlike in the case of internal social media, questions such as how they exist and are positioned in relation to organizations are more complex, as public social media can be used at work and outside of work and allow for connecting to and with others, both on and off work and beyond organizational borders (Aggarwal, Singh, Chopra & Kumal 2022), in a way organization and work specific digital platforms do not. For many, social media have also become the arena on which they not only engage in but also discuss work. A recent example is the sudden shift into remote work due to the global Covid-19 pandemic and social media as a site for bonding over experiences of it (Wrycza & Maślankowski 2020). While people have been physically removed from their organizational and workplace communities, and socializing typical to them such as hallway conversations and pre-meeting chit chat (Jacks 2021), global social media spaces have provided them with opportunities for making and maintaining social connections, professionally (Valdez, Connell, Leo & Morin 2022) and beyond. Overall, the impact of public social media platforms is especially major today because more than half of the world's population uses them (Data Reportal 2022). From here onwards, I focus on these public social media spaces and refer to them as 'social media'.

It is thereby evident that, as Treem, Dailey, Pierce & Biffl (2016) promptly put it, "social media matter". However, the exact ways in which they matter, and the reasons why they are of crucial importance for work and organizational contexts, need more research attention now that social media have become so widely used in work and organizational settings and in the many interfaces around them. My doctoral thesis responds to this need through providing two interconnected answers: first, to the question of *why* social media matter, and second, to the question of why they matter *in organizational contexts in particular*. I seek to provide insight into how exactly social media platforms and spaces have come to impact professional, organizational, and societal lives, and why

this impact is simultaneously clear and blurry – and for both reasons, crucially important – from an organization studies point of view. While made pronounced by the sudden need for digital solutions and spaces due to the global pandemic, this impact did already exist before it and will likely remain after. The sharpened focus on social media due to the pandemic merely highlights what has been going on for a longer while.

The first key claim my thesis makes is that social media have slowly but surely become an inseparable and impactful part of our social structure and space over the past decade and a half because they have essentially changed how we discursively interact with and encounter each other online. Most essentially, they have changed the 'where' (online), 'how' (in many digitally mediated means such as text, image, and video) and 'by whom' (people and technologies) of interaction. Thus, *social media matter because* they change the space for what I here call the dynamics of interaction, referring to the 'how' and 'by whom' of how interaction plays out. Specifically, social media provide new, technologically embedded spaces and means for interaction.

A major reason is that social media are innately socio-technological (Baygi, Introna & Hultin 2021; Innes, Roberts, Preese & Rogers 2017). What socio-technologicality means here is that "the technological structure can't be separated from its human use and the permanent creation and communication of meaningful information through the Internet" (Fuchs 2005, p. 57). Another popular term organization scholars have used in recent years to convey this blurring of human and technological is socio-materiality (Cooren 2020), which implies that the social and the (technologically) material are "consitutively entangled" and "inextricably related" (Orlikowski 2007). In the context of social media, socio-materiality thus highlights the same inseparable link between the technological setting and its human use. While the differences between the terms are nuanced, socio-technologicality is used in this thesis in order not to emphasize technology as merely *material* (that is, as a setting for human interaction) but also as *agentic* (that is, as a participator in the interaction).

This is not to say that research on socio-materiality excludes the notion of agency, on the contrary: material agency is well accounted for in research (Leonardi 2012a). The reason for opting for the term socio-technologicality here is semantic but not 'just semantics' – most importantly, it is a choice made to emphasize that the social media platforms and phenomena studied here fall under the notion of 'Web

3.0'. In the words of Fuchs et al. (2010), technologies and humans are mutually connected and produce each other in the most contemporary online systems and spaces. Some scholars argue that on the 'Web 2.0' the focus was on human interaction enabled by technological materialities, but on 'Web 3.0' it is on the irretrievable co-dependency of the two (Barassi & Treré, 2012). To acknowledge this relationship, I have chosen to use a wording which does not lean towards either materiality or agency in its focus because, as I aim to show throughout the thesis, contemporary social media technologies carry agency beyond their materiality as understood in the context of 'Web 2.0'. An example of this is the growing use of and interest in artificially intelligent social media algorithms and their social actorhood beyond human interaction (Gruwell 2018; Klinger & Svensson 2018). Another reason for this conceptual choice is that socio-materiality as a concept is still sometimes strained by a persistent focus on physical, tangible materialities (Cooren 2020). 'Web 3.0' technologies are quite different as they exist and operate invisibly in the cyberspace. It is also for this reason that the concept of socio-technologicality is used here.

All human interaction in social media spaces is thus embedded in technology and in interaction with it in various ways (Bucher & Helmond 2018; Farman 2015). From Facebook group functions to Instagram visual editing tools and Twitter retweeting options, all social media platforms provide a wide array of technologically enabled means for producing, editing, and sharing content and for interacting with other users. Different social media platforms offer different sets of affordances – that is, the features and functionalities of a given platform provide an environment for action and determine how it can take place (Gibson 1986). Social media affordances thus enable, restrain, and steer communications and connections online (Treem and Leonardi 2013). Moreover, much interaction on social media takes place *with* technologies. Social media algorithms, for example, both participate in and steer interaction between users and content online (Bucher 2015). Their actorhood is socio-technological in that they are human-designed but artificially intelligent, and they are technologically built into the operational logic and interactive dynamics of social media platforms.

Overall, this notion of technologically infused social interaction has a major impact in terms of discourse and discursivity on social media. Discourse is a concept that is both vague and contested but here, one by discourse scholar Norman Fairclough is adopted. Fairclough defines discourse as material social practice which takes place through language

– textual, visual, bodily, or mediated through some other means (2001). In other words, discourse is a moment as well as means of interaction – it is a materially embedded and linguistically mediated act of social meaning-making and meaning-sharing. In the scope of this thesis, discursivity thus captures the space for and dynamics of interaction on social media, that is, the 'where', 'how', and 'who' outlined above.

Social media technological functions essentially shape how discourses are produced, shared, and responded to, how they travel in the online space, and how they reach their audiences. From textual Twitter tweets of limited character-length to TikToks in video format and from messages shared in closed Facebook groups to hashtagged content which travels quick and far across platforms, interaction can adopt various forms and means on social media. Platform specific functionalities (Treem & Leonardi 2013) play into how discourses and discursive dynamics get shaped online. Moreover, technological actors participate in how these dynamics play out. The example of 'bots' – automated non-human users – is a case in point of how the language (Torres & Sulayes 2021) and rhythm (Chavoshi & Mueen 2018) of interaction can become technological in and of itself, even to a deceitful degree as bots are often maliciously made to mimic human users. The socio-technological affordances and actors in social media spaces thus essentially determine how and by whom discourses are shaped and transported online.

One of the key elements of the discursive space and dynamics of interaction online is increased multimodality, that is, availability of different 'modes' for communication and meaning-making (e.g. Jancsary, Höllerer & Meyer 2016; Meyer et al. 2018) in the online space. On social media, verbal and visual modes of communication layer into newly multimodal communication and even give birth to new discursive vehicles such as short animated pictures, gifs (Adami & Jewitt 2016), and virally spread combinations of text and image, memes (Mina 2019). Moreover, the social media technological setting and its affordances play into how modes are drawn on and combined, and resulting digital modalities (Cappallo, Svetlichnaya, Garrigues, Mensink & Snoek 2018) shape interaction online. Overall, there is new discursivity and discursive dynamics in social media spaces, and social media platforms are not instrumental or 'just a setting' for how they emerge. Rather, they are of actual consequence and impact in how these dynamics get shaped: social media 'shape the shape of discourse' (Gillespie 2018).

While research within organization studies has begun to pay attention to social media contexts, discursive insights into their socio-technologicality are still scarce. Discourse scholars in social sciences more generally have tapped on the implications for discursivity of socio-technological social media spaces, such as new forms of discursive participation and power as well as changing discursive practices (e.g., KhosraviNik 2016, 2022), but organization studies have yet to follow even though the impact on the world of work and organization is vast. Organizations can be perceived as inherently discursive constructions (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst 2015; Sillince 2007). Specifically, this thesis builds on the idea of organizations, organizing, and work as dynamic outcomes of discursive interaction – that is, language does not make organizations into reified entities but rather keeps creating them all over again (e.g., Coupland & Brown 2004; Mumby 2011). In other words, organization and work are constant processes of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia 2002). From such a perspective it is crucial to place focus on social media as contemporary discursive spaces which increasingly permeate organizational lives through their continuous use both within and outside of them.

The second key claim of my thesis builds on this essential discursive link between social media and organizations. I suggest that not only do social media matter, but they matter for modern-day organizations and their research. While there are certainly a number of reasons for *why social media matter* in this organizational context, one that is particularly important is that socio-technological social media blur the boundaries of and widen the discursive grounds for organizations, organization, and work. Social media provide one universal socio-technological space – although in the form of various different platforms – which can be used both within and beyond organizations and workplaces, during work hours and outside of them, as well as for work-related organizational purposes and for personal matters. The space and the overall discursive dynamics its socio-technological nature enable and encourage remain the same independent of the place, time, and purpose of use.

What follows is that the discursive impact of social media spaces is broad and diffused and spills across these various boundaries. In the language of discursive construction of organizations (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst 2015; Sillince 2007), the language giving shape to organizations and organizing now increasingly originates from and operates also beyond organizational boundaries. Sillince (2007) presses that in order to understand any discourse's meaning,

it is essential to "know about both the discourse's possibility and the circumstances of its constitution" – that is, to know about its contextual dimensions of when, where, as whom, and why the discourse is produced. It is these dimensions of organizational discourse and discursive space that social media tend to shift and reshape. Here, I refer to this effect as widening of the discursive grounds for organizational construction. Due to digital spaces such as social media discursively, organizational realities are now constructed and impacted from both within and outside of traditionally held boundaries of what can be widely referred to as organizational space (e.g., Taylor & Spicer, 2007). This 'organizational space' covers both spatial and temporal elements here, as it refers to both the 'where' and 'when' of work and organization.

In practical terms, organizations and organizational members share a discursive space with a variety of 'extraorganizational' others as social media are by nature a public sphere and platform for connecting to other people and information as well as for collectively getting organized across physical boundaries (Young, Selander & Vaast 2019; Vaast et al. 2017). Such a space also opens organizations and what goes on inside of them for commentary in this public sphere in a newly pronounced way (Alvinius & Holmberg 2019). The nature of the social media space also has boundary-blurring implications for individual organizational members. For people at and off work, social media are a space for networking, self-presentation, and overall for being the self and being with others in the digital space (Kasperiuniene & Zydziunaite 2019). Their use can have a distinctly blurring effect as in the social media space, public, personal, and professional tend to collide and boundaries shift (Fieseler, Meckel & Ranzini 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard & Berg 2013). Social media also blur the temporal boundaries of work for individual organizational members.

The notion of social media blurring various lines is certainly not new. 'Social media context collapse' (Marwick & boyd 2011; Vitak 2012) is a concept often used to refer to the boundary blurring effect of social media where social contexts which are separate in the offline world – the personal and professional context, or different social circles, for instance – collide in the shared social media space. A typical example of this is when the same social media profile is used for interacting with people from different social contexts. However, in terms of organization studies, the collapsing effect is interesting because the variety of spatial and temporal contexts which blur due to the use of social media is

particularly wide and challenges the overall notions of organizational, 'extra-organizational' (e.g., Brankovic, 2018; Kuhn, 2018), and their increasingly difficult-to-draw boundaries.

Overall, organizational lives are full of newly obscure boundaries and ambiguous 'in-betweens'. In research on organizations and identity, such transitionary middle spaces have been studied with the lens of liminality (Beech 2011; Sturdy, Schwarz & Spicer 2006). A similar approach to the bending organizational boundaries and resulting blurry spaces might be useful as social media, paired with the portable nature of mobile devices on which they are often used, increasingly remediate everyday lives into "new contexts of social visibility and connection" (Vivienne and Burgess 2013). In these new contexts, organizational contexts and spaces intricately overlap and blend with broader societal and narrower private ones of individual people. This needs to be accounted for in organization studies. In this thesis, I provide four independent papers which illustrate these various overlaps. In each paper, I demonstrate how different social media platforms and actors shape discursive dynamics in a way which has pervasive impact on contemporary lives within, across, and outside of organizational boundaries.

First, however, I return to *pondering my orb*. During its moments of viral fame, the original meme inspired a variety of new versions – in some, the wizard was replaced with another figure, in others, he reached for something else than an orb. There was no consensus on the actual meaning of the original meme or the various versions it transformed into during its circulation in the social media space and for this exact reason, *pondering my orb* captures perfectly what is elemental to social media as a discursive space. It shows how in the socio-technological social media space, content can travel quickly and unpredictably across boundaries, here geographical, but also others such as professional and personal like I discuss in paper 3. It is difficult to predict what kind of content takes off in the technologically steered online space and why, as I discuss in paper 4. In this case, the impact was of the momentary entertainment kind and faded away after some time. However, this is not always the case: social media discussions can also spark action and spill their impact over to offline spaces, like I discuss in paper 2, sometimes exploding into something of global proportions, like I discuss in paper 1.

Finally, *pondering my orb* is a case in point of social media discursivity precisely because it is seemingly completely random at a first glance. On a closer look, however, the meme is just open for multiple interpretations.

It is up to the viewer to determine what the image, caption, and context in which it is shared layer into. To me, the man pensively staring at his glowing orb resonates because it depicts what my thesis is all about: the era of social media where much of life, on and off work, is suddenly mediated through a single screen many of us spend increasing amounts of time staring at. It is this entwinement of social media spaces into all areas of life I discuss in papers 1,2, 3, and 4.

1.1 Research aims and questions

When starting this thesis process, my aim was simple: I wanted to illustrate how social media is used in, and impacts on, contexts relevant to contemporary work and organization. However, I soon became all too familiar with the question of "*ok, so what…?*". It certainly is no news that social media has become widely used in work and organizational contexts in the digitally infused world, where roughly 59% of the population is online (Data Reportal 2022). Through an abductive process (Van den Ven 2007) of going back and forth between gaining empirical understanding on social media and finding a relevant theoretical focus, I soon found apparent that it was the "*…what exactly is unique about social media, and how exactly does it matter for work and organizations?*" that was relevant and would add to the growing knowledge on online spaces within the field. Out of this understanding emerged two research questions:

RQ1: What kind of discursive dynamics emerge in social media spaces?

which can be divided into two sub-questions:

> How are discourses produced and shared on social media?
>
> Who participates in discursive interactions on social media?

RQ2: Why do these discursive dynamics on social media matter for organizations and researching them?

In this thesis, I present two interconnected claims. First, I argue that new discursive dynamics emerge in socio-technological social media spaces. What this means is that the 'where', 'how', and 'by whom' of interaction change on social media where interaction increasingly takes place within various online platforms, between humans and technologies, and through different, digitally mediated and multimodal means. Second, I argue that social media spaces blur the boundaries of and widen the discursive grounds for organizations, organization, and work. What this means is

that the new discursive dynamics of social media spill across traditionally held boundaries of organizational and work-related space and time. Consequently, discursive construction of organizations, organization, and work also takes place in space, time, and language traditionally considered 'extra-organizational'. This impact makes social media particularly interesting and relevant from a contemporary organization studies point of view.

In paper 1, I and my co-author (Maaranen & Tienari 2020) focus on one particular work setting – the world of finance and its hotspot Wall Street – and a heated social media discussion revolving around its reactions to the global social media movement #MeToo. We show how the online commentary on Twitter and Reddit quickly takes on new discursive practices which, in their tone and scope, effectively open up organizational practices for public scrutiny. As what goes on in Wall Street workplaces becomes publicly discussed online, the commentary turns into societal debates about gender (in)equality and the role of gender relations at work. In paper 2, I and my co-authors (Lundgren-Henriksson, Maaranen, and Tienari, in review) move on to a different kind of online discussion, this time on Facebook and revolving around a city merger process in Finland, where societal discourses like globalization and urbanization intertwine with individual citizens' collective identity work in the multimodal online space, leading to discursively and multimodally mediated identity struggles. In paper 3, I zoom in on the individual level, focusing on how professionals in the field of politics in Finland navigate the newly drawn digital boundaries between their work and personal lives through online identity work characterized by complex discursive tensions. In this paper empirically focused on Instagram, the blurred lines between work, professional, and personal become pronounced as in the online arenas, all three inevitably collide. Finally, paper 4 shifts the focus away from people as social media users and draws it fully to the technology they engage with online. Here, I and my co-authors (Maaranen, den Hond & Vesa 2022) discuss social media algorithms and algorithmic bias as a case in point of how little we still understand about the deeply socio-technological nature of social media, and how alarming some of our encounters with technological actors are. This conceptual paper does not focus on any single platform but instead, aims to illustrate the functioning of global social media spaces in general.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of this introductory essay and four individual, independent papers. In the introductory essay, I first introduced the emergence of social media as a key part of contemporary social lives and the appearance of novel discursive dynamics in socio-technological social media spaces. I argued for a need to gain more research knowledge on them in contemporary organization studies contexts, especially due to their ability to blur and cross organizational boundaries. I then summarized my key contributions and research questions. Next, I will provide an overview on the theoretical framework which guides my research and connects the four individual papers: social media in and outside of work contexts, socio-technologicality of social media spaces, and multimodal discursivity in social media. I will then discuss my methodological approaches and detail the research design of each individual paper. Finally, I will summarize the four papers that constitute the bulk of my thesis. I will conclude with a discussion on my research questions and answer(s) and their implications in the field of organization studies and beyond. I will also discuss the urgent need to keep further developing qualitative and discursive methods for social media research. These thoughts will be followed by conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research. The introductory essay is followed by the four papers as appendices.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Social media in and outside of work contexts

At their core, social media are communication platforms where content is created and shared by users in technologically embedded digital spaces (Leonardi & Vaast 2017). This user-centric production and dissemination of content distinguishes social media from traditional as well as other online media (Scott & Orlikowski 2012). Essentially networked participatory spaces, social media are characterized by connectivity as well as collectivity (Page et al. 2014). Social media are 'social' by definition and sociality runs across their operational logical in that "every click, share, like, and post creates a connection, initiates a relation -- the network networks" (Bucher 2015, p. 1). Used by millions of people across the world, these connective spaces have become woven into and across various contexts in the contemporary world.

