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Publicness on Platforms: Tracing the Mutual Articulation of Platform Architectures and User Practices

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Literature on social media communication during major public events—protests, disasters, elections—is replete with terms to describe the publics formed on these platforms: "networked publics," "calculated publics," "affective publics," "hashtag publics," "issue publics," "ephemeral and transient publics," and "riparian publics" (Berry, 2011; boyd, 2011; Gillespie, 2014; Hestres, 2014; Rambukkana, 2015; Papacharissi, 2015; Postill, 2015). These concepts have been particularly important in highlighting the constantly *changing* character of publicness in online environments. Social media platforms connect thousands and even millions of people, but these connections can also disappear in the blink of an eye when the next wave of trending topics hits the Web. A collective "we" can suddenly emerge, but just as quickly disappear (Juris, 2012; Kavada, 2015; Papacharissi, 2015; Rambukkana, 2015). The different conceptualizations also highlight the *sociotechnical* mediation of publicness. Social media platforms not only enable public exchanges and connections, but they also steer through their technologies how these exchanges and connections take shape (Berry, 2011; boyd, 2011; Gillespie, 2014; Galis & Neumayer, 2016; Milan, 2015a; Poell & Van Dijck, 2015). And finally, recent empirical and theoretical work on publics has been important in drawing attention to the *affective* nature of platform-mediated relations of publicness. Affect, emotions, and feelings play a key role in connecting users during public events (Gerbaudo, 2016; Papacharissi, 2015).

This chapter aims to take the exploration of the constitution and continuous transformation of online publics a step further by examining and theorizing publicness as a *communicative process that follows specific trajectories*. While the different conceptualizations of online publics have been highly productive in identifying the characteristics of these publics, they also stimulate researchers to produce "snapshots" of moments of publicness rather than account for the continuous changes that characterize platform-mediated publicness. Moreover, by concentrating on the identification of particular publics, researchers tend to downplay the variation between social media platforms in how they steer public exchanges. Thus, rather than focusing on publics as the outcome of a process of communication, we try to untangle publicness as a communicative process. This process is always grounded and context-specific: the particular sociotechnical configuration, as well as the historical and political context in which publicness is articulated, shapes how it unfolds (Kavada & Poell, 2017). By shifting the analytical focus from the identification of particular publics to the exploration of processes of publicness, we hope to produce more accurate empirical descriptions of such processes, as well as gain a deeper understanding of the political (and democratic) implications of specific episodes of (contentious) publicness.

Conceiving of publicness as a process that follows a specific "trajectory," means that we need to be attentive to how relations of publicness are spatially, temporally, and materially instantiated. In this chapter, we will do so by concentrating on the role of specific social media platforms in two episodes of public contention. The first one concerns the Twitter communication in the year following the New Delhi gang rape of December 2012, which sparked mass protests. This case study builds on the analysis of a set of over 1 million tweets, as well as interviews with feminist activists and journalists (Poell & Rajagopalan, 2015).[1] The second case study focuses on the Egyptian Kullena Khaled Said (We are all Khaled Said) Facebook Page, which became a vital stage for the expression of grievances about the Mubarak regime in the months leading up to the uprising of early 2011. For this case study, we have collected all available data—14,072 posts, 6.8 million comments, and 32 million likes—exchanged through the entire lifetime of the page from June 2010 to July 2013. The analysis specifically focuses on the period from June 2010 to mid-February 2011, when the Mubarak regime fell (Poell et al., 2016; Rieder et al., 2015).[2] The two case studies should be seen as "slices" from larger trajectories of publicness, which incorporated many more actors, locations, media, issues, exchanges, and so on than can be discussed in this chapter.

By putting the interactions on two social media platforms under the microscope, we can gain a more precise sense of how platform-based relations of publicness transform over time and vary across platforms. Operationalizing this inquiry, we will, in the next section, reflect on how *platform architectures* mediate relations of publicness. What role do particular platform technologies play in the construction of publicness? Building on work in platform and software studies, we understand the formation of social relations and the instantiation of publicness through social media as the mutual articulation of technological architectures and user practices (boyd, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013; Gillespie, 2014; Langlois et al., 2009; Poell, 2014). Platform architectures consist of interfaces and algorithms that format, organize, and process the flow of user data. These architectures steer how users interact with each other, but, vice versa, users also shape the meaning and impact of platform technologies by using and interpreting them in specific ways. Networked sociality cannot be reduced to one or the other. Hence, the second section of the chapter focuses on *user practices*, examining how users have adopted particular platform affordances in the two contentious episodes. Finally, as recent scholarship has made clear, platform-mediated publicness also centrally involves the mobilization of affect and emotions. To gain insight in how *affective ties* that bind publics together are assembled and reassembled, we will analyze how users, in the course of contentious episodes, project, invoke, and experience collectivity in streams of contentious social media communication.