Societally, the participatory freedom characteristic to social media has originally generated high hopes of a communication space that is accessible and free of many of the biases and power distortions of the offline world. Ample empirical evidence speaks for the ability of social media communication to reach and gather people across geographical and other boundaries. Social media platforms serve as spaces for people to organize and get together independent of where they are physically located (Young, Selander & Vaast 2019). They have created a whole new arena for connective action and collective engagement upon shared interests (Vaast et al. 2017). Linguistic minority communities (Cru 2015; Johnson & Callahan 2013), feminist movements (Clark-Parsons 2019; Bowles Eagle 2015), and anti-racist movements (Carney 2016; Mundt, Ross & Burnett 2018) are only some examples of how people can find and strengthen bonds online and use them to for example organize and scale up collective action. Moreover, in addition to providing an arena for action, social media as public spaces can participate in shaping discourse on the societal issues it tackles (Carney 2016). They are the very vehicle of meaning work and, in that sense, an inherent part of the process through which it is created (Milan, 2015).

However, there is also a distinctly darker side to social media spaces (Baccarella, Wagner, Kietzmann & McCarthy 2018). The freedom from editorial control, sometimes combined to full or partial anonymity, makes social media spaces prone to incivil tones (Jane 2014; Klein 2017), trolling and bullying (Cole 2015; Lumsden & Morgan 2017;

Mantilla 2013), and even violent bursts of hatred crossing the boundaries between online and offline (Phipps et al. 2018). Often, these impacts are gendered, racialized, and distinctly unequal (Banet-Weiser 2018, Bartlett et al. 2014, Bonilla & Rosa 2015; Jane 2017). While a key element of social media, participation is not neutral nor evenly distributed in the reality of online (Page 2019). Social media spaces can both draw people together and pull them apart, creating sharp polarization of emotions (Toubiana & Zietsma 2017; Yarchi, Baden & Kligler-Vilenchik 2021), opinions (Kubin & von Sikorski 2021; Sunstein 2018), and even identities (Koivula, Kaakinen, Oksanen & Räsänen 2019). Movements spark countermovements and in the online space, the resulting conflict and competition for attention and supporters can spark war-like dynamics (Singer & Brooking 2018). A dynamic of affective intensification is often involved in online organization (Just 2019). Social media are a newly uncontrolled digital sphere with an inclination towards divisive dynamics and vitriolic tones.

While it is evident that social media are a new societal sphere and interaction platform, the impact of these spaces in contemporary work and organizational contexts is also vast. Social media have become pertinent across fields both directly and indirectly. Directly, they are used as internal and external communication tools (Cardon & Marshall 2015), and in support of strategy and management work (Schroeder 2014; Tourani 2022). They also serve as bridges to organizations' various stakeholders (Bell, Warren & Schroeder 2014). More indirectly, they 'open' work contexts for discussions in public online arenas, like the relatively recent example of the hashtag movement #MeToo illustrates (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller 2018; Özkazanc-Pan 2018). In this globally impactful campaign, harassment at workplaces (and beyond) became widely discussed online which led to various real-life impacts (Alvinius & Holmberg 2019). It is evident that the social media era where it is increasingly difficult to opt out of online spaces altogether has blurred the lines of what remains inside of workplaces and organizations and what gets opened up to digital audiences and their public scrutiny.

The impact of social media on individual people within and beyond organizations has equally blurring effects. As social media platforms and profiles have become an essential part of social networking in general (Cunningham 2013), they have also become a 'part of the job' for many: especially in knowledge-heavy fields, social media are used for digital networking (Rolls, Hansen, Jackson & Elliott 2016) and professional self-presentation or self-branding (Petroni 2019; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz

2018). In practical terms, social media use for work and career purposes can take up large chunks of work time (Scolere, Pruchniewska & Duffy 2018), sometimes to the point of distracting it (Treem, Dailey, Pierce & Leonardi 2015). It can also change the language and style of work and professional communication, taking it to a more informal and colloquial direction (Gretry, Horváth, Belei & van Riel 2017).

However, some of its impacts are less direct yet dig deep into the contemporary professional being, as the increasing attention to social media and professionals' identities and identity work illustrates (Kasperiuniene & Zydziunaite 2019). As professionals across fields use various social media platforms for self-presentation, they are inevitably faced with the boundary blurring effect of social media – that is, the fact that it is the same online space, sometime even the same platform, where they lead their various social lives on and off work (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard & Berg 2013). When work and personal lives encounter online, both domains and selves tend to collide. In terms of domains, for example family life (Ollier-Malaterre, Jacobs & Rothbard 2019) can become exposed to and intertwined with professional contexts online. In terms of identity and identity work, social media can become sites of struggle where selves, or different sides to them, get renegotiated within and across different platforms (Van Dijck 2013). Moreover, it is not just the individual professional and their blurred identities that are impacted: also for example organizational identification can entwine with portrayals of the self online. Organizational identification can influence professionals' tendency and willingness to combine their personal and professional domains under one online persona (Fieseler, Meckel & Ranzini 2015).

Some of the impacts are particularly alarming, such as online bullying due to what Forssell (2019) refers to as 'distortion' of private and professional. The 'invasion' of work matters into the private domain changes work – where it is done, how it is done, and when it is done – in ways which can cause what is commonly known as technostress. An oversupply of possibly relevant information available all the time, combined to demands for oneself to be socially available all the time, can be mentally consuming (Ayyagari, Grover & Purvis, 2011; Bucher, Fieseler & Suphan 2013). Here, the devices on which social media are typically used play a key role. As smartphones travel with their users from home to work, boundaries of work and leisure time become increasingly blurred and pressure to be reachable grows (Jeong, Jung & Lee 2020).

Overall, work and personal lives collide in newly ubiquitous ways in the social-mediatized world. A distinct sense of in-betweenness and ambiguity, sometimes referred to as liminality (Beech 2011), characterizes the navigation of contemporary professional selves online. Social media spaces seem to have brought on what Beech (2011) calls an elongated state of liminality: not just momentary in-betweenness due to for example work role or career transitions, but of a continuous kind because of how on social media, balancing between various professional and private sides to the self is the status quo. This differs from the traditional understanding of liminality as a transitory moment in-between old and new selves or identities because online, it is the in-betweenness of many current identities brought together at the same time, in the same space, that creates a more permanent experience of liminality. Bamber, Allen-Collinson and McCormack (2017) talk about permanent liminality as a state of "being neither-this-nor-that, or both-this-and-that", and on social media this is perhaps elevated into an even more ambiguous state of "being all-this-and-that-all-at-once".

Finally, it is worth noting that one of the key interests within the field of organization studies has been the so-called internal or enterprise social media, that is, digital platforms intended for internal communication where the technological features resemble public social media platforms. These spaces, studied as for example knowledge-sharing sites (Ellison, Gibbs & Weber 2015), communication tools (Leonardi, Huysman & Steinfield 2013), and social networking spaces (Steinfield, DiMicco, Ellison & Lampe 2009) are outside of the scope of this thesis which focuses on the public social media which are not organization-specific nor primarily created for work purposes. In these platforms, the blurring effect on organizational boundaries that I draw focus on in this thesis becomes pronounced.

2.2 Socio-technologicality of social media spaces

While it is evident that social media platforms have become ubiquitous in work and organizational lives, their impact should be studied further as focus has so far largely been on the technology which they are built on instead of the many settings for interaction they create (Vaast & Pinsonneault 2022). One way to understand the way social media shape interaction is through the way its platforms and their technologies enable it. The concept of socio-technologicality offers one way forward. Social media are profoundly social as well as technological in that they run on technology and are used by people. Interactions in these

spaces are essentially digital encounters between people, technologies, and technological materialities. On social media, interaction depends inseparably on the technological embeddedness of a given platform (Farman 2015).

This unique feature of social media spaces can be referred to as e.g., socio-technicality (Bucher & Helmond 2018; Carter 2016; Ems 2014; van Dijk & Poell 2013), socio-materiality (Leonardi 2012b; Peng & Wang 2021; Scott & Orlikowski 2012) or socio-technologicality (Baygi, Introna & Hultin 2021; Innes, Roberts, Preese & Rogers 2017). Discussions have also emerged on the more nuanced similarities and differences of these terms in more general (Leonardi 2012b) but in this thesis, socio-technologicality is used to highlight the role of technologies in both the materiality of social media spaces and in the interactions that take place within. This is important because in social media spaces, technologies are more than technical structures or settings, in fact, they can have agency and social actorhood of their own (Gruwell 2018; Klinger & Svensson 2018).

Algorithms are a case in point of such 'material and meaningful socio-technical arrangements' (Dahlman, Gulbrandsen & Just 2021) that, when built into social media platforms, powerfully orchestrate interaction between users, content, and the platform itself. The 'social' in social media is algorithmically administered in that connections are always made within the boundaries of algorithmic social media architectures (Bucher 2015). Social media algorithms are artificial intelligence (AI) which run in the background of each platform, determining interaction with, access to, and visibility of content as well as other users. These technologies are uniquely socio-technological in that they are human-programmed but operate and circulate online based on AI decision-making. Thus, they are also prone to new kinds of issues, such as inequality of visibility and access, as they can effectively copy and translate problematic human 'error' such as gendered or racist ideas into the operational logic of social media platforms (FoschVillaronga et al. 2021; Klare et al. 2012; Scheuerman et al. 2020). Algorithms carry power in that they can diminish or widen existing injustices (Hoffmann 2019). Moreover, they can promote, demote, or even delete content. In terms of discursive dynamics online, they thus not only carry power but can either grant or deny it by deciding whose voice gets heard and whose does not.

While the concept of socio-technologicality illuminates the unique discursive space social media provides, it can fall short on explaining how exactly the technological embeddedness of different online spaces impacts the way discourses and discursive dynamics emerge and develop. Here, the concept of affordances comes to aid. Affordances are, as defined by Gibson (1986), what a given environment provides: in human-computer interaction they are commonly referred to as action possibilities (Norman 1988). What this means is that they dictate how for example social media platform technologies enable or restrain discursive meaning making (Treem and Leonardi 2013). In social media, the socio-technological space is always in flux (Scott & Orlikowski 2012) as platform technologies are constantly developed and reshaped by their owners, users, and algorithmic technologies. An affordance lens thus helps explain how a specific platform at a given time and its design and functionalities afford interaction and shape discursive dynamics.

Research has pointed out several social media specific affordances. In organizational contexts, perhaps the most essential ones are the four listed by Treem and Leonardi (2013) which hold true for social media spaces in general: visibility (opening up knowledge and connections to others), editability (co-creating content and commenting it), persistence (saving content into a digital archive), and association (establishing connections between individuals and between individuals and content shared). These illuminate the way social media platforms dictate encounters and interaction online and, consequently, shape discursive dynamics. They show how on social media, interactions are – and remain – openly available for wide audiences. Connections made and ideas shared thus leave traces online. However, as affordances are platform specific, closed groups and channels as well as private messaging functions limit this visibility in some social media. This goes to show how social media are not a homogenous setting but rather a collection of different spaces and tools which afford interactions in different ways.

One of the characteristic affording mechanisms of many contemporary social media platforms is their tendency to steer interaction into 'bubbles' of different kinds. While social media spaces are often deemed as uniquely free and open, their communication functionalities (such as Facebook groups) and operating logic (such as content personalisation) dictate how and with whom discussions play out and to whom they become visible (Zanathy 2021). Algorithms play a key role here, as it is the AI of a given platform which guides users towards connections with other users and content based on their digital traces. Zanathy

(ibid.) argues that while these are just digital 'nudges' – elements of the choice architecture of platforms which predict and suggest – content personalization eventually leads into complex, algorithmically determined and maintained digital divides which can both connect and separate people, discussions, and discourses and dictate boundaries drawn between them (Bange, Järventie-Thesleff and Tienari 2022).

Social media echo chambers (Sunstein 2018; Toubiana and Zietsma 2017), filter bubbles (Spohr 2017) and identity bubbles (Koivula, Kaakinen, Oksanen & Räsänen 2019) are some examples of a how online spaces are not always – or even, often – free and open but rather, a discursive environment where there are various divides and loops that steer interaction. These can be difficult to track and grasp as their impact on an individual user is always unique. There is no one social media but rather, a multitude of 'parallel but separate universes', each personalised based on and for an individual user's predicted needs and wants (Zanathy 2021). All interaction that takes place on social media is always and inherently conditioned by the connections and divides between these universes which makes up for a unique discursive setting.

2.3 Multimodal discursivity on social media

The socio-technological affordances and actors in social media spaces essentially shape discourses and the way they are transported online. One of the most major of such shifts that social media have brought on is the increased multimodality, that is, availability of different 'modes' for communication (e.g., Meyer et al. 2018). Here, a 'mode' is defined as 'socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning' (Kress 2010, p, 79). Modes can thus be verbal text, visual artifacts, or something else that is drawn on to discursively create and transport meaning. They can exist simultaneously and be used separately or in tandem (Höllerer et al. 2019).

While the verbal mode continues to be central also in online spaces (Höllerer et al. 2019), visuals – both still images, moving videos, and their various social media specific variations such as gifs (Adami & Jewitt 2016) and memes (Mina 2019) have become interwoven in the communication culture and logic. Visual content is a central component of most social media but especially of those explicitly framed around the visual such as Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube (Highfield & Leaver 2016). Moreover, on social media, interaction takes place in not only text, image, and video but also through for example ideograms such as emoji

which create completely new, digitally enabled modalities in the online space (Cappallo, Svetlichnaya, Garrigues, Mensink & Snoek 2018). Social media are thus crucially multimodal as discursive spaces.

What this means for discourses and discursive dynamics online is that communication tends to take place in various blends of different modes. Like research on combining visuals and verbal text shows, the meaning-making potential expands when there is a wider array of modes available (e.g., Boxenbaum et al. 2018). Meyer et al. (2018) explain how different modes operate in different ways. For example, verbal text can argue, narrate, specify, and abstract ideas and meanings while visuals can materialize and spatialize abstract meaning, captivate emotion and infiltrate embodied knowledge (Meyer et al. ibid). Visuals can express the sensual, aesthetic, and emotional in a way pure text might fail to (Höllerer et al. 2018). It is, however, worth noting that the divides are not clear cut: just like visual text can also express rational ideas, verbal text can convey more emotive meanings – and vice versa (van Leeuwen 2018). The capabilities and means of expression are merely different depending on the mode, and often complementary to each other. Verbal text and visuals can thus be layered into combinations which transport concrete and abstract as well as factual and subjective meanings.

How the use of multimodals for meaning-making plays out on social media has been actively evidenced in research. One of the most recent interests in social media research has been social media memes (e.g., Humphries 2018; Mina 2019). "Amusing or interesting items (such as a captioned picture or video) or genres of items that are spread widely online especially through social media" (Merriam-Webster), memes are essentially multimodal in that they play with the very idea that text and image together generate novel meanings, often in a characteristically humorous manner. While on the surface, memes can be considered merely fun at first glance (think of *pondering my orb*), they can also translate and transport serious societal concerns. They enable expressions of differing experiences, perspectives, and narratives and encourage affective connections (MacDonald 2021; Mina 2019). For example, they can mobilize feminist connectivity, collectivity, and solidarity (Lawrence & Ringrose 2018). However, as the multi-meaning-making-potential of multimodals suggests, memes can also be used for opposite purposes. They can serve as propaganda and means of symbolic violence (DeCook 2018), and in disparaging ways to for example reinforce stereotypes and deepen social cleavages (Gal 2019).