Platform Architectures

Social media platforms are characterized by specific "architectures of participation" that shape the relations of publicness constituted through them. Such architectures involve particular rules of engagement and communication, regulating who communicates with whom, as well as how such communication unfolds. The rules or codes that underlie social media platforms are inscribed in the terms of service and community policies that regulate interaction on these platforms (Van Dijck, 2013; Noveck, 2005). And, they are encoded in the platforms' technical design: in the interfaces between users and platforms and in the algorithms through which user activity is processed. Platform architectures are not static, but constantly evolving—they differ across platforms, depending on the goals, cultures and business models of the specific

corporations that develop and manage them. As we noted before, while these architectures do not determine social practices, they do shape how this practice unfolds.

In light of these considerations, we can observe key differences between the two platforms at the center of our case studies: Facebook Pages and Twitter. Starting with Pages, similar to broadcasting's one-to-many design, Facebook Pages provide its administrators with a public stage to distribute messages to large numbers of people. Given the architecture of Facebook Pages, admin posts are displayed on the page timeline and directly visible to users. By contrast, user comments, except for the last few, can only be accessed through further clicking. On large pages such as Kullena Khaled Said on which users post many comments in a short time, user comments are like a continuous stream or a rapidly increasing number with the admin post as the frame. The administrators, in this respect, very much set the agenda for interaction on the page. This hierarchical structure of communication corresponds with how Facebook envisions Pages, as marketing tools to "give your brand, business or cause a voice on Facebook and connect with the people who matter to you" (Facebook, 2017). Strikingly, developing key platform features, such as Pages and Groups, Facebook effectively pushes users who want to communicate with large numbers of people to Pages by setting limits on other functionalities. As Coretti and Pica (2015, p. 958) note in their analysis of the Italian Popolo Viola, the movement, around 2010, quickly ran into the 5000 user limit set on Groups. Consequently, it migrated to Pages, which did not allow for the same forms of interaction as Groups. These authors also note that the evolving architecture of Pages over time became more hierarchical, providing admins with advanced instruments to steer the interaction on their page (ibid., p. 963). In this regard, architectural changes affect how key elements of social interaction, including leadership relations, collective identities, and formations of publicness take shape.

Connecting with users in the framework of Facebook Pages also means being able to gain insight through a range metrics in how users engage with the content posted on the page. Through the freely available Facebook Insights, page owners are provided with detailed metrics concerning the number of page likes, unique users engaging with the page, and the demographics of these users, as well as when page followers are online each day of the week, and what type of post—for example, "status update," "photo," or "video"—generated the highest reach and engagement (Lee, 2013). In the Kullena Khaled Said case, it gave the admins detailed insight in the interest of users and especially their willingness to pursue particular protest activities. These insights, as will be discussed, very much guided the interaction between admins and users. The real-time and detailed metrification of user activity is an essential element of how publicness evolves on Pages.

In comparison to Pages, the dynamic of exchange on Twitter is evidently much more distributed. While hashtags are employed to organize streams of communication on particular issues, these do not provide a prefixed structure, like a Facebook page, but instead preferred hashtags frequently change and multiple hashtags are used in parallel. Furthermore, the relationship between users, like in the case of friend networks on Facebook, is in principle more horizontal than on Pages.

This also affects how metrics about user activity is made available. Although Twitter users have access to metrics regarding the engagement with their Tweets, given the networked nature of Twitter communication it does not provide the kind of overview afforded to Pages administrators. Having said this, it is, simultaneously, important to note that there are large differences between Twitter users in number of followers. Whereas most users come close to the average number of about 200 followers, there are some users that have tens of thousands or even

millions of followers. These power users are in a somewhat similar position to the admins of major Facebook pages, broadcasting their messages to large numbers of users. These observations are particularly interesting in the light of frequent claims about online publicness as revolving around participation by the crowd and around two-way communication (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Bruns, 2008; Shirky, 2008).