Multimodality is thus a key element of social media discursivity because it enables rich and varied discursive resources to be drawn on and, consequently, discourses and discursive dynamics to emerge. The impacts are vast both within and beyond immediate organizational contexts. Societally, various social movements get organized and gain momentum through multimodal social media platforms and communities (Boxenbaum et al. 2018). Multimodality also aids in for example bridging and recontextualizing global and local phenomena (Höllerer et al. 2013) in societal debates. Within organizations, multimodality enables for example communication of change (Iedema 2001) and information that is difficult to put in numbers (Arjaliès & Bansal 2018). For individuals especially in professional contexts, multimodal social media spaces are arenas for portraying the different aspects of the self at work and beyond. Visually heavy platforms such as Instagram have become increasingly popular social media for e.g., politicians (Enli & Simonsen 2018; Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson 2016), professional athletes (Smith & Sanderson 2015), bloggers (Duffy & Hund 2015) and even religious leaders (Golan and Martini 2020). Multimodality allows for portraying the (professional) self in nuanced ways through visual and verbal snapshots into the different layers of one's life.

Finally, a unique element of the deep multimodality on social media is that the online materiality itself plays into how modes are drawn on and combined. Social media provide a technologically embedded discursive space for "multimodal text-making" (Poulsen and Kvåle 2018) where text, image, video, and other formats can be made use of in different ways. Social media provides a unique 'site of display' for modes to take on functions and meanings (Jewitt 2009). It is thus the platform-specific functionalities such as templates (Jovanovic & Van Leeuwen 2018), filters (Poulsen 2018) or embedding and sharing functions (Adami, 2014) which dictate the interplay of different modes and enable or restrain their use. In social media research, this intertwinement of technology in online discursivity is often discussed as social media semiotic technology. Here, the emphasis is on the multimodal meaning potentials offered by digital social media technologies and the subsequent restructuring of communication practices (e.g., Djonov & Van Leeuwen 2018; Moschnini 2018; Poulsen, Kvåle & Von Leeuwen 2018). Social media technological materiality is considered as deeply and inseparably impactful on the modalities and their use online.

This fundamentally new discursivity of online spaces calls for attention in not only theorizing discourses on social media but also in empirically studying them. Social media visuality, in particular, calls for considerations ranging from methodological to ethical (Highfield & Leaver 2016). The implications for critical discourse analysis (CDA) used in my thesis are major, complex, and still somewhat unresolved, as studying social media spaces with critical discourse analytical means requires letting go of the traditionally heavy focus on texts and textually mediated discourses (KhosraviNik & Unger 2016). These as well as some other particularities social media multimodality poses for CDA will be discussed in the following section focused on the methodological approaches I have adopted in this thesis. The ethical considerations in social media research will be detailed in the discussion section.

2.4 Summary of theoretical framework

The theoretical framework described above draws focus on social media as socio-technological, multimodal discursive spaces with an impact that cuts across organizational boundaries. In this thesis, social media are considered as technologically embedded, collectively used, and essentially networked communication platforms. Societally, they are a new societal sphere and interaction platform. Within organizations, they are used in internal and external communication and in support of various functions. They also open work contexts for discussions in the public space. For individual professionals, social media serve as spaces for networking, self-presentation, and identity work. Their use can have a blurring effect as in the social media space, public, personal, and professional tend to collide.

As a discursive space, social media are fundamentally socio-technological as they provide a technological setting for interaction and in this interaction, technologies such as social media algorithms are also participants with actorhood. The technologies of each platform provide a different set of affordances which enable, restrain, and direct interaction and discursive dynamics in different ways. Often, these affordances steer interaction in a way which can both bring people together and draw them apart. Finally, a key element of the new discursive space and dynamics social media platforms provide is multimodality, that is, availability of different visual, verbal, and other ‘modes’ for discursive meaning construction. On social media, modes can be used alone or together, and the way they are drawn on, combined, and mobilized depends on the technologies and functionalities of each platform. The online materiality

itself plays into social media modality. The online discursive dynamics are thus rich and varied in meaning-making potential, and this has impact which can shift organizational boundaries. It is these discursive dynamics and their level-spanning impact I illustrate in this thesis and the four papers constituting it. The theoretical framework outlined above serves as an umbrella for all papers, but the topic and empirical focus of each is unique.

In paper 1, the socio-technological discursivity of social media is explored through the empirical example of Twitter and Reddit commentary on Wall Street's reactions to the global social media campaign #MeToo. Theoretically, the focus is on gender, work, and equality and the discursive practices through which they become (re)constructed. In paper 2, the multimodal socio-technological discursivity of social media is illustrated through an empirical example of a city merger debate which sparks heated discussions on the interrelations of language, place, and identity on Facebook. Theoretically, the paper focuses on collective identity work and discursively constructed, multimodally mediated struggles over identity. In paper 3, the multimodal socio-technological discursivity of social media is studied through an empirical example of politicians and their use of Instagram for personal and professional self-presentation and interaction. The focus is on identity work which is approached through the theoretical lenses of dialogue, tension, and carnival. In each paper, social media as an empirical focus also becomes an integral part of the theorization – whether in terms of gender (in)equality or collective or individual identity work – through the constitutive role its unique discursive dynamics play in the emergence of discursive practices (paper 1), discursive struggle (paper 2), and discursive tensions (paper 3).

The conceptual paper 4 is a complimentary work in that it illustrates the overall socio-technological space contemporary social media provide. Not focused on any single platform, it shows how algorithms as socio-technological actors steer, tailor, and participate in online interaction within and in between platforms. This goes to show how discursive dynamics online are fundamentally socio-technological in a way which is not always easy to grasp.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Critical constructionist approach

Criticality is the methodological point of departure for this thesis and runs through all the related choices made. The tradition of Critical Management Studies (CMS) (Alvesson & Willmott 1992; Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000; Fournier and Grey 2000) stands on three cornerstones – anti-performativity, denaturalization, and reflexivity – which have guided my research. First, I follow the principle of anti-performativity in that my research does not produce knowledge intended to increase efficacy or profit. I do not focus on how the use of social media can benefit organizations or their business endeavours – rather, my aim is to provide insight into how social media spaces impact these organizations and the world around them. Second, the focus on looking past the taken-for-granted and the naturalized – whether individually, organizationally, or societally – guides my choice to shift the focus from the 'surface-level' of social media use in work and organizational contexts and into the underlying socio-technological discursive dynamics that steer and are steered by encounters between people and technology online.

Third, CMS places emphasis on reflexivity in analysis in that it encourages the researcher to admit and embrace their own impact on and power in how data collection and analysis unfolds. I consider this throughout the data analysis process in each three empirical papers, acknowledging the way my interaction with the data – the way I choose it, read it, interpret it, and the way I write about it – are not neutral but rather, have a deep impact on how a particular empirical analysis unfolds. This notion of inherent subjectivity is especially important when dealing with social media data as my encounter with the materials is not unique just because of me as a researcher, but also because of the particular way algorithms steer my encounters with data online (Gruwell 2018). The critical discursive data analysis methods – critical discourse analysis, feminist critical discourse analysis and multimodal critical discourse analysis – I make use of in the empirical papers constituting this thesis stem from the critical tradition and build on all three cornerstones described above. These methods as well as the empirical materials collected and analysed will be detailed in the following section.

Ontologically and epistemologically, my research falls under social constructionism which as a philosophical tradition often – but not always – underlies critical (discursive) methods. Social constructionism (Berger

& Luckmann 1967) builds on four foundational assumptions of the world and of what and how can be known about it: 1) an understanding of the world as socially constructed in and known through human interaction mediated by language, 2) an understanding of language and its use as socially constructed and contextually bound, 3) an understanding of knowledge as socially constructed and sustained by conventions of communication, and 4) an understanding of knowledge and social action as inseparable (Burr 1995). These assumptions align with and serve as a philosophical foundation for the different critical discourse analytical methods used here, as throughout the thesis I treat discourses circulating and discursive dynamics emerging in the online space not as static or fixed or as something that exist by themselves, but rather as something that come into being in and through social encounters and interactions and adapt certain meanings in certain time and place. Consequently, any knowledge on these can only be subjective and depends on one's relation to and perspective on these social interactions. A constructionist ontology and subjective epistemology thus underpin my critical research method and guide all the subsequent choices made. Critical and constructionist traditions are used in tandem and as complementary to each other.

However, social media as a space of interest here poses some challenges for a fully constructionist understanding as discursivity online is heavily socio-*technological,* as I elaborated in the theoretical framing of this thesis. First, social media are inarguably material spaces: their very existence and, consequently, all interaction they enable is based on technologies and technological settings. Second, on social media, technology not only provides a material setting but can also carry actorhood. It is thus evident that interaction in social media spaces is not just *social* but always also *technological* in such a pronounced way it needs to be acknowledged in methodological considerations and their philosophical underpinnings. Ontologically and epistemologically social media can thus exist and be known about only in relation to its technological embeddedness. What this substantialist position (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008) means for methods of empirical data analysis will be discussed in the following section in more detail.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis on social media

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) in a primarily Faircloughian tradition (e.g., Fairclough 2001, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak 1997) is the methodological starting point in all three empirical papers in this thesis. In very general, CDA is critical study of language which explores

discursive (re)production of meaning and power (Van Dijk 2015). According to Fairclough (2001), CDA is a theoretical as well as empirical endeavour to study discourse as material social practice which takes place through language – textual, visual, bodily, or other – and carries as well as constructs power. CDA thus provides means to explore the dynamics of interaction on social media and, in particular, to study how the socio-technological space enables people and technologies to come together and speak to and with each other in particular ways. It allows focus to be placed on the important 'where', 'how', and 'by whom' of social media discursive dynamics. These new discursive dynamics can be studied in analytical detail with Faircloughian CDA because it critically explores social interaction both mediated through language and embedded in social and material contexts (Djonov & Zhao 2013).

Moreover, CDA treats discourse as both reflective and constitutive of social realities (Fairclough 2001, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak 1997) such as those of work and organization. Organizations and what goes on within and around them can be understood as discursive constructions which are reflected through, shaped by, and grounded in language and communication (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst 2015). CDA thus provides a lens into exploring how discourses and discursive dynamics on social media can have both illuminative and transformative impact both online and offline and in the blurring of contemporary work and organizational contexts. Its built-in critical stance (Vaara & Tienari 2011) is fit for understanding the nuances of the discursive dynamics which also redraw power relations in the online space. It enables the emphasis on how social media as a discursive space rearranges power relations such as who can participate in producing discourse (human users and technologies), who can control the discursive space (e.g., social media companies and platforms designers), and who can determine visibility and access (e.g., algorithms). CDA thus not only provides a tool for analysing the use of language but also its users, their voices, and silences which are all an inherent part of discursive dynamics, especially in terms of power relations that play out in this new discursive setting. In that sense, the Faircloughian CDA here layers into CDA according to Van Leeuwen (e.g., 2008) where emphasis is placed on how discourses recontextualize and rearrange various elements of social practices such as social actors, activities, spaces, and instruments (Djonov & Zhao 2013).

Van Leeuwen's take on CDA thus also opens an avenue for exploring elements of discursive dynamics in online spaces. For one, social media are unique discursive spaces in that they do not maintain a traditional

editorial control like e.g., newspapers or other mass media outlets. They are participatory spaces in that users are free to contribute to and share content largely as they wish. These bottom-up dynamics (KhosraviNik & Zia 2014) make the discursive logic of these unique and require sensitivity to the shifting power relations from CDA analysis, which traditionally focuses on the dichotomy of dominant and silenced or resisting voices (KhosraviNik 2016). On social media, the dichotomy blurs into a more scattered manifestation of power, resistance, and their interplay. However, these spaces are by no means free from control. For example, algorithms hold power in how content and, consequently, discourses are displayed. The ways in which this takes place are ambiguous, which poses challenges to CDA as well, as it needs to find means to also explore these less easily visible forms of discursive power.

What also poses challenges is the increasingly multimodal nature of social media discursivity elaborated above in the theoretical framing of my thesis. Traditional CDA focuses heavily on text, whether written or spoken, as a means of social interaction. In social media spaces where image, video, ideograms (graphic pictures or symbols such as social media emoji), and other beyond-textual means of communication prevail, such a focus fails to grasp the discursive dynamics at play and risks missing much of the interaction taking place. A multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA, e.g. Bouvier & Machin 2018; Jancsary et al. 2016; Machin 2013; Machin & Van Leeuwen 2007; Machin & Mayr 2012; Djonov & Zhao 2013) aids in including all of the interaction in analysis, as it treats multimodals and the interplay of different modes as powerful carriers of meaning (Jancsary et al. 2016). It also takes into account the materiality of social media as an important aspect of multimodality. The availability of different modes, as well as the way in which they can be drawn on and combined on a given platform, impact on discursive dynamics in important ways (Bouvier and Machin 2018).

3.3 Methods, data collection and analysis in individual papers

CDA is used as the foundation in all three empirical papers in this thesis and complemented with different emphases according to the theoretical and empirical focus of each paper. While the specific variation of CDA as well as the process of data analysis is unique to each empirical paper, all follow an overall tradition of an abductive manner of analysis where theory and empirical findings emerge in tandem and inform each other (Van den Ven 2007). In this section, I will elaborate on the research

design – empirical method, data, and analysis – of each individual paper and briefly discuss the empirical setting or phenomenon which sparked each research process. The papers and their findings will be summarized in more detail in the next section.

In paper 1, the intense reaction to #MeToo on Wall Street, and the social media commentary on that reaction, served as a starting point which sparked an interest to study the phenomenon further. An article published by Bloomberg Business on the Wall Street reaction had been shared on Bloomberg's own Twitter accounts, and it was the comments these shares sparked that were first collected. Soon after, similar commentaries on Reddit were added to the data set as the commentary on Reddit's anonymous threads seemed somewhat different in tone and provided a point of comparison in terms of platform differences. We collected altogether 382 comments from Twitter and 1086 comments from Reddit. These social media comments were then explored in several iterative rounds of discourse analysis, where the understanding of them grew rooted in extant theories of gender (in)equality in organizations and on social media. Similarly, the rounds of analysis inspired new theorization on social media discursive practices in relation to gender (in)equality and gender relations. A feminist CDA (FCDA) (Lazar 2014) angle was chosen in the analysis phase because the commentary came across as heavily embedded in wider societal debates about gender, power, and resistance. With this approach, we could explore the discursively constructed and challenged gendered assumptions and power asymmetries online. Here, the discursive manifestations of gendered power and resistance in social media spaces became the key focus of critical analysis.

In paper 2, it was also a societal event which initially sparked the research interest. A city merger process in Finland spurred intense debates among citizens and politicians on Facebook, and these debates were followed longitudinally over three years up until a referendum, after which it was decided that the merger would not be carried out. As our primary data, I and my co-authors systematically collected posts by individual pro-merger and pro-independence councillors and by two organized pressure groups, as well as comments in discussion threads of these posts. As supplementary data, we collected merger-related letters to the editor published in a local newspaper. Altogether 97 councillor posts and 3191 comments as well as 203 pressure groups posts from our primary data were included in the final, detailed analysis. These were then analysed in iterative rounds during which the initial focus on language,

place and identity developed into theorization on discursive struggles over collective identities. A multimodal CDA (MCDA) method was used in the analysis because the discussion took place through heavily multimodal means such as text, image, video, and their combinations like memes. This multimodality turned into one of the key parts of our theorization as the paper developed, leading into an understanding of socio-technologically enabled multimodality as integral to discursive – and often distinctly divided as well as divisive – meaning-making online.

In paper 3, it was not a single event but rather a longer-term development observed in professionals' social media profiles and presence which sparked research interest. In Finland, especially politicians seemed to have become increasingly active in using social media platforms in the past few previous years, and there was a distinct change in what kind of content, how, and how often they shared. This observation led to a few months of lurking around on several platforms and, finally, a focus on Instagram where 20 politicians' profiles were followed for 30 days, and the same politicians were interviewed on their social media use. Altogether 295 feed posts and 2706 Instagram stories (posts using the Story function which disappear in 24 hours) were collected, and 20 interviews of 26 – 47 minutes in length were conducted. During this data collection process, an interest in the identity work aspect of social media use emerged and strengthened. Both sets of data (interviews and social media posts) were then analysed in iterative rounds during which three theoretical lenses into identity work emerged: dialogue, carnival, and tension. A multimodal CDA (MCDA) method was used in the analysis because both the social media posts and the interview transcripts indicated that the availability of different, technologically enabled modes of communication were central to identity work and all interaction in the socio-technological online space.

Finally, all rounds of analysis in each research process consisted of coding the materials on NVivo software. Where there was more than one coder involved in the coding process in paper 2, an inter-coder reliability rate was calculated to ensure the liability of the qualitative coding process (O'Connor & Joffe 2020).

3.4 Ethical considerations

There is an ethical dimension to studying social media material which was considered in all three empirical papers to eliminate the risk of harm to research subjects (Townsend and Wallace 2016). In all papers only publicly available posts and comments on public social media platforms

were collected and analysed. No personal information of the users who had posted them, or any traces of it which could lead to identification, was disclosed. In paper 1, of the request of one of our reviewers, we chose not to include any direct quotes from the social media material but instead, used paraphrasing to illustrate the discursive practices at play. In paper 2, both text and visuals were directly quoted, but we increased the anonymity of posters and commenters by developing "archetypal" profiles of key actors with pseudonyms so that no individual poster could be identified. In paper 3, because the research subjects were chosen from a relatively small pool of Finnish politicians, anonymity was ensured by not including direct quotes from social media material and instead, paraphrasing and verbal illustrations of the material was used. Direct quotes of the interview transcripts were included, but all traces of personal information were removed. Informed consent was obtained for including the interview quotes.

Overall, no broadly established guidelines for using social media data exist even though there are some attempts (see for example franzke, Bechmann, Zimmer, Ess & the Association of Internet Researchers 2020), and there is still a lot of confusion and even disagreement over how exactly digital research subjects and online data should be treated. I will elaborate on what this means for studying social media materials in the discussion section.

4 PAPERS CONSTITUTING THE THESIS

4.1 Paper 1: Social media and hyper-masculine work cultures

In my first paper, published as an article in *Gender, Work and Management* (Maaranen and Tienari 2020), I and my co-author focus on gender (in)equality and gender relations in the financial industry and social media platforms Twitter and Reddit. We study the deeply intertwined relationship between workplaces, work cultures, and social media as an arena for discussing topics of work and management, in particular, gender inequality. Using the backlash sparked by the global social media movement #MeToo in and around Wall Street in recent years as a case example, we discuss the unpredictable nature of social media movements and their reception in organizations. We show how the boundaries of organizational and societal tend to blur when workplace issues are opened up for public scrutiny in the online space (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller 2018; Özkazanc-Pan 2018) We also show how the Wall Street reaction to #MeToo illustrates a wider societal shift towards inflamed gender relations, visible both offline and online, and how social media discursive practices seem to play a part in this inflammation.

Adopting a feminist critical discourse analysis approach (Lazar 2014), we observe that on social media, discursive practices such as naturalizing, polarizing, and humourizing emerge and steer interaction. Their emergence is due to how the platforms function – e.g., anonymity, in case of Reddit, and limited word space, in case of Twitter – and to the overall social media 'culture' which, as our analysis shows, is taking a turn towards increased hostility in the form of for example misogyny and manospheres (Banet-Weiser & Miltner 2016; Marwick & Caplan 2018). We suggest it is also due to social media technologies, like the example of algorithms and algorithmic bias which powerfully orchestrate online interaction shows (Lambrecht & Tucker 2019). We conclude that social media as a socio-technical platform plays a unique role in how discourses get shaped and transported through such discursive practices.

4.2 Paper 2: The merger that never happened: Collective identity work and discursive struggle on social media

In my second paper, currently in review in a journal, I and my co-authors zoom in on Finland and the unique context of one Finnish city merger process and the role of Facebook in how it unfolded. We study how social media as a platform and its multimodal (textual, visual, and

technological) functionalities were used by different stakeholders to organize, comment on, and make sense of a city merger process and, most importantly, how it enabled the societal discussion around the merger to turn into heated discursive struggles over identities (e.g., Beech, Gilmore, Hibbert & Ybema 2016). We examine the interaction between the politicians deciding on and managing the merger decision process and the general public commenting on it, thus also illuminating how social media platforms bring professionals' work to the public eye and expose processes such as mergers to public scrutiny.

Adopting a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach (Jancsary, Höllerer & Meyer 2016; Machin,2013; Meyer et al. 2018), we study how the merger was argued for and against in the social media space. We make use of the concept of affordances (Gibson 1986) to explore and highlight the role of the technological features of social media which enable and constrain potentials for meaning making of verbal and visual discursive resources, here, texts, images, and videos online (Meyer et al. 2018). We thus aim to show how in the materiality of social media, discourses are shaped and drawn on in novel ways which tend to escalate debates and polarize opinions as well as identities. Our findings show how on social media, multimodality affords highly opposing constructions of identities – inclusive and fluid, on one hand, and exclusive and fixed, on the other.

4.3 Paper 3: Work, life, and the carnival of self - politicians' identity work on social media

In my third paper, to be submitted for review in a journal, I study Finnish professionals in the field of politics and their use of Instagram as an emerging social media platform for identity work in the intersections of professional and personal (Fieseler, Meckel & Ranzini 2015; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard & Berg 2013). Specifically, I look at social media as a technological platform and as a new, increasingly popular social sphere which shapes the conditions for and expectations of political actors' careers and self-presentation, taking them to a more personal, visual, and interactive direction. These characteristics have a major impact on the politicians' identity work, blurring boundaries between work and home as well as professional and personal selves, and widening the repertoire of means for self-portrayal. My focus is on how these politicians work on their identities in the public eye with not only other people but also with new technologies, such as algorithms.

Adopting a multimodally inspired critical discourse analysis approach, I explore the dynamics of being, knowing, and portraying the self online with others, through text and visuals. I approach this dynamic, emergent, and interactional way of how selves become constructed as a dialogue (Beech 2008), and my findings show how identity work on social media appears as socio-technologically dialogic and carries carnivalistic tensions, a concept inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin (e.g., 1984, 1986) whose work I use to illuminate the tensioned discursive dynamics of identity work in the contemporary online space. My findings also illustrate how on social media, contemporary professionals navigate their selfhood across boundaries of work, professional, and personal.

4.4 Paper 4: Social media and bias 2.0

In my fourth paper, published as a book chapter (Maaranen, den Hond & Vesa 2022), we discuss algorithmic bias in social media spaces. Instead of the human users of social media platforms, we focus on the artificial intelligence technologies that run in the background, namely, algorithms. Adopting a critical approach, we address the increasing concerns over interaction, access, and visibility being determined by these technologies which are not free from human bias but rather, tend to automate it. We briefly discuss the processes through which bias can enter algorithmic decision-making as well as the ways in which this bias then circulates online through the algorithms working their way around the social media spaces. We offer gendered (FoschVillaronga et al. 2021; Klare et al. 2012) and racist (Scheuerman et al. 2020) algorithmic outcomes as recent, alarming examples.

Our main focus is on the ethical implications of this novel form of bias which needs to be taken seriously in the contemporary world where social media spaces have become pervasive. We argue that emphasis should be moved from deeming biased algorithmic outcomes technological issues of data processing (Wong 2020) to the larger, underlying questions of morality in the age of algorithms (Moser, den Hond & Lindebaum 2021). We discuss how understanding this new socio-technological structure of the online space can shed light on social media platforms as arenas of technologically administered homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook 2001) where social injustices remain and are reinforced through "bias 2.0", human bias translated into and replicated by algorithms in global social media spaces. We argue that because of this, it also works against some of the UN Sustainable development goals (United Nations 2015).

4.5 Summary of the papers

The four papers all focus on social media, each drawing attention to a different way in which novel and newly socio-technological encounters and discursive dynamics emerge in social media spaces and how their impact works to blur and obscure organizational boundaries. Empirical papers 1, 2, and 3 each present an empirical example focusing on one or two social media platforms to illustrate the variety of different platforms, all with unique functionalities and characteristics but each socio-technological in how they afford discursive dynamics to play out. Methodologically, papers 1, 2, and 3 also illustrate the use of different forms of CDA in social media analysis. The conceptual paper 4 zooms out of individual platforms and presents social media algorithms as a case in point of how the innate socio-technologicality of social media has fundamental impact on online interaction in that artificially intelligent technology steers it *and* participates in it. Below is a table summarizing the topics, types, and methods of the papers. The publication or revision status of each paper is also listed.

Table 1: Papers constituting the thesis

Title of the paper	Topic	Type of paper	Method	Status
Paper 1: Social media and hyper-masculine work cultures	Discursive practices in social media commentary on gender equality and workplaces Platforms of focus: Reddit, Twitter	Empirical	Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis	Published as a journal article in Gender, Work and Organization in 2020
Paper 2: The merger that never happened: Collective identity work and discursive struggle on social media	Discursive struggle over collective identities in social media debate on a city merger process Platform of focus: Facebook	Empirical	Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis	Manuscript in review in a journal
Paper 3: Work, life, and the carnival of self - politicians' identity work on social media	Discursively navigated tensions in politicians' identity work on social media and the blurring boundaries of public, professional, and personal Platform of focus: Instagram	Empirical	Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis	Manuscript to be submitted for review in a journal
Paper 4: Social media and bias 2.0	Social media algorithms and issues of bias and inequality	Conceptual	n/a	Published as a book chapter in *Transformative Action for Sustainable Outcomes* in 2022

5 DISCUSSION

In this introductory essay, I have drawn focus on social media as a key part of contemporary (organizational) lives. I have argued that due to their entwinement into and across today's social structure, they require increased attention in the field of organization studies. As a response to this need, I have offered this thesis and its two key contributions. First, I have illustrated how the use of social media changes the where, how, and by whom of interaction in work and organizational contexts. Specifically, I have shown how social media provide new, technologically embedded spaces where interaction is fundamentally socio-technological and as a result, new discursive dynamics emerge. Second, I have provided insight into how the use of social media and these new discursive dynamics work to blur traditionally held organizational boundaries in a way which is relevant for work and organizational lives as well as organization research. I have explained how both contributions provide important understanding of contemporary work and organizational contexts. Through a theoretical framework I have positioned this thesis within extant research on social media in and beyond work contexts, socio-technologicality of social media spaces, and multimodality as a key aspect of the discursivity of these spaces.

I have thus set the stage for the four independent papers – three empirical and one non-empirical – which constitute the bulk of this thesis. I have briefly summarized these papers and argued how each of them contributes to an increased understanding of social media within this framework and theorizes its various impacts. I have thus offered a glimpse into how my two key contributions will be delivered and illustrated through the four papers. Next, I will discuss and detail these contributions and their implications. I will also briefly tap on the evolving field of discursive social media research from a methodological point of view. Finally, I will conclude this introductory essay with a summary of the thesis, its limitations, and suggestions for future research. This concluding section provides a transition into the four independent papers included as appendices.

5.1 Discursive dynamics in socio-technological social media spaces

As evidenced by both extant literature and the empirical findings in this thesis, social media spaces have become tightly woven into contemporary social structure. Their socio-technological nature makes interaction,

discourse, and discursive dynamics newly conditioned by technology (Bucher & Helmond 2018; Farman 2015). These are illuminated in all four papers. In paper 1, technological features and differences of Reddit and Twitter shape the discursive practices of gender discussion, in paper 2, Facebook groups provide a setting for a heated public debate and discursive struggle over collective identities, and in paper 3, Instagram affords discursive construction of professional and personal identities both embedded in and in interaction with technology. In papers 2 and 3, visuality and multimodality afforded by the technological features of platforms are also illuminated as core elements of social media discursivity (Jovanovic & Van Leeuwen 2018; Zappavigna 2021). This is especially crucial because while visual media such as new social media platforms have gained ground, their research has not yet been systematically integrated into the field of organizational research (Boxenbaum et al. 2018).

In paper 4, one of the most interesting and most recently acknowledged aspects of social media socio-technologicality is addressed: that of social media technologies, here, algorithms, as not only a setting for but essentially as actors in the online interaction. Algorithms have gained some attention in recent organization research (Moser, den Hond & Lindebaum 2022; Plesner & Husted 2019; Shrestha, Krishna & von Krogh 2021), but those circulating in and shaping the discursive dynamics of global social media spaces still lack attention. Such attention is however crucially needed because it is these socio-technological actors making their way around social media that reshape power and resistance (DeVito, Gergle & Birnholtz 2017; Velkova & Kaun 2021) and, consequently, dynamics of interaction. This should be of interest in organization studies and business research in more general, not the least because these 'social media logics' are what social media platforms trade in – algorithmic decision-making steers not only content and users, but it also essentially steers and is steered by money in often difficult-to-track ways (Gillespie 2018; Etter & Albu 2021; Van Dijck & Poell 2013). Discursive dynamics online are thus not freed by a utopia of democratic participation and access as was hoped for in the early days of social media (Gillespie, 2018) but rather conditioned by the age-old (yet newly shaped) dynamics of power, ownership, and control.

This thesis thus sheds light on various socio-technological elements and dynamics of social media. The choice of empirically focusing on different platforms and phenomena in each paper stems from the aim to also illustrate the vast fluidity and diversity of social media spaces. Social

media platforms are various in their scope, format and topic (Treem, Dailey, Pierce & Biffl 2016) and in a constant state of flux (Zappavigna 2021). They are fluid and constantly evolving due to platform updates and changes as well as users' changing ways of platform use (Hogan & Quan-Haase 2010). Moreover, content additions, editions, and deletions constantly reshape these spaces (Gillespie 2018). No one platform now is the same as another, nor is it the same as it was yesterday. For these reasons, the socio-technological characteristics and affordances of different social media are always unique and shape discursive dynamics in a unique way. What is referred to as socio-technological discursive dynamics of social media here thus is a generalization of an inherently scattered and evolving space. It is only through continuous and systematic empirical investigation of different platforms that knowledge on the similarities and differences within social media can be gained.

5.2 Blurring boundaries and widening discursive grounds for organization and work

While my first contribution illustrates how social media afford newly socio-technological discursive dynamics of interaction, the second one points to why exactly it matters so crucially for organization studies and contemporary work and organizational lives. The socio-technological social media work to obscure the boundaries of organizations and work and, in the process, create a wider ground for their discursive construction. First, social media provide a socio-technological space which is increasingly used both within and beyond organizations and workplaces, during work time and outside of it, as well as for work-related and organizational purposes and for personal interactions. What follows is that social media specific discourses and discursive dynamics can travel around in this space and spill across organizational boundaries. In other words, the discursive grounds for organization, organizations, and work become more diffused as organizations are discursively constructed and shaped by interactions and language from both within and outside of 'organizational spaces' (e.g., Taylor & Spicer, 2007).

First, the use of social media provides additional tools and spaces for organization, work, and professional lives in general, like the growing research on e.g., remote work and new organizational designs illustrates (Dubey & Tribathi 2020; Foss 2020). Alongside other digital environments, social media serve as socio-technological alternatives for organizational spaces which have been traditionally understood as largely physical surroundings (Taylor & Spicer, 2007). In the absence

of physical elements, these spaces become more heavily reliant on discursive construction and maintenance of organizational and work-related elements such as practices of doing the work and talking about it. In other words, the discursive construction of organizations adopts an increasingly important role in organizational lives and realities (Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst 2015).

The use of social media also opens up what takes place within organizations and in the world of work for public scrutiny. What goes on in workplaces and organizations can spark social media mobilization movements which grow individuals' experiences into societal concerns, and vice versa (Mendes, Ringrose & Keller 2018; Özkazanc-Pan 2018). Overall, much of what previously took place and remained primarily – although not entirely – within organizations and workplaces is made newly public due to social media. These 'leakier' organizational boundaries make the distinction of organizational and extra-organizational increasingly blurry. Consequently, what also leak across are discourses and discursive dynamics, as the same social media environment – in the form of various platforms – provides a space for interaction within, outside of, and in between organizations and their surroundings. The same underlying logic and possibilities for interaction afford these interactions, allowing them to impact on each other. One current example is the visualization of organizational communication. This becomes visible through e.g., the increasing use of a social media native communication mode, multimodal emoji, in professional and work-related contexts (Lauer & Brumberger 2019; Leslie 2019).

For individuals in organizations, social media can also stretch the boundaries between work and organizational and personal space and time, especially as they can be used on mobile devices, often the same ones for work and personal communication (Vivienne and Burgess 2013, Hogan 2010; Kini, Pathak-Shelak & Jain 2022; Loh & Walsh 2021). In social media research, collapsing of these social contexts for users has been well accounted for (Marwick & boyd 2011; Vitak 2012). Contexts are both colluded and collide, as social digital spaces can be used for intentionally bridging various contexts, but they can also blur them in unexpected and inadvertent ways (Davis & Jurgenson 2014). These ways inevitably bring along discursive shifts as well when communication channels, means, and styles encounter and potentially mix up.