Given the specific affordances of the examined networked technologies, it appears particularly vital that researchers are careful when trying to generalize their observations concerning specific platforms to make claims about online publicness more generally. From this perspective, it is also noteworthy that research on online contention has heavily focused on Twitter, for which user data is more readily available than for Facebook, let alone for Snapchat, Whatsapp, and Telegram. Over the past years, a few studies have been published on activist Facebook Pages, but the arguably more important terrain of Facebook friend networks remains largely unexplored (Coretti and Pica, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2016; Hendriks et al., 2016; Poell et al., 2016; Swann & Husted, 2017). Thus the particular dynamic of specific modes of online publicness also remains largely unexplored.

Contentious User Practices

Of course, as we have argued, exploring different modes of online publicness entails analyzing not only the affordances of particular platforms, but also the contentious practices that shape the meaning and impact of specific technologies. Looking at user practices, it is first important to note that in both Egypt and India the use of social media in the years around 2011 was distinctly an urban middle-class phenomenon. In Egypt in 2011, there were about 5 million Facebook users in a population of 92 million. Many of these users were located in Cairo (Lim 2012, p. 235). In India in 2012, there were about 93 million Facebook and 33 million Twitter users in a total population of 1.3 billion (Patel, 2014). In this regard, whatever connections of publicness were established and expressed through social media in the examined episodes of contention, these only actively involved the middle-class section of the population in both countries. With this major caveat in mind, we will now focus on how contentious practices were articulated through the specific social media platforms.

In the Kullena Khaled Said case, the interaction between admins and users, as structured by page architecture, is especially interesting. The analysis of this interaction suggests that the social exchanges on the page were mostly triggered and guided by what can be labeled as "connective leadership" (Poell et al., 2016). As the page received 250,000 likes during its first three months and rapidly developed into a stage where users shared grievances about the Mubarak regime, the page provided an important framework for protest communication and mobilization (Lesch, 2011; Lim, 2012).

The page admins carefully developed this framework by explicitly cultivating the page as "participatory." The admins constantly invited user contributions, which informed further initiatives and activities developed through the page. A prime and successful example of this was a call to users to photograph themselves holding up the "Kullena Khaled Said" (We are all Khaled Said) sign, a tactic which was, a year later, replicated on a much larger scale during the Occupy protests with the "We are the 99%" slogan (Gerbaudo, 2015; Milan, 2015b). This expression of collectivity, while involving the active participation of users, was not simply a bottom-up dynamic, but one that was at least partly engineered by the admins. An observation confirmed by parallel research by Gerbaudo (2016) on the administrators of the Kullena Khaled

Said page and of the Spanish Real Democracy Now page, which played a key role in the May 2011 protest. He observes how the admins incited enthusiasm among users by posting hopeful, emotional messages.

The impression of intricate engineering of collectivity by connective leaders is further reinforced, when we consider how Ghonim and colleagues solicited user feedback and consulted page metrics to develop campaigns that resonated with the majority of page users. For one, they regularly held polls to determine what further activities the users were interested in developing through the page. And, they systematically read user comments to be able to adequately respond to feedback. It is also through such feedback that calls for street protests were formulated and circulated through the page, including the call for mass protest on January 25, 2011. Hence, a carefully curated form of contentious publicness comes into view, constructed through the interaction between specific platform technologies and activist strategies. This managed public is enabled by the hierarchical structure of Facebook Pages and accomplished through the careful marketing tactics of the page admins (Kavada, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2016; Poell et al., 2016).

Yet, although Facebook Pages afford admins extensive control over user interaction, in practice this control and the relations of publicness constructed through these tactics are highly unstable. The connective mode of leadership exercised by the admins effectively commands little, if any, loyalty from the assembled users because these leaders do not and cannot publicly identify themselves as leaders. And given the completely open character of Facebook communication, their activities can also be easily undermined by political opponents. This became very clear on the Khaled Said page when supporters of the Mubarak regime hijacked the communication on the page from the moment the mass protests started on January 25, 2011. With newly created Facebook accounts, these supporters began spreading false rumours and accusing the administrators of being foreign agents, secretly working for Israel.

While the relations on the Kullena Khaled Said page can be conceptualized as a particular type of networked or affective public, this does not help to trace in the fundamentally evolving character of relations of platform-mediated publicness. Exploring how such relations evolve, we observe moments of collectivity but also their sudden collapse. Before we turn to this discussion, we will demonstrate, by looking more in detail at the Indian case study, how other networked technologies and other user practices can produce very different sociotechnical relations.