Overall, these various effect of social media on organizations and work layer into something highly impactful because these spaces can fade boundaries between several contexts and interactive spaces traditionally considered 'extra-organizational' as well as create discursive dynamics which travel across them. Consequently, the discursive grounds on which organizations are constructed – drawing on Sillince's contextual dimensions of discourse (2007), the who, how, and where as well as for what purposes – need to be reconsidered. Social media discursive dynamics and discourses circulating on social media impact upon organizations, organizational lives, and contemporary realities of work in various ways. For example, more fluid organizational forms have seen an increase recently thanks to, for example, social media and online spaces (e.g., Puranam et al. 2014). These forms of organizing are newly fluid and boundaryless and, consequently, increasingly discursively constructed and maintained (Dobusch & Schoeneborn 2015).

A case in point in the contemporary world of work are the professions native to social media. This is a quickly growing yet vastly scattered field of work which includes, but is not limited to, the overlapping professions of social media influencing (Khamis, Ang & Welling 2017) and social media content creation (Arriagada & Ibáñez 2020). These are crucially different from what has been primarily discussed in this thesis – that is, work and organizational contexts and professions which pre-date social media and have been impacted by them in different ways – as they are a product of the social media era in and of themselves. As such, they are essentially social media centric and in their operational and business logic, social media are always at the core. For instance, in social media influencers' profession the influencer's self and life often becomes not only a marketing tool but also the marketized product in a complex way as they operate in the interface of social media audiences and companies (Morton 2020).

Here, the notion of 'work' and more loosely drawn boundaries around its organization become illustrated in a nuanced way. Influencing work is carried out and organized in the public sphere where the individual professional's life becomes work and this work, often paid for by companies, intwines with all their life. Individual lives and lifestyles become 'shoppable' and monetizable as they are portrayed on platforms that encode marketplace logics and capacities into their designs (Hund & McGuigan 2019). The vast increase in such work which no longer takes place in and through traditional organizational structures and spaces has profound impacts on the world of work, and this novel porosity needs to be accounted for in organization research.

Overall, the four papers in this thesis illustrate the newly drawn boundaries of work and organization, and the discursive dynamics brought along by social media spaces which increasingly spill across these boundaries and create new discursive grounds for organizational construction. Paper 1 shows how social media spaces are societally a new public sphere where work and organizational matters are opened up for public scrutiny. The case of #MeToo discussed in the paper illustrates how discussions move back and forth from offline organizations to online platforms and spark real-life organizational impact ranging from shifting workplace practices to legislative changes. Paper 2 shows how social media provides a space for organizing collective action and engaging in a public debate where societal discourses like globalization and urbanization entwine with individual citizens' collective identity work. Paper 3 shows how for individual professionals, social media platforms are a novel arena for discursive self-presentation, networking, and connecting to others across the boundaries of public, private, professional, and personal. Here, the blurred boundaries become particularly nuanced from an individual's perspective. The individual professional's personal self and private matters tend to become a part of their work, and this work becomes societal in the online public sphere. Finally, paper 4 shows how social media technological actors, that is, algorithms, are programmed to circulate in the social media space and steer individual users' encounters with content and each other in a way that has wide societal impact crucial for the contemporary world of work and organization.

5.3 Studying social media: a note on methodological and ethical considerations

In the initial stages of this thesis project, I adopted critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2001, 2003) as a means to explore the new discursive dynamics online. CDA offers a way to understand discourses as both reflective and constitutive of social realities, such as those of work, professional, and organizational lives (Fairclough 2003), as well as to explore how discursive communication shifts their various social boundaries and power relations (Djonov & Zhao 2013). Yet, I soon came to find that the traditional application and focus of CDA cannot fully capture the subtleties of the online, especially the fact that social media content consists of not only text but also image, video and ideograms, and that it is shared using various technological functionalities in the technological setting of a given platform (or between platforms).

Traditional CDA thus needs to take on new 'lenses' to be able to study what this means for the discourses and discursive dynamics that emerge in social media contexts.

As discussed in the methodology section, one promising avenue is multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) (Catalano & Waugh 2020; Machin 2013; Meyer et al. 2018) which offers an approach to studying the multimodal discursivity online without losing the critical stance of CDA. Like Djonov and Zhao (2013) point out, there has been a proliferation of studies taking on a multimodal discourse analysis approach in recent years, yet these often fail to include a critical lens in the analysis. Critical analysis of multimodal discourse has yet to properly establish itself (Van Leeuwen 2014). As I have aimed to illustrate here and in all four papers, social media are uniquely complex, fluid, and fluctuating spaces where there are various tensions in terms of, for example, freedom of participation and inequality of access, freedom of interaction and algorithmic steering, as well as user-centredness and social media corporation control. Due to these reasons, social media as a discursive space is conditioned by novel power relations and struggles as well as forms of inclusion and exclusion. These need to be accounted for, and an MCDA approach which considers the relationship between language, power, *and* modes is suitably oriented for that (Djonov & Zhao 2013).

Moreover, also MCDA still needs to properly catch up with the notion of technology: as I have discussed, it is not just the different verbal and visual modes available online, but the way the social media platform specific technologies afford their use that produces new socio-technical discursive dynamics online. While research on social semiotic technologies (Adami 2014; Djonow & Van Leeuwen 2018) and social media discursivity in more general have recognized this crucial element of the new online spaces, there is still a need for a more critically oriented understanding of how these play out within and in between the various platforms contemporary social media consist of, and what it means in terms of for example power relations. A case in point is the power of the social media technology itself (e.g., algorithms), which has become of wide societal and popular interest, but CDA scholars have yet to develop analytical strategies to examine and account for this.

On a more practical level, discursive methodologies need to adapt to the technological settings of social media in how discourses and discursive materials are searched, observed, and collected in social media spaces. For example, there is the question of searchability: while text-based

social media often provide easy word search functions for the researcher (Zappavigna 2021), image- and video-based platforms provide more challenge in this regard. The 'ephemeral media' (Zappavigna ibid.), such as transient Instagram stories discussed in paper 3, on the other hand, pose another kind of a challenge in that they require live data collection and make it difficult if not impossible to return to the materials as they were in retrospect.

Overall, qualitative organization research faces the challenge of making use of the big, dynamic, and fluid social media data available. Hybrid methods making use of 'big data methods' like web scraping (Zhao 2017) in tandem with qualitative methods such as (M)CDA is one solution, but they have not yet been systematically developed within the field. Perhaps an even more pressing lack is that of focus on social media research ethics. Currently, there is not yet a consensus on how to sufficiently eliminate the risk of harm to research subjects in online contexts – or, even, who those subjects actually are and where the boundaries of privacy around their interactions in public spaces are drawn (Townsend and Wallace 2016; Williams, Burnap & Sloan 2017). This has led to suggestions of steering clear of including social media data extracts in research papers altogether (Williams et al. 2017).

A case in point is the review process I and my co-author underwent with our article included as paper 1 in this thesis. Referring to Williams et al. (ibid.), one of our reviewers challenged us about the ethics of using public social media data without informed consent from the commenters involved. The reasoning here is that informed consent should be acquired even when users have agreed to terms and conditions of a public platform because the inclusion of comments has 'the potential to make sensitive personal information identifiable beyond the context it was intended for, and under some conditions, the publication of these data may expose users to harm' (Williams et al., 2017, p. 1150). The crucial question thus is whether it can be expected that users truly understand the public nature of their posts and comments. Even more crucial is to determine that if it cannot be expected, how can informed consent be acquired in social media spaces where elements like anonymity currently make it challenging and, very often, impossible. No definitive consensus yet exists.

As we state in the discussion in paper 1, the question of publishing direct quotes from public social media platforms in academic research publications warrants constructive conversation. There is an urgent

need to develop clear guidelines which protect research subjects without interfering with the ability to adequately illustrate what is going on in this new, digital sphere that has become a key part of contemporary (organizational) lives. A growing part of social interaction in today's world takes place and is stored online, and not being able to fully illustrate it in research reports is an alarming prospect. In all the three empirical papers, I engage in the discussion on these important research ethical concerns in social media studies.

6 CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this doctoral thesis, I contribute to the emerging stream in organization studies exploring the impact of social media spaces in professional, organizational, and societal lives. Drawing also on literature in media studies and information systems research, I illustrate how in these spaces, new socio-technological encounters take place and discursive dynamics emerge. In addition, I show how the socio-technological interaction in these spaces blurs organizational boundaries and widens the grounds for discursive construction of organizations and work in a way which is relevant for practitioners and researchers alike. Both findings provide important insight into the contemporary, ever more digitally infused world of work and organization. Methodologically, I make use of critical discursive approaches with an emphasis on those focused on multimodal discourses embedded in technological social media settings. I also further the discussion on methodological and research ethical considerations related to the use and analysis of social media data.

An evident limitation of this research is that its empirical focus is largely on the US (paper 1) and Finland (papers 2 and 3). While social media are global, the access to and experience of them depends on who is using them and where. Social media spaces are often widely accessible because in most cases, it only takes a (mobile) device and internet connection to access free social media platforms. However, this idea is essentially privileged as access to neither is universal. Especially in the Global South and rural communities, access to digital infrastructure and mobile networks is significantly more restricted than in the Global North and metropolitan areas (Ragnedda & Gladkova 2020; Velaga et al. 2012). Moreover, social media censorship is a major issue in many countries, China being a widely discussed example of a society where access to many social media platforms and content is strictly prohibited (Mina 2019; Tai & Fu 2020). It is thus worth noting that while the technological features and digital architecture of social media often make them globally accessible spaces, the reality is more complex and socially divisive. Consequently, discursive dynamics – e.g., what and how is, or can be, posted and viewed, and by whom – differ greatly.

Some concerns are even more rudimentary, as not only does social media usage require access, it also requires basic skills in and comprehension of the Internet, that is, digital and social media literacy (Cho, Cannon, Lopez & Li 2022; Leaning 2019). This includes understanding how to

access, use, and contribute to social media and knowing their risks. As social media platforms have become key arenas for social interaction, knowledge sharing, and information storage in the contemporary world, it is of crucial importance that these spaces do not become inaccessible or disproportionately unsafe to some people and regions. More research is needed on social media divides and on how to diminish them.

This thesis is thus one step forward, and many more need to be taken in order to keep up with the quickly developing, globally diverse social media space and its growing impact for work and organizations. One especially relevant phenomenon to focus on globally is professions and work native to social media spaces which were only briefly tapped on in this thesis. These professions, and the field of social media work in general, are an integral part of the whole social media ecosystem, its organization, and its entwinement in not only the social sphere but also the global market economy. Moreover, they reshape old power relations and create new ones, like the emerging research attention on struggles between social media corporations and content creators illustrates. Empowerment and exploitation of digital workers and the contestation over monetization of digital labour are some examples of how power is being negotiated in the social media sphere (Arriagada & Ibáñez 2020). It is evident that social media are just as prone to struggles over authority and ownership as any other social space or field of work. For this reason, especially critical research needs to take them seriously.

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APPENDICES

In the following pages, papers 1, 2, 3, and 4 are included as appendices.

Social media and hyper-masculine work cultures

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Maaranen, A., & Tienari, J. (2020). Social media and hyper-masculine work cultures. Gender, Work & Organization, 27(6), 1127-1144.

Received: 1 October 2019 | Revised: 15 March 2020 | Accepted: 30 March 2020

DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12450

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Social media and hyper-masculine work cultures

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In this article, we aim to contribute to research on social media as an arena for gender relations and inequality by elucidating how social media and hyper-masculine work cultures are interconnected. We focus empirically on the fiery social media commentary #MeToo sparked on Wall Street in New York. While the possibility of this movement backfiring has received relatively little research attention, we argue that online reactions illustrate the unpredictable nature of social media movements and their reception in organizations. Our analysis shows how they work to naturalize gender differences and polarize opinions, often with highly suspect humour. Focusing on interconnections of hyper-masculine work cultures, on the one hand, and popular misogyny gaining ground online, on the other, offers ways to critically explore the constitutive role of social media as a medium in shaping contemporary workplaces and society. More research on social relations and technology is needed in organizations that are less obviously hyper-masculine but deeply gendered nevertheless.

KEYWORDS
#MeToo, backlash, discourse, gender equality, social media, Wall Street

1 | INTRODUCTION

> *No more dinners with female colleagues. Don't sit next to them on flights. Book hotel rooms on different floors. Avoid one-on-one meetings.* (Bloomberg Business, December 3, 2018)

An article titled 'Wall Street Rule for the #MeToo Era: Avoid Women at All Cost' was published by Bloomberg Business on 3 December 2018. It presented findings of a survey conducted among more than 30 executives in the financial district of Wall Street in New York, focusing on their reactions towards the #MeToo movement. The article introduced strategies that men adopt in the '#MeToo era', many of which encourage avoiding women at the workplace and in work-related events.

Social media have become a key site on which social and societal issues are commented on today. One major discussion that has taken over social media platforms globally is that sparked by the #MeToo movement. The hashtag was first coined in 2006 by the civil rights activist Tarana Burke but gained global momentum when used in protest against sexual abuse in Hollywood in 2017. #MeToo raised discussions on harassment, segregation and gender inequality worldwide to the extent that it became one of the most high-profile examples of digital feminist activism (Mendes, Ringrose, & Killer, 2018). As Rubery (2019) argues, the way #MeToo took over social media by storm has made it clear that gender equality issues are far from being solved. However, not all social media commentary works in favour of the equality pursuits of #MeToo — in fact, the opposite, so much so that it may be igniting a new era of gender segregation.

A case in point is the heated social media commentary on the Bloomberg Business article and the 'Wall Street backlash'. The commentary was vivid, ranging from comments on sexual harassment and accusations of it to debates on inequality in the context of work and beyond. A sense of increased fear and resentment towards #MeToo and between men and women seems to persist among corporate decision-makers. Most notably, online commentary boils down to gender, and gender differences, as both the reason and the fix for whatever is perceived as the main issue, whether harassment, claims of it or unequal opportunities at work and beyond. Social media commenters tend to draw on an essentialist logic on gender and in such a harshly polarizing manner that some refer to the present condition as the new 'gender wars' (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016).

The 'Wall Street backlash' has brought to the fore something that has perhaps been boiling under the surface in western societies. While workplace sexual harassment has been discussed long before #MeToo (O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, & Lean, 2009; Zippel, 2006), the debate today seems particularly vitriolic in tone. Although Wall Street workplaces are known for their gendered hierarchies and hyper-masculine cultures in which sexuality and even its violent displays are evident (Fisher, 2010, 2012; Ho, 2009; McDowell, 1997; Roth, 2007), the extreme counter-reactions to #MeToo illustrate that there is something new going on. A hashtag movement apparently touched a painful nerve among Wall Street bankers, and it was also on social media where the reactions intensified. This suggests that the responses have to do, at least in part, with social media as a new stage for power struggles (Ems, 2014).

The important role of social media and hashtag movements such as #MeToo is recognized in feminist research (Bowles Eagle, 2015; Clark, 2014, 2016; Horeck, 2014; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Meyer, 2014; Rentschler, 2015; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019; Williams, 2015). The utilization of online spaces and hashtags powerfully catalyses what Özkazanc-Pan (2018) calls collective feminist agency. However, also the pitfalls of social media are recognized by the growing research exploring misogynist culture and willingness to shut women up that flourishes online (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Bartlett, Norrie, Patel, Rumpel, & Wibberley, 2014; Jane, 2014, 2016, 2017; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019). It is thus evident that social media has a distinctly darker side where gender inequalities not only persist but are revived.

Motivated by a belief that the persistent struggles over inequality in the world of work and beyond are tightly interlinked to, and made newly visible by, commentary on social media, we set out to study the 'Wall Street backlash' to #MeToo. We find Wall Street illuminative of these interconnections as some of the anti-feminist discourses flourishing online seem to resonate with many aspects linked to the hyper-masculine Wall Street work culture. We adopt critical discourse analysis (CDA) as our methodological approach and conduct a reading on the commentary sparked by the Bloomberg article on two different social media platforms, Twitter and Reddit, to make sense of #MeToo and its effects.

In our analysis, we specify and illustrate discursive practices used in the social media commentary and consider what they tell us about two things: first, the increasingly complex relationship of gender, work and inequality and,

second, social media as a uniquely unfiltered, unpredictable and uncontrollable arena for anti-feminist sentiment. The social and the technological are fundamentally intertwined online, which makes social media a public sphere where technology plays a uniquely important role in shaping discourses and discursive practices. Drawing on feminist media studies as well as gender studies research on hyper-masculine work cultures, we offer a comprehensive critical analysis of how social media discourses are unique to the medium and powerfully participate in shaping perceptions of gender relations, and how they are impacted by, and have an impact on, the world of work.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Next, we discuss social media from the perspective of gender relations, address the hyper-masculine context of Wall Street, and outline our research design and analysis. We then specify and illustrate discursive practices in social media, discuss our findings, and offer conclusions and ideas for future research.