Whereas the Kullena Khaled Said page constituted, at least initially, a framework for the construction of collectivity, the Twitter communication following the New Delhi gang rape and the mass protests revolved much more around publicity and global networks. The Facebook page was composed as a particular space for public contention, while the Twitter communication was completely open. This should not simply be seen as the consequence of different technological architectures. There are prominent instances of contentious Twitter communication in which users intensely communicate with each other through particular hashtags that establish a frame or space for the articulation of collectivity. For example, during the Tunisian uprising #sidibouzid functioned as such, as did #Egypt during the early stages of the Egyptian uprising (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Poell & Darmoni, 2012).

In our Indian case study, we observed a different dynamic. The analysis of our Twitter data shows that various hashtags were employed, but no issue-specific hashtag stood out. Instead of tagging their messages through issue-specific hashtags, such as #Damini and #Nirbhaya, users tweeting on the gang rape case chose to use general hashtags, such as #India and #Delhi. Even when we focused the analysis on the Twitter accounts of prominent women's organizations and feminist activists and bloggers, we did not find intensive use of issue-specific hashtags (Poell &

Rajagopalan, 2015) This image was also put forward by the feminist activists and journalists we interviewed, who emphasized that they especially used Twitter to network and disseminate information.

Of course, these kinds of connections can be considered as a public: one that brings together a heterogeneous set of geographically distributed actors. Yet, this was by no means a stable public, but rather one that was continuously transforming. Especially following the mass protests incited by the gang rape incident, a lot of international women's organizations and feminist activists began to make statements on Twitter about the problem of gender violence in India and in other parts of the world. Over the period of our investigation, we could observe a rapid expansion in relations of publicness mediated through Twitter, but also a rapid decrease, when the public interest in the gang rape incident receded.

Acutely aware of the ephemeral character of Twitter attention, most of our interviewees considered the platform as only the first step in developing more durable relations. In developing such relations, Twitter was particularly important in a country as vast as India, in which women's organizations and activists based in different parts of the country may otherwise not have found each other. For example, Binalakshmi Nepram, the founder of the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, stressed that 90% of her Twitter followers were located in other parts of India.[3] Moreover, as Rita Banerji, founder of the women's organization 50 Million Missing, makes clear, the platform not only allows Indian feminists to overcome geographical distances, but also allows them to address a variety of societal actor, ranging from other activists, journalists, and NGOs to academics, public servants, politicians, governments, and international organizations.[4]

As this list of actors already indicates, this is very much an elite network. Many of these actors can be understood as connective leaders. Some of the activists and journalists had large numbers of followers and were connected to prominent activist organizations and news media. Just like Ghonim and his fellow page admins, they employed networked technologies to invite, connect, steer, and stimulate activism. Yet, the type of contentious publicness they engineered was distinctly different than in the Egyptian case. Although we can identify prominent Twitter users that acted as connective leaders, the relationship with their follows was much more horizontal than in the Kullena Khaled Said case. For our Indian interviewees, publicness on Twitter took the shape of a heterogeneous set of relations, while for Ghonim the Facebook page especially functioned as a broadcasting platform to a mass of users. As such the page constituted a framework for engineering collectivity, whereas the Indian Twitter communication produced a more open-ended network.

So far, this exploration provides two key insights for the study of platform-mediated publicness. First, while the sociotechnical relations observed on Twitter and Facebook can be understood as networked publics, these are fundamentally unstable publics, which are constantly evolving. This dynamic should not be seen simply as the consequence of changing user practices, but also as driven by the techno-commercial strategies of platforms. To sustain a high level of online engagement, social media platforms are geared toward identifying and promoting trending topics rather than generating sustained interest in contentious issues that hold publics together (Barassi, 2015; Poell & Van Dijck, 2015). Second, beyond such general observations, the investigation demonstrates that publicness takes shape differently on each platform. These differences result from the interaction between particular platform architectures and specific user practices.[5]

Evolving Affective Relations

It is through the interaction between platform technologies and user practices that *imagined collectives* emerge. These collectives need to be consider as "imagined" for the same reason as Benedict Anderson (1983) considered nations as imagined communities: most users in mass processes of contentious social media communication will never know or meet each other. Nevertheless, collectivity is constantly projected on these processes. Participants may develop affiliative ties, an abstract sense of "we" deriving from their shared affiliation to the same cause (Bimber et al., 2012). However, they may also create interpersonal bonds of solidarity if they engage in direct interpersonal communication with each other (ibid.). While in both case studies we observed such instances of collectivity, there are distinct differences in how collectivity was articulated and how it evolved.