2 | SOCIAL MEDIA: FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND POPULAR MISOGYNY

Media are among the most important cultural carriers in the (re)production of gender relations (Krefting, 2002; Macdonald, 1995, 2003). Today, social media platforms have gained a prominent role as the new, digital public sphere. Gendered images and 'doing' gender related to management, organizations and work have been studied on the arena of mass media and the business press (Achtenhagen & Welter, 2011; Kelan, 2013; Krefting, 2002; Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002; Lang & Rybnikova, 2016; Tienari, Holgersson, Meriläinen, & Höök, 2009) as well as in online media (Tienari & Ahonen, 2016; Vanhala, Pesonen, & Nokkonen, 2010). According to Tienari and Ahonen (2016), online commentary serves to produce portrayals of gender and particularly those that naturalize gender differences, thereby justifying inequalities.

While social media commentary shares some of the characteristics of other online media such as digital access and lack of geographical boundaries, its concept uniquely differs from other spaces such as online journals with edited content and comment boards, which are meant for reacting to that content rather than producing it. Kosut (2012) describes social media as a defining characteristic of the 'Web 2.0': it allows the individual user to control both the flow and production of information online. Social media platforms allow users to take control over content and form. However, the form is often limited in terms of the length and form of messages, which has led to a culture of distinct brevity that is different from mass media (see Brock, 2012).

Feminist media studies have acknowledged the potential of the new, proactive online sphere as an arena for discussing gender inequality and sexual harassment. Feminist scholars have recognized social media as a globally accessible and visible arena for feminist activism (Baer, 2016; Carter Olson, 2016; Crossley, 2015; Drüeke & Zobl, 2016; Keller, 2012, 2015; Keller et al., 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018; Phipps, Ringrose, Renold, & Jackson, 2018; Rodino-Colocino, 2014). Vachhani and Pullen (2019) argue that feminist movements are experiencing a vibrant, fuelled resurgence on social media where people can connect and get organized globally. 'Hashtag feminism' that works to counter gender inequalities with social media hashtags such as #MeToo, #mencallmethings, #YesAllWomen, #NotOk and #EveryDaySexism, has become a widely recognized phenomenon within feminist research (Bowles Eagle, 2015; Clark, 2014, 2016; Horeck, 2014; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Meyer, 2014; Rentschler, 2014, 2015; Williams, 2015). Clark-Parsons (2019) argues that the key potential of hashtag feminism lies in its transformative politics of visibility: networking through a shared tag makes it possible to illustrate the systemic nature of social injustice on a global (social) media stage. Thereby, hashtag feminism can at times spark 'real' social change instead of being mere virtue signalling online (Clark-Parsons, 2019).

Movements such as #MeToo have also encouraged women to speak up collectively in traditional media against gendered violence and sexual harassment. Alvinius and Holmberg (2019) analyse a collective call for an end to violence and harassment in the Swedish military, signed by 1768 women employed there, and published in a major daily newspaper. Alvinius and Holmberg analysed this call as a public resistance effort against the military, which they termed the 'last bastion of masculinity'. These authors concluded that #MeToo challenges the norms of the hyper-

masculine military organization, making resistance towards it visible, and thereby resists the practices of sexual harassment and lack of responsibility.

However, social media also has a darker side. Due to its unfiltered nature and, in the case of many platforms the lure of anonymity, social media are often characterized by a toxic tone and gendertrolling (Cole, 2015; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017; Mantilla, 2013, 2015). It is characterized by a rhetoric so vulgar that Jane (2014) calls it e-bile. Social media commentary is not independent of 'irl' (real life) inequalities. While online bullying and other pitfalls of social media affect some men as well, research consistently shows that women are subject to more bullying, abuse, hateful language and threats online (Bartlett et al., 2014).

A particularly prominent instance of gender-based exclusion and hatred is the culture of misogyny translated into online spaces (Bartlett et al., 2014; Jane, 2014, 2016). Sometimes referred to as 'popular misogyny' (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016), this is a 'basic anti-female violent expression that circulates to wide audiences on popular media platforms' (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016, p. 172). The term implies a counterforce to 'popular feminism', an umbrella term used for such movements as 'hashtag feminism'. What makes popular misogyny so powerful is that it reaches large audiences quickly and has become a visible culture of its own. Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) argue that characteristic to popular misogyny is not only opposing feminist beliefs but also men having a sense of being attacked by feminism. According to these authors, some men articulate that their very maleness is threatened. They point out that the fear seems to be that some men perceive that their rightful place in the social hierarchy is questioned. As such, popular misogyny and the strong juxtaposition of women and men, and women's and men's rights, powerfully stir up resentment, polarization of opinion and resistance to feminist pursuits.

Popular misogyny often intertwines with 'lad culture' that is a collective mentality and a hyper-masculine culture, which favours male bonding and tends to dismiss women as sexualized objects. In the extreme, it is linked to rape culture, which associates sexuality with violence and naturalizes sexual assault (Phipps et al., 2018). While lad culture is evident in offline contexts (Phipps & Young, 2013, 2015), it increasingly thrives on social media and illustrates the toxic forms of anti-feminism gaining ground on online 'manospheres' (Farrell, Fernandez, Novotny, & Alani, 2019; Ging, 2019; Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). A case in point is the gaming industry where what became known as 'GamerGate' brought to the surface anti-feminist and hyper-masculine attitudes but also their counterforces (Just, 2019).

As such, the issue of sexual harassment and #MeToo as a movement demonstrates the paradoxical nature of social media. While recognizing its potential, feminist scholars have discussed social media as a new and forceful medium for sexual harassment in itself (Citron, 2014; Megarry, 2014). While harassment online lacks face-to-face interaction, its bases are similar. Megarry (2014) argues that harassment in social media takes place through consistent utilization of stereotypical ideas of femininity in a derogatory manner as well as aggressive attacks on the female body. The sexually saturated female body (Acker, 1990; Butler, 1990) appears to be as vulnerable to harassment online as 'in real life'. The main function of online sexual harassment, according to Megarry (2014), is to preserve male social control in digital spaces. Hence it seems that while social media serve as spaces for speaking up and challenging inequalities, they are also used to perpetuate the deeply rooted patriarchal structures and misogyny of the 'irl'.

Finally, the gendered realities of social media are made even more complex by algorithms. Built in the way social media platforms function, algorithms are software which often go unnoticed but largely determine access, visibility and prioritization of content on a given platform (Tufekci, 2017). They not only shape an individual user's experience but also play a role in determining what kind of content and discourse gets promoted and what suppressed. As more and more evidence of gendered algorithmic bias — that is, discriminatory algorithmic outcomes such as being excluded from seeing certain content or being offered certain content based on one's (assumed) gender — emerges (Datta, Tschantz, & Datta, 2015; Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019), it is evident that seemingly uncontrolled social media platforms are often subtly yet forcefully orchestrated by a gendered logic, which reproduces assumptions, conventions and inequalities of visibility and access.

Overall, then, there is a polarization taking place on social media. While feminists are taking over online spaces to challenge the *status quo*, misogyny and gendertrolling flourish (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Connell, 2019; Mendes et al., 2019). A particular type of macho male resistance to women's power is evident (Cox, 2018) and it seems that, as Banet-Weiser (2018) argues, existing hegemonic masculinities are not only reasserted on social media but new, potentially even more toxic ones are created. The paradoxical nature of social media, combined with their unquestionable prominence today, calls for research to understand this forceful new public sphere. This is especially the case as the polarization taking place online is not unique to questions of gender equality. Anti-racist hashtag movements (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Campbell, 2019; Carney, 2016; De Choudhury, Jhaver, Sugar, & Weber, 2016; Yang, 2016) and flourishing racism (Shafer, 2017; Jakubowicz, 2017; Jakubowicz et al., 2017; Klein, 2017) demonstrate similar dynamics online. These observations suggest that it is the new, digital public sphere itself that needs to be taken seriously.

3 | GENDER AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE HYPER-MASCULINE CULTURE OF WALL STREET

Social media and its movements and countermovements are connected to the world of organizations and work. The hyper-masculine culture of Wall Street and other financial centres across the world demonstrates the implications of #MeToo. The world of finance has long been heavily male dominated and deeply gendered (Assassi, 2009; De Goede, 2005; Fisher, 2010, 2012; Ho, 2009; McDowell, 1997; Roth, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Zaloom, 2006). New York's financial district Wall Street in Manhattan is a case in point. According to Fraser (2005), when established in the late 18th century Wall Street was regarded as a place for men to make money. A strong ethos of maleness — and a pointedly macho maleness in particular — was characteristic to its culture from the start. While Wall Street is no longer exclusive to men and there are some women in top positions, the image as well as reality of a particular kind of male prototype that dominates the uppermost echelons of financial firms persists (Ho, 2009). According to Ho (2009), the 'Wall Street man' is embodied in a competitive, driven, hard-working white male professional. Similar portrayals are drawn in a number of studies that focus on the hyper-competitive and hyper-masculine culture of Wall Street and other hot spots of the financial world, most notably the City of London (Fisher, 2010; Fraser, 2005; McDowell, 1997; McDowell & Court, 1994; Roth, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Zaloom, 2006).

The hyper-competitive and hyper-masculine culture of finance has become hard to challenge as it consistently conflates a particular kind of masculinity with competence and success, naturalizing the dominance of particular kinds of men in positions of power. Women (as well as men who do not fit the narrow ideal of masculinity) are deemed outsiders who lack the traits required for fulfilling the role of the ideal finance professional, and they are marginalized and excluded (Fisher, 2010; McDowell, 1997). While women can decide to adopt traits and behaviour perceived as masculine, they are still at risk of the double bind — that is, they are not regarded as 'real' women (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Moreover, traits and characteristics perceived as female seem to be regarded as downright harmful on Wall Street. De Goede (2005, 2009) argues that throughout history financial crises and their causes have been associated with female fickleness and promiscuity as well as irrationality and irresponsibility symbolized through female figures. These portrayals are essentialist and polarizing, and they categorically value traits associated with the masculine over those associated with the feminine (Knights & Tullberg, 2012). As a result, gender has become to define the hierarchical order on Wall Street. This is demonstrated in Ho's (2009) observation that Wall Street jobs, pay and work are deeply segregated and structured by gender (as well as race and class) on all levels ranging from recruitment to promotions and dress codes to work schedules.

Moreover, the gendered hierarchy on Wall Street and other financial centres is reinforced by a heightened, sexually laden focus on the female body. Ho (2009) and McDowell (1997) argue that in the hyper-masculine culture of finance, monetary success and male heterosexuality are tightly interlinked, even to the point that men's success is interpreted in terms of women's subordination. Roth (2007) explains the historical context of these sexualized power

relations, arguing that as recently as the 1980s Wall Street women were reduced to roles as secretaries and sex objects and the connections of their subordination at work and in terms of sexual relations were highlighted.

Such hyper-masculine organizations tend to be prone to sexual harassment. McDowell (1997) shows in the case of the City of London that emphasized sexuality marginalizes, derogates and even abuses female bodies. Empirical research suggests that such abuse continues to take place on Wall Street as the number of harassment charges remains high (Roth, 2007). According to Roth (2007), Wall Street continues to be a hostile working environment for anyone else than a white male because of the 'sexually-charged macho atmosphere' and work culture.

Based on insights from extant research we ask the question: what do fiery online reactions to #MeToo on Wall Street tell us about gender relations today in social media and at workplaces?

4 | RESEARCH DESIGN

Authors of the article titled 'Wall Street Rule for the #MeToo Era: Avoid Women at All Cost', published by Bloomberg Business on 3 December 2018, noted that men's strategies to reduce the risk of being (falsely) accused of sexual harassment were starting to isolate women on Wall Street. Although some of the men interviewed offered less extreme solutions for dealing with the situation, such as '*Just try not to be an asshole*', the general attitude of those surveyed was characterized by distress caused by a sense of '*walking on eggshells*', as one interviewee put it. The authors listed the scarcity of women in top positions and Wall Street culture, known for avoiding scandals at all costs, as potential reasons for these reactions. The key message was that the #MeToo era has sparked a strong reaction in the field of finance, with implications in terms of gender segregation.

The Bloomberg article implied that #MeToo was counterproductively harming the progress of women at work. The article triggered a number of reactions on various social media platforms. The commentary was vivid and quickly moved beyond sexual harassment to discuss gender, work and (in)equality more generally. The article was commented on in several social media platforms in the weeks after it was published. We focus on two different platforms, Twitter and Reddit. Twitter is an online news and networking service where users post, share and comment on messages known as 'tweets', limited to 280 characters (formerly 140 characters) in length, with a public profile. Reddit is a social platform where users anonymously share content and start discussion threads. Both sites originate from the United States but are globally used by hundreds of millions of people monthly (Social Media Today, 2018).

On Twitter, we analysed the commentary on Bloomberg's own channels where the article was shared. On Reddit, we focused on threads on different Wall Street and finance communities. The Bloomberg article was shared multiple times on both Twitter and Reddit in December 2018, and we did not study every thread of commentary it sparked — rather, we focused on seven threads to be able to conduct a detailed reading of each. Most comments on all these threads were posted during December 2018, shortly after the article was shared. By the time we collected our data in early 2019, some comments had been deleted, hidden or become unavailable in the discussion and thus were not included in our final sample of 382 comments on Twitter and 1086 comments on Reddit.

We only used data that was publicly available online at the time of our data collection. However, challenged by one of the reviewers for this article about the ethics of using public social media data without informed consent (Williams, Burnap, & Sloan, 2017), we took precautions to protect the anonymity of the commenters in the Twitter and Reddit threads studied. We chose not to directly quote comments and instead, anonymized and masked those few comments that we use as examples. In these cases, we convey the message and give indication of the language used, while protecting the identity of the commenter.

Studying two different platforms — one anonymous and one with public user profiles; one meant for sharing short tweets and one where comments are not limited in length — gave us an overview on the different ways in which social media serves as an arena for commenting on social and societal phenomena. Different reactions that arose illustrated how commentary sparked by the Bloomberg article took different directions and adopted different rhetoric and yet, how some of the same arguments and underlying assumptions of gender, (in)equality and their

relations with work seemed to cut across platforms. These persistent arguments and assumptions present on both platforms constituted the core discourses in the commentary. Some differences between commentary on Twitter and Reddit, however, illustrated how different technological affordances, specifically anonymity, of different social media platforms impact upon discourses and discursive practices online.

We focused on Wall Street that is perhaps an extreme example of a hyper-masculine work culture in western societies. Connections between offline work cultures and online commentary in social media may be particularly evident in this context. Our analysis can thus elucidate something that is present but not as explicit in other spaces and organizations, and thereby take forward discussions on social media as an arena for gender relations and inequality in contemporary society also more generally.

We used CDA to make sense of the discursive constructions of gender, (in)equality and their connections to organizations and work in social media. Adopting the view of Norman Fairclough (1989, 2003), we regarded discourses as both reflective and constitutive of social realities. We embraced the critical stance of CDA in order to study the discursive construction of social power and domination (Van Dijk, 1993, 2001). Drawing on feminist CDA, we focused on the taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and power asymmetries, which are discursively constructed, maintained and challenged online (Lazar, 2014). In the tradition of feminist CDA, we sought to elucidate both overt and more subtle discursive manifestations of gendered power and resistance. Our goal was to analyse how social media commentary echoes (and amplifies) particular assumptions about gender and inequality — but also how it offers an arena for new discourses and discursive practices to arise, ones that potentially translate into workplace realities and contribute to broader societal shifts.

We explored how social media discourses on #MeToo make use of underlying assumptions of gender relations, and how these assumptions were used to legitimate and sustain a variety of inclusions, exclusions and hierarchies. We also considered discourses that question or resist the taken-for-granted assumptions. By observing how conflicting discourses were (re)constructed — some becoming dominant and some being marginalized and silenced — we aimed at making visible power dynamics in the commentary. We followed Fairclough's (2003) suggestion that discourses are analysed on textual, discursive practice and societal practice levels. We considered the role of textual level elements in constituting discursive practices and we conducted all our readings bearing in mind the broader context: #MeToo as a global phenomenon, Wall Street as a cultural environment, social media as a unique arena for public discussion and the turbulent political climate in the United States in which the gender inequality discussion takes place.

Our analysis proceeded in two main stages. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data set and focused on the most recurrent themes in the commentary. Interestingly, only some commenters focused on discussing sexual harassment, accusations of it, and the related policies and practices in workplaces and in the judiciary system. Perhaps due to the way the Bloomberg article framed the issue — contrasting men's and women's perspectives and interests — most commenters seemed to be interested in men, women and their different behaviour at work as potential explanations for both harassment and accusations of it. Their key arguments centred around specific gendered and sexed assumptions, stereotypes and explanations. Arguments that drew on such explanations were so prominent and the ones that questioned this logic so few — and so quickly dismissed — that the commentary was characterized by a sense of coercive gendering and sexualizing.