The clearest expression of a collective "We" could be observed on the Kullena Khaled Said Facebook page. This was triggered by streams of emotional user messages, as well as by the architecture of Facebook Pages. Given how Pages directs user attention toward the admin posts, it constitutes an ideal space for the articulation of collectivity by the admins. Strikingly, user metrics played a vital role in this process. These metrics have a strong affective quality, they incite administrators and users to develop further activity and they confirm that many users are involved (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013; Kavada, 2012). The admins of the Kullena Khaled Said page constantly cited rapidly growing user numbers to mobilize and to unity. In one of the first posts, on June 10, 2010, they maintained "we've reached 300 people in two minutes, we wanna reach a hundred thousand … we have to unite so as to make a firm stand against those who lord it over us." And, six months later, when the call for protests on January 25, 2011 circulated on the page, the admins wrote "The Jan25 invitation reached 500,000 Facebook users … 27,000 have RSVPed … […] Let's do this, Egyptians."

Using metrics as validation, the admins rhetorically constructed the page as the stage for unity against oppression. This was a constantly evolving process. Initially, in the summer of 2010, the admins and users connected with each other over their shared horror and anger over the murder of Khaled Said. They organized so-called silent stands in Alexandria and changed their profile picture to the image of Said, giving substance to their collective identity "We are all Khaled Said" (Ghonim, 2012). Over the following months, as more users joined the page and expressed their grievances, the scope of oppositional publicness expanded to develop into a national collective: the united Egyptian people against corruption, torture, terrorism, nepotism, and radicalism. This vision was especially clearly pronounced in early January 2011, when the bombing of a Coptic church in Alexandria threatened to divide the page users. The admins posted, "We have to meet despite our differences … despite misunderstands and blurred visions that sometimes come to our minds … We have to stand next to each other … and say we are Egyptians … We are one." Many page users met this call with enthusiasm. As one user argued, "if they want the Copts, we in Egypt are all Copts, and if they want the Muslims, we in Egypt are all Muslims."

Yet, when the mass protests against the Mubarak regime started on January 25, 2011, this sense of national unity immediately fell apart. The admins and users disagreed whether and how to revolt against the regime. Part of the users strongly supported the call for an uprising, providing strategic advice on how to limit the chances of being arrested, disable armored vehicles, and draw international media attention. Others feared the response of the security forces, arguing that protests would lead to a blood bath. And when the protests turned into a

genuine uprising at the beginning of February, the page users began to disagree on whether or not the Mubarak regime would have to resign.

The page, however, especially lost its role as a key platform for staging a united public front because regime supporters began to subvert the exchanges on the page. After the protests had started, it was clear from the analysis of the most engaged-with comments that the regime indeed systematically targeted the page. These counterpropaganda efforts were part of a larger campaign to immobilize online opposition. From January 27 to February 2, the regime famously shut down the Internet in the entire country. While this measure proved to be ineffective in stopping the protests, it did bring the activity on the page to an almost complete halt. Consequently, the focal point of oppositional publicness shifted from Kullena Khaled Said and the Internet more generally to the streets, especially to the occupied Tahrir Square. The role of the page changed from staging public opposition and collectivity to publicizing images and reports of on-the-ground protests.

Strikingly, the analysis of the communication on other social media platforms during the mass protests does show strong expressions of collectivity. In their study on the Twitter exchanges through the #egypt hashtag in the period from January 25 to February 25, 2011, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012, p. 275) found that the "Tweets documenting events and expressing opinion reflected overwhelming expressions of solidarity." The authors observed constant calls to "fellow brothers and sisters" to join the cause and to "unite" against the Mubarak regime (ibid.). These observations reveal the complexity and variation of platform-mediated publicness. Thus, examining online expressions of collectivity, it is vital to be aware that these can substantially vary across platforms and even across hashtags.

We can observe how platform-mediated publicness evolves along particular trajectories. At any point along the trajectory followed by Kullena Khaled Said, we can label the connections and exchanges on the page as a networked public. The real challenge is to trace the *changes* in the form and dynamic of these connections and exchanges. As a result of these changes, the role of the Facebook page in Egyptian public discourse and politics substantially transformed over time. To understand what publicness entails in a social media stream, we need to account for these changes and transformations.

Turning from Egypt to India, from Facebook to Twitter, and from protests against an authoritarian regime to protest against gender violence, we encounter a trajectory of platform-mediated publicness that started with mass protests and strong online expressions of collectivity. Our analysis focuses on the year that followed these protests. In this year, feminist activists and women's organizations tried to build on the momentum of the protests to develop sustainable networks and communities to combat systemic gender violence and patriarchy.