While most of the commenters seemed to agree on the existence of some fundamental differences between men and women, there was little consensus on what exactly these differences are and, most importantly, what are their implications for organizational life. Differing ideas resulted in a divided debate on the interrelations of gender, work and inequality as well as on the effects of #MeToo. Many also made linkages beyond work and organizations, either relating the topics discussed to personal life such as dating or referring to wider societal discussions such as US party politics and feminism as a social movement. It was evident that #MeToo and sexual harassment were assumed to cut across realms of the personal, organizational and societal. On the anonymous Reddit threads personal anecdotes were particularly prominent, as were discussions of politics and political views. It seems that the mask of anonymity encourages commenters to share particularly sensitive information and opinions.

Second, we proceeded to a more detailed analysis focused on detecting the main discursive practices that the comments were built on. We identified three key discursive practices around which most comments in both Twitter and Reddit seemed to revolve. We call these naturalizing, polarizing and humourizing. Naturalizing was the most common practice: a notable number of the comments built on gendered and sexed explanations and they were typically used to either blame or justify women's (or men's) behaviour. Polarizing was also characteristic to the commentary throughout. It was used to emphasize the naturalized differences and create confrontation between women and men as well as between different priorities and worldviews. This discursive practice made use of opposites, extremes and insurmountable divides. Finally, the comments in which humour was used as a discursive practice built on both naturalizing and polarizing. Humourizing caricatured and exaggerated gender differences. While masked in jokes and humorous language, many of the comments were harshly degrading towards women. This discursive practice was particularly prominent in the anonymous Reddit platform where many commenters used characteristically vulgar language and nasty humour.

In the following, we specify and illustrate the three discursive practices. We focus on the ways these practices participate in maintaining and challenging assumptions of gender differences and inequality and, consequently, how they shift (or cement) gendered power asymmetries brought under scrutiny by #MeToo.

5 | NATURALIZING

The most common discursive practice in the comments was what we call naturalizing. Throughout the commentary, gender and gender differences were naturalized as something fixed in biology in order to make sense of the situation on Wall Street. These naturalizations were not merely used to explain what is going on, but they were often used in a way that categorically put the blame on women and justified men's actions. While not all comments followed this logic, it was evident throughout the commentary to the extent that it became to characterize the whole discussion and its accusatory, defensive and conflicting tone. At times, it resembled popular misogynistic discourse characterized by a strong sense of men wanting to maintain what they perceive as their rightful place in the social hierarchy (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). Biologically rooted explanations were used as a means to maintain gendered hierarchies and silence the efforts of #MeToo.

Naturalizing was used to blame women in different ways, all of which were based on the assumption that women as a group naturally possess some characteristics that determine the way they are, feel and act. Many commenters portrayed women as naturally untrustworthy liars who fabricate accusations. One commenter believed that being dishonest comes naturally and instinctually to women, arguing that they become deceitful early on as they learn to lie to each other. Others took a different route, depicting women as naive and incapable of understanding the consequences of their actions. One commenter argued that it is women's lack of self-awareness that is to blame for igniting the battles. It was evident that the stereotypes used as a basis for argumentation were not at all coherent. What they had in common was that they ended up blaming women's 'natural' characteristics for what was going on.

Some commenters questioned women's compatibility with the Wall Street work culture altogether. This was based on the assumption that women are fundamentally different (from men) in their biology, needs and ways of doing things. Such comments tended to push accusations of harassment aside and argue that the real issue is trying to make women fit Wall Street and its 'naturally' masculine culture. They reinforced the idea of female characteristics being harmful in finance (De Goede, 2005). Such comments also questioned campaigns such as #MeToo as undesired attempts to disregard the 'natural' order of people and things.

Finally, the most extreme and derogative way of blaming women was the argument that women fabricate accusations based on their own sexual desire and disappointment. This argument sought to naturalize sexual approaches towards women at work and suggested that women who come up with accusations of harassment are merely disappointed in the person by whom they are harassed — or by not being sexually approached at all. One commenter

believed that women only accuse unattractive men of harassment because they are upset that such men would dare to approach them. According to another commenter, women only start coming up with accusations when they are no longer sexually approached. A third one suggested that women fabricate claims just for the sake of seeking attention.

While many commenters used stereotypes about women to put blame on them, stereotypes of men were used to justify their actions, whether it was sexual harassment or the precautions men were taking to avoid the risk of being accused. Naturalizing particular forms of sexuality and validating a specific dynamic of sexual relations in the workplace played a major part in these justifications. These comments built on the persistent idea of women's bodies being sexually available for men (Ho, 2009; McDowell, 1997). While women were portrayed to welcome sexual approaches (as long as it is from someone attractive), men were depicted as having natural urges towards women, which they should be allowed to act on. This, too, built on the idea typical to hyper-masculine work cultures that sexual virility is linked to competence at work (Ho, 2009). It also reinforced the stereotype of women as temptresses and men as easily tempted that, as Martin (2003) argues, persists in some workplaces. One commenter explained that men just cannot keep their hands to themselves and not comment on women's bodies, a view which was agreed on by many others. While most commenters seemed to use such rationale as a means for justifying sexualized comments and flirtatious behaviour, some bluntly naturalized men reacting sexually to women at work with 'erections'.

Similar arguments were used to blame men on allegedly rampant sexual harassment on Wall Street. These, too, made use of essentialist beliefs that all men are similar and act in similar ways. Such comments seemed to ignore the complex issues of harassment, inequality and the process of handling claims as they suggested that men controlling their natural urges would solve all problems. These 'common sense' arguments had a tendency to simplify a complex issue and discourage further discussion on the underlying problems. One commenter asked: is it really that difficult to not sexually assault a colleague? Such comments leaned on a simplistic assumption that, like many commenters put it, men 'not being assholes' would solve the problem.

Men were also contrasted to women in portraying them as rational risk thinkers who naturally fit the Wall Street work culture as they always prioritize business. These arguments reinforce the gendered hierarchy typical to Wall Street (Ho, 2009). If men need to disregard such things as equality by not recruiting women or interacting with them at work, it is a justified decision from a business perspective — like one commenter argued, just having men to do the work is the easiest solution. This commenter added that 'girls' can surely find other jobs. Such comments were particularly effective in silencing all other voices and concerns over equality and fairness because they maintained that on the Street, everything revolves around risk and reward.

Overall, the dominance of naturalizing in the commentary illustrates how persistent the essentialist gender logic is in the context of Wall Street and in social media discourse. Explaining the issues at hand — harassment, accusations and precautions — based on gender or sex left little room for debate over things such as culture, practices and processes as well as the assumptions underlying gender stereotypes. Many commenters seemed to agree on an 'easy fix': organizing according to gender, in one way or another, instead of looking for and solving the root issue of harassment and making processes for dealing with accusations fairer. Such logic created a fruitful ground for a hyper-masculine culture to 'rightfully' remain intact and for renewed gender segregation to flourish. It offered a seemingly simple way to restore the *status quo*: many commenters seemed to agree that maybe women and men are better off segregated due to their natural and different gender roles.

6 | POLARIZING

Another discursive practice frequently used in the commentary was what we call polarizing. This practice emphasizes and valorizes naturalized differences, creates confrontation, and makes use of rhetoric of opposites, extremes and insurmountable divides. It is particularly endemic to social media as a medium as the culture of brevity, lack of filters and relative anonymity offer a fruitful ground for such discourses to flourish.

By far the most common polarization was that between men and women. This division built on the essentialist assumptions about gender and was characteristically hierarchical, reflecting the reality of many Wall Street workplaces as described by Ho (2009). Men and women were not only portrayed as different but there was also a hierarchy implied in the difference, which legitimizes Wall Street to remain male dominated. One commenter concluded that men function at a higher cognitive level than women. Some rare commenters took the opposite stance and suggested an all-female Wall Street where replacing men with women would guarantee better results for everyone. Albeit sometimes made with what seemed like a heavy dose of sarcasm, these comments, too, tended to reinforce the idea of men and women being better off segregated.

Divides were also built among women. Feminism and feminist women were blamed for the currently backfired situation. These comments seemed to intentionally create confrontation and resentment, potentially in order to shift the focus away from the issue of sexual harassment. This was a result of the overall war-like setting of the commentary. Commenters accused feminists of igniting a war against men and shooting other women 'in the foot'. One believed that instead of hating the 'imaginary' patriarchy, feminists hate men altogether and are purposefully attacking them. The rhetoric of many of these comments was harsh and accusatory and seemed to purposefully turn the blame on feminists who, as one commenter argued, had betrayed other women.

Another polarization was that between business and gender equality. These were portrayed as polar opposites in many comments, claiming that they cannot be prioritized simultaneously. Ensuring that business runs smoothly at the expense of issues such as equal recruitment and development opportunities was justified. One commenter believed that it is acceptable not to hire women if they do not 'fit' the team and 'upset' the order of the company. This commenter emphasized that the fact that they are women has nothing to do with it.

Such comments were frequent and serve as examples of how harassment, #MeToo and their linkages to work were understood by many in the context of Wall Street. Some commenters argued that the Wall Street way of doing things is institutionalized, arguing that Wall Street bankers are characterized by unchangeable qualities that make them act in a certain way. This again disregarded history, practices and socially constructed hierarchies and power relations, and put the blame on 'Wall Streeters being Wall Streeters'. One commenter argued with some irony that 'being a dick' is business as usual.

However, some polarizing cut across wider societal realms and drew linkages to party politics and the US political landscape. It was evident that larger dichotomizations at play were perceived as interlinked to #MeToo and the question of harassment. Often, feminist attempts at greater gender equality were associated with the (far) left and the idea of segregation with the (far) right. The debate that drew on political divides was particularly vitriolic and accusatory in tone and seemed to carry frustrations that reached beyond the discussion on Wall Street. Many commenters turned the blame on progressive liberals who they believed were ruining the society, while some (and considerably fewer) were determined that right-wing politics was to blame.

This tendency of the comments to meander beyond the original topic shows how in social media platforms the direction of the discussion cannot be controlled. This is why it was impossible to detect which battles were directly sparked by the Bloomberg article and which were ignited by other disagreements, such as those on US politics. On social media, different power struggles such as over business, on the one hand, and politics, on the other, tend to overlap. What was evident, however, was that this particular topic attracted a lot of commentary that was divided and inflamed. Many of the comments focused on emphasizing and aggravating differences rather than suggesting solutions, and a form of 'gender war', as described by Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016), was constructed. Some commenters tapped on this, arguing that the discussion became so polarized, war-like and concerned with finding culprits that it might be oblivious of the reality and dismissive of finding a middle ground.

Finally, what stood out in the polarizing commentary were the extremes to which many commenters seemed to take their reactions. There were comments on attaching cameras and microphones to clothing to record all interactions with women in case they should come up with accusations. This was particularly visible in the Reddit threads in which a lot of personal anecdotes and experiences were shared, probably due to the anonymity offered by the platform. The Reddit commentary confirmed the specific type of macho male resistance taking place online (Cox, 2018).

These comments capture the lengths to which the fear and resentment over being falsely accused is taken by some. It illustrates vividly how real the risk of new gender segregation is. Most notably, it illustrates how social media commentary can easily spiral into and aggravate a sense of extremity.

7 | HUMOURIZING

What we call humourizing was another recurring discursive practice, which built on both naturalizing and polarizing. Comments that made use of humour caricatured and exaggerated gender differences. While masked in jokes and humorous language, many were harshly degrading and aggressive towards women as is typical of misogynist discourse and gendertrolling online (Mantilla, 2013, 2015). In addition to naturalizing gender differences and polarizing the commentary, humour as a discursive practice was used so much that it bordered on harassment itself. It became a form of exercising power and suppression (Plesner, 2015). As Mantilla (2015) puts it, gendertrolling is seldom done 'for the lulz' but rather in order to deliberately threaten women and drive them out of public online spaces. While by no means all humour used in the commentary could be described as gendertrolling, a particularly toxic tone of voice was characteristic throughout.

Perhaps the most common way of using humour was through sarcasm over how #MeToo plays out on Wall Street and the backlash it has caused. These comments seemed to belittle feminist attempts for equality, invalidate them and link them to 'feminine naivety'. They also shifted the blame on #MeToo and pursuits of equality, blaming irrational feminists for making a mess of Wall Street and society in general. They downplayed focal issues such as sexual harassment. Some commenters joked that feminism has recreated the 'boys' club' and others sarcastically pointed out that surely every rational person could see the backlash coming. Commenters belittled the struggles women were facing and gloated over the turn #MeToo had taken on Wall Street.

The harshest use of humour was found in comments that made degrading jokes about women. These were heavily sexualized and demeaning. They reproduced the idea of female bodies as sex objects, which characterizes hyper-masculine work cultures (Roth, 2007). While the goal of these comments, often loosely connected to the overall discussion, was sometimes unclear, they had some clear implications. First, sexuality and availability of women for being viewed and commented on sexually was naturalized, so much so that some commenters seemed to portray sexual harassment as an integral element of Wall Street work culture. One commenter asked what is the point of being an executive if one cannot have sex with one's subordinates.

Some jokes turned into offensive attacks on women, either to emphasize the perceived role of women as sex objects or as a means of online harassment and silencing. These comments were vitriolic, hostile and used nasty language when making fun of women. This enabled commenters to shift the blame on women, like the one who stated that 'you asked for it' and went on to joke about vibrator costs going up.

Further, 'humorous' attacks were not geared solely towards women but also gay and trans people. These comments, although few in the overall commentary, were a reminder of the fact that hyper-masculine notions of the Wall Street work culture, or culture of misogyny in general, are not exclusively targeted at women but also others whose gender or sexuality do not fit the central masculine ideals.

Humour was used in the commentary both to reinforce and legitimate the '*status quo*' and to make the issue of sexual harassment seem less serious. Humour was used to downplay the significance of harassment or to cope with discussing a sensitive phenomenon that is considered as something of a taboo by many in US society. Hyper-sexualizing everything and at the same time making sex a taboo likely results in 'weird' discussions, one commenter pointed out.

Overall, the offensive nature of humour and the major role sexualized banter plays in the commentary on Reddit in particular were major reasons for why the discussion became vitriolic. The discussion on #MeToo and gender equality at work is not free from gendertrolling and other aspects of misogynist online culture. These were particularly visible on the anonymous threads of Reddit where the commentary at times exemplified what Jane (2017) calls

e-bile. The nasty humour on Reddit often combined sexist and racist remarks, and seemed to carry frustrations far beyond #MeToo.

8 | DISCUSSION

In this article, we have analysed the 'Wall Street backlash' to the #MeToo movement through online commentary and elucidated how social media plays out as an arena for gender relations and inequality. Strong reactions and friction caused by #MeToo is not a unique or new phenomenon. It is well documented throughout the history of feminism that movements for gender equality spark counter-reactions (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Mendes, 2011; Mendes et al., 2019). The precautions taken to avoid being accused of sexual harassment are not unique to the #MeToo era either (Martin, 2003). However, social media seems to offer a particularly fruitful environment for a backlash. Discussion on gender equality has become increasingly polarized to the extent that Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016, p. 171) call it the new 'gender wars'. We believe that the social media movement causing commotion in the world of work is a symptom of something fundamental in contemporary society and an example of its new socio-technical assemblages (Ems, 2014).

What is new is the impact the era of 'gender wars' is igniting in the context of work as well as on various social media platforms. As the Bloomberg article and the commentary we analysed shows, the dramatic reaction towards #MeToo on Wall Street indicates that something deeply problematic about gender equality has begun to unravel. This backwards progress is alarming and needs to be studied critically. We have used CDA to grasp online commentary about the 'effects' of #MeToo. Our aim has been to understand both what is (not) said, but also how it is (not) said, and to make sense of the phenomenon itself, the social media commentary and its discourse as a particular context for gender inequality.

We have analysed threads of comments to the Bloomberg article on two social media platforms and found some overarching themes and recurring discursive practices. First, the commentary categorically boiled down to naturalizing gendered assumptions and explanations. Second, it was divided and full of polarizing, which made the discussion heated and hostile. Third, while many commenters seemed to be rather serious about the topic, humourizing was frequently resorted to. Harsh humour was used to reinforce gender stereotypes, to justify the *status quo*, and to blame women through sarcasm and irony. All these routinely happen in organizations (Plesner, 2015), and on social media humour is used to purposefully ignite fires between commenters.

We believe that these findings reveal something essential not only about Wall Street but about social media as an arena for commenting on gender inequality. #MeToo touched a painful nerve on Wall Street, and this reveals how social media movements have an ability to impact offline spaces and make visible their issues in newly intense ways. The financial services industry is forced to reconsider a work culture that has institutionalized some of the very things #MeToo is standing up against (De Goede, 2005; Fisher, 2012; Ho, 2009; McDowell, 1997; Roth, 2007). As Alvinius and Holmberg's (2019) study in the military context shows, #MeToo challenges the norms of hypermasculine cultures. It is a case in point of the ability of hashtag feminism to ignite social change (Clark-Parsons, 2019).

However, this does not explain the reaction of Wall Street that dials back progress of equality and reinforces gender differences and segregation. Some explanations are offered by misogyny and toxic anti-feminism that flourish on social media (Bartlett et al., 2014, Farrell et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; Gotell & Dutton, 2016; Jane, 2014, 2016; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Phipps et al., 2018). Hyper-masculinity and online 'manospheres' are rooted in the same gendered, hierarchical and sexualizing assumptions that Wall Street work culture routinely reproduces, actively countering #MeToo and other movements (Keller et al., 2018). Popular misogynist discourse online also tends to give birth to new, more extremist forms of masculinity in addition to shoring up the 'irl' ones (Banet-Weiser, 2018). As social media blurs the boundaries of online and offline, the reinvigorated anti-feminist sentiment on social media encourages and potentially even amplifies anti-feminist actions in real life, especially in

organizations where the culture of male-centricity and objectification of women resonates well with the powers that be (Plesner, 2015).

Most importantly, we believe that social media as a medium plays a key role in creating such an inflamed discussion today. As the discursive practices we have identified illustrate, social media commentary can become characteristically essentialist, polarized and vitriolic in tone. We believe that the lack of editorial control, lure of anonymity, culture of impetuosity, gendertrolling and popular misogyny are some potential reasons for this. These are all an outcome of a combination of technological properties, social and societal phenomena, and changing dynamics of interaction. In social media research, the inseparable links between technology and its users is often understood in terms of social media affordances. These affordances are both socio-technological and socio-material (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Social media is a medium that both intensifies social forces and discourses and changes the material arena in which they play out (Ems, 2014). The social and the technological are fundamentally intertwined.

These interconnections are so integral to social media that they make it a unique public sphere where technology plays a role in every discussion, discourse and discursive shift. The implications of this role for discussing gender equality are many. On the one hand, the commentary we analysed illustrates how technology and technological affordances shape discursive practices of social media users who discuss gender-related issues. On the other, the impact of social media technologies can be more subtle and complex, like the example of algorithms and algorithmic bias shows (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2019). Finally, the major role of technology today raises questions of power and voice: alongside algorithmic logic, users' access to and knowledge of using social media technologies can determine which discussions and discourses get promoted in the digital public sphere. For example, research on social media as a public sphere indicates that being skilled in engaging with new technologies can assist in gaining power over public discourse (Carney, 2016). In this light, the attempts of gendertrolls to drive women out of the Internet are especially alarming.

The intertwined, mutually reinforcing reactions to #MeToo on Wall Street *and* online elucidate how the social and the technological intertwine and result in new — or newly inflamed — gender wars (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). Although the 'Wall Street backlash' was pronounced due to the reasons above, other workplaces and industries may resort to similar strategies in the face of feminist movements. While social media is not solely to blame, gender and equality discourses being repeated and reshaped on its platforms warrant critical research attention that takes into account both its social and technological aspects. Social media gains ground as a global and powerful arena for public discussion, and our study shows that its commentary on gender (in)equality can be deeply problematic. Gendered ideas sit tight, and most importantly, divides are likely to become harsher. There is a tendency for extremism on social media, which needs to be taken seriously and studied further.

9 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we have aimed to contribute to research on social media as an arena for gender relations and inequality. We have focused on Wall Street reactions to #MeToo and the fiery social media commentary it sparked, elucidating how hyper-masculine work cultures and social media are interconnected in today's world. We have argued that the studied comments illustrate the unpredictable nature of both social media movements and their reception offline. The possibility of a movement such as #MeToo backfiring is a twist so new that it has received relatively little research attention. Analysing the interconnections of a hyper-masculine culture in workplaces and 'popular misogyny' and anti-feminist 'manospheres' gaining ground online offers a way forward for critical research. Social media as a new medium of which technology and technological affordances are an integral part plays a unique role in how discourses get shaped, translated and circulated across spaces. More research is needed in how this takes place in organizations that are less obviously hyper-masculine than Wall Street but deeply gendered nevertheless.

For example, future research could focus on how gendered discourses generated in online spaces are transferred to offline discussions, as well as on the reasons for their increased popularity. Our study sheds light on a particular

example but it is limited by a focus on an industry where a hyper-masculine culture is pronounced and connections to toxic anti-feminist pursuits online are visible. We hope to see future studies on gender, work and organization tackle these issues in other industry and societal contexts. Specifically, we hope to see more research that recognizes the blurring boundaries between digital and 'real-life' spheres and explores the imprints social media phenomena and discourses leave on offline realities in workplaces. The world of sports and sports organizations is an interesting example as it illustrates how complex these impacts can be: social media presentation has been found to both reinforce and challenge the persistently masculine culture and gender inequalities in sports institutions (Thorpe, Toffoletti, & Bruce, 2017). More research is also needed on gendered humour in online spaces and their connections to workplaces. We must critically scrutinize forms, uses and implications of humour in sustaining patriarchy and misogyny in organizations and in society. We also hope to see future research focus on how hyper-masculinities, whether online or 'irl', exclude not only women but also others such as gay and trans people who do not fit in work cultures that draw from them.

Finally, we suggest that critical and gender studies scholars continue to discuss the ethics of social media research. Specifically, the question of publishing original materials from public social media platforms in academic research reports warrants constructive conversation. One of the reviewers of this article challenged us on this, asking us to consult the article by Williams et al. (2017). For ethical reasons, these authors argue, researchers are advised to ask for informed consent of the users of public platforms such as Twitter — or at least anonymize the data they use. The reason is that the inclusion of comments has 'the potential to make sensitive personal information identifiable beyond the context it was intended for, and under some conditions, the publication of these data may expose users to harm' (Williams et al., 2017, p. 1150). This seems to be a reasonable assertion on a general level. Since gaining informed consent of all commenters in Twitter and Reddit was not possible in our case, we decided not to include any direct examples from the original comments in our article. However, for us this raises questions of policy and principle. Social media is gaining ground as the new public sphere, and we believe it is intrinsically important to be able to conduct research where an increasing amount of human interaction takes place — yet, the nature of social media data often makes it impossible to seek consent. Not sharing direct quotes may also prove problematic in presenting findings of analyses focused on how language is used online. The ethics of social media research is a complex question that must be discussed further, perhaps revisiting and revising debates on academic freedom.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

None declared.

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How to cite this article: Maaranen A, Tienari J. Social media and hyper-masculine work cultures. *Gender Work Organ*. 2020;27:1127–1144. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12450

The merger that never happened: Collective identity work and discursive struggle on social media

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This is an unpublished essay intended for publication as a journal article and currently under review in an academic journal. The essay is excluded from the online version of this thesis.

Work, life, and the carnival of self - politicians' identity work on social media

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Social media and bias 2.0

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Maaranen, A., den Hond, F., & Vesa, M. (2022). Social media and bias 2.0. In: M. Sandberg & J. Tienari (Eds.), Transformative Action for Sustainable Outcomes. London: Routledge., p. 93-98.

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Introduction

This chapter discusses algorithmic bias – or what we call bias 2.0 – on social media. It argues that while new technologies utilising advanced algorithms that are often referred to as artificial intelligence have inspired hopes of a world beyond bias, the reality is gloomier. On today's social media, interaction, access, and visibility are largely orchestrated by algorithms that are not free from bias but, instead, have learnt to efficiently automate it.

With the emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the 1990s, hopes were high for this new "information superhighway" to democratise societies by providing a more equal access to information, markets, and education. At the heart of this optimism was an essentially modernist development narrative. Social media was to give better access to the classical devices of progress and enlightenment, which by default would solve a multitude of human and societal problems. Some decades later, many observers are increasingly concerned that the digital revolution is turning on its head and becoming a source of problems, in addition to solving them.

On the one hand, there is techno-optimist talk of the fourth industrial revolution or the second machine age in the domain of industrial production (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). On the other hand, the web itself is construed as becoming a new iron cage of capitalist control (Zuboff, 2019). It turns out that the information superhighway of high hopes has become the domain of big tech, whose business models use social media, "Web 2.0," for the accumulation and analysis of massively big data. An increasing concern here is algorithmic bias which has implications for responsible organising in that it can reinforce inequalities in society in a newly difficult-to-track way.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003229728-17

Bias is bad as it fosters incorrect conclusions and misunderstandings about the phenomenon of interest, or about the world as it exists. Such bias may result from multiple sources such as (1) reliance on incomplete, partial, or otherwise untrustworthy information as if it were reliable data, (2) the digitalisation of information, and (3) the treatment of accidental, spurious correlations and patterns in data as meaningful. Hence, bias needs to be avoided, and if technology can help reduce or even eliminate bias, then that technology is valuable for that precise reason. A case in point is social media: when the technology was introduced, back in the 1990s, Web 2.0 sparked the idea of a globally accessible digital space where users could interact and create as well as consume content free from editorial control and other filters that mediate information provision. Social media were thus perceived as inherently participatory spaces driven by increased informality, continuous uploads, and user-generated content.

On social media, nearly everyone with access to the Internet can create, consume, and engage with content independent of their geographical location, social status, or financial situation. A notable example is the facilitation of social movement activism. Social media were thus not only expected to allow more people to participate in information exchange but also to reduce bias in information exchanges, and for these two reasons, to enhance democracy. However, this has proved to be more complicated and problematic than anticipated.

What has only recently become visible is how, and how consequentially, social media are being orchestrated by the algorithms on which they operate. Each social media platform has its own algorithms, but their common function is to determine access to and visibility of content on a given platform through collection, processing, and presentation of user data. On today's social media, interaction is orchestrated by this decision-making technology running in the background. Social media algorithms predict users' future interests through pattern matching of stored historical data on clicks, searches, likes, and other personal and biographical data, and they determine what kind of content a given user is shown and what remains hidden from their view. For example, Facebook's timeline, the results from a Google search, and the recommendations on Netflix are all carefully curated, based not just on your previously espoused preferences but also on those by numerous others.

Algorithms and curation are not without consequences. By customising users' online encounters with content and other users, social media enhance the tendency of people to be attracted to and brought together with content they are likely to enjoy and people

who are "similar" to them. This phenomenon is known as homophily (McPherson et al., 2001). Exploiting people's curiosity and their tendency to pay more attention to "spectacular" than to neutral information, algorithms have become effective in connecting similar people and trapping them in echo chambers and filter bubbles. Algorithms raise barriers to accessing in online spaces content that is outside of one's historical trajectory, to encountering people dissimilar to oneself, and to learning about views alternative to one's own. Instead of eliminating bias, we argue, a "bias 2.0" is now in place.

Manufacturing bias 2.0

How did this bias 2.0 come into being? Algorithms are fed with or collect themselves numerous data inputs from social media users and then construct user profiles; some of the attributes in user profiles (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, and political views) are inferred through a pattern matching calculus on the data of numerous users. Bias 2.0 can emerge at two moments. It may emerge, first, during the collection of historical records of user data, due to reliance on the assumption that user data elucidate something meaningful about the user, that an accurate picture can be created from likes, clicks, and other traces and trails that a user leaves when wandering around in the virtual space of social media.

Second, bias 2.0 may emerge from the processing of data in pattern matching calculus, including the "learning" about associations in massive data sets. This relies on the assumption that similarities in user data reflect similarities in users, that we can rely on the procedural rationality and calculus of which Simon (1996) speaks so highly, but which leave little or no space for other, substantive kinds of rationalities (cf. Lindebaum et al., 2020; Moser et al., 2021). Neither assumption is fault proof.

Consequently, there are numerous reports of, for example, algorithmic discrimination due to (mis)attribution of gender (Fosch-Villaronga et al., 2021). Racist algorithmic outcomes have also received increasing attention, for example, when facial recognition systems did not perform well on dark skin tones (Klare et al., 2012) or when shown faces of women and transgender people (Scheuerman et al., 2020). Arguably, pictures exhibiting men's faces were overrepresented in the training set for facial recognition.

It is thus evident that visibility and access in social media spaces is prone to many of the same inequalities that the promise of the Web 2.0 was meant to tackle. Designed with hopes of cherishing diversity and equality, social media have instead become a space of technologically

administered homophily, where social injustice, exclusion, and discrimination remain (Fosch-Villaronga et al., 2021). Algorithmic decision-making re-enacts whatever biases already existed "irl" (in real life) and occasionally even introduces new ones, for example when it acts on spurious associations.

While social media are not the only technology to use algorithmic decision-making, they are a case in point of online spaces where algorithmic bias has widespread impact. Algorithms are a novel set of non-human social actors, numerous and obscure, that work their way around the online sphere (Gruwell, 2018). Yet, who is to be held accountable for the biases they create and disseminate? They embody the biases of those who develop and use them and create new biases through their processing of user data. However, it is often impossible to know whether and how they are biased and where their biases come from. What once was human bias has become an automated bias 2.0: human bias has been translated into and reshaped by algorithms that replicate and reinforce it in the vastness of the global social media space.

This has prompted calls for increased algorithmic transparency and regulation in online spaces. However, many of these discussions tend to treat algorithmic fairness as a primarily technical issue of data processing (Wong, 2020). What these studies do not address are the deeper-rooted ethical and responsibility-related concerns related to algorithmic bias. If algorithmic processes are essentially chained moments of choice in which a variety of human and non-human actors are engaged (Rieder, 2017), who are to be held responsible for those moments: algorithms, their designers and programmers, the social media companies commercialising them, or the platform users who interact with them? And who makes the call on whether they are "fair"? How do agency, morality, and responsibility interrelate in the online space where encounters between people and technology increasingly blur? Responding to such questions requires tackling the complex notion of ethics and morality in an age where algorithmic technology has become a key element of our social – or rather, socio-technological – structure.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed how social media algorithms reinforce biases related to, for example, gender and race. Our discussion sparks concerns related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There is ample evidence on algorithmic discrimination, sexism, and racism indicating that, through what we call "bias 2.0," social media

works against achieving gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Work to mitigate or counter algorithmic bias on social media can make progress on these SDGs and reduce inequalities in online spaces.

Moreover, bias 2.0 in social media links to another goal: promoting equal education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4). In 2021, more than half of the world's population uses social media, and the number is quickly growing. Social media platforms become increasingly prominent in our daily lives, and information and knowledge are increasingly spread through social media. Their prominence makes digital media literacy a major concern. Promoting not only equal access to but also comprehension and literacy of online spaces and their socio-technological features such as algorithms is essential for reducing barriers to knowledge, learning, and societal participation and enabling lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, only by addressing bias 2.0 can social media and other online spaces fulfil the promise of democratising knowledge.

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Socio-technological encounters and new discursive dynamics in social media spaces

Social media have become tightly integrated into contemporary work and organizational lives. Accessible on mobile devices, they are used at work and outside of work, for individual and organizational purposes. Social media are online interactive platforms where content is created and shared by users and steered by technologies such as algorithms and as such, they provide socio-technological spaces for interaction where new dynamics of interaction emerge. This thesis illustrates that there are new discursive dynamics at play in these spaces, and that their use blurs the boundaries of and widens the discursive grounds for organization and work. Work and organization increasingly take place in space, time, and language traditionally considered 'extra-organizational'. This impact makes social media particularly relevant from a contemporary organization studies perspective.

The thesis consists of three empirical and one conceptual paper. Paper 1 studies commentary on Twitter and Reddit revolving around Wall Street's reactions to #MeToo and shows how it takes on new discourses and discursive practices which, in their tone and scope, effectively open up what goes on within organizations for public scrutiny on online arenas. Paper 2 studies citizens and politicians getting organized on Facebook to discuss a city merger process in Finland. In this debate, societal discourses like urbanization intertwine with citizens' identity work and lead to complex, multimodally discursive struggles over identity. Paper 3 studies how professionals in the field of politics in Finland discursively draw and make sense of the digital boundaries between their work and personal lives on Instagram where the two increasingly overlap and collide. Paper 4 presents social media algorithms and algorithmic bias as an example of the overall changing dynamics of interaction on social media.

This thesis contributes to the emerging stream in organization studies exploring the impact of social media spaces in work and organizational lives. First, it illustrates how the use of social media changes the where, how, and by whom of interaction in work and organizational contexts. Specifically, social media provide new, technologically embedded spaces where interaction is fundamentally socio-technological and as a result, new discursive dynamics emerge. Second, it provides insight into how the use of social media and these new discursive dynamics obscure the boundaries of and widen the discursive grounds for contemporary work and organizational lives. Third, it engages in the discussion on methodological development and research ethical concerns in social media research and argues for a need to catch up with the newly vast, dynamic, and open data available in online spaces.

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9 789522 324825

ISBN 978-952-232-482-5 (PRINTED)
ISBN 978-952-232-483-2 (PDF)
ISSN-L 0424-7256
ISSN 0424-7256 (PRINTED)
ISSN 2242-699X (PDF)

HANSAPRINT OY, TURENKI