Before we turn to these efforts, it is important to briefly discuss the powerful moment of collectivity that took shape during the mass protests immediately following the gang rape incident. As various studies have documented, the mass protests were driven by collective frustration with the justice system and the police to hold rapists culpable and to provide basic security and protection. In this turbulent period, the communication on Twitter and other social media platforms was characterized by pervasive social outrage (Ahmed et al., 2017; Belair-Gagnon et al., 2014; Chaudhuri & Fitzgerald, 2015). The online communication was vital in translating individual anger into collective action. As Ahmed and colleagues (2017, p. 460) maintain "the online Nirbhaya movement was able to channel individual expressions of anger into collective action as an offline protest." This process was guided by activists who formulated a common cause for the protests: "Justice for Women" (ibid.).

In the year following the protests, such a collective identity was no longer as clearly present. Rather than revolving around the articulation of collectivity, the Twitter communication was predominantly focused on generating public attention for new cases of gender violence and to mobilize support for the persecution of perpetrators. Particularly striking was also that many of the emotionally charged exchanges on Twitter were very much tied to the mass media, with Indian and international celebrities figuring prominently. Many of the interviewed feminist activists and journalists experienced this close connection with the mass media as rather problematic. Journalist Anindita Sengupta emphasized that most Twitter users appeared primarily interested in the "crime of the day" and questions of suitable punishment and retribution.[6] Like in many mass media, there was relatively little attention in the most retweeted messages for the larger enduring problem of systemic gender violence and patriarchy.

Reflecting the mass-media-driven dynamic, the Twitter communication was only occasionally organized through issue-specific hashtags, such as Suryanelli and Tejpal, which referred to other rape cases that were in the news. Following the mainstream news cycle, these hashtags trended for a short period to subsequently disappear again. Crucially, our interviewees did not see themselves as part of a particular public on Twitter either, but rather as individual members of (global) interpersonal networks, who briefly connect through particular hashtags. As individuals they were primarily positioned in following and follower networks, allowing them to promote their cause. On Twitter, they focused on growing these networks, targeting influential actors within them, and promoting strategically important information.

Community-building efforts primarily took place beyond Twitter. The interviews indicate that a great investment was made to build ties beyond the "moment." The interviewees realized the need to channel the publicity, public anger, and protest triggered by the gang rape incident into a larger societal movement against all kinds of everyday forms of gender violence and patriarchy. Twitter was frequently the starting point to pursue this aim, but not the end point. A prominent example, in this regard is "Justice for Women," which started as a Twitter hashtag. Its founder, Sakshi Kumar, began to use the hashtag #justiceforwomen in the summer of 2012 after a young woman from north-east India was assaulted by a group of twenty to twenty-five men. The hashtag was meant to raise awareness and to function as an open call to ask people what could be done against gender violence. As the assault case triggered a lot of media attention and public anger, the hashtag quickly began to trend in India and, subsequently, worldwide. And in December 2012, "Justice for Women" became the central slogan of the mass protests.

Encouraged by all the publicity, Kumar developed the idea to set up a network to organize self-defense workshops for women in cities across India. This was an effort that quite quickly extended beyond Twitter and other social media. Kumar emphasizes that while social media were employed to publicize the workshops and to find volunteer martial artists, hardly anyone showed up through Twitter. People were primarily mobilized through other means, banners, word of mouth, and networks of friends. It was ultimately through these on-the-ground connections and the workshops themselves that a more sustainable community and sense of collectivity grew.[7] The need to look beyond social media platforms to build more enduring collectives was expressed by many of our interviewees. This involved on-the-ground activities, but also other types of mediated exchanges. For example, Natasha Badhwar, columnist and filmmaker who co-curates Genderlog, a crowd-sourced group website on gender violence in India, emphasized the importance of writing long-form reflexive pieces in print media or on blogs rather than immediately responding on Twitter. It is through such "slow" forms of civic journalism that attention can be generated for more fundamental problems.[8] In other words, to

gain insight in the dynamic of episodes of public contention, it is crucial to also trace how relations of publicness take shape beyond social media platforms.

Conclusion

Exploring our two case studies, we have come to a few crucial insights that can help future research. Given the highly dynamic, constantly evolving character of platform-mediated publicness, we suggest *shifting the analytical focus from the identification of publics to tracing processes of publicness*. Doing so, we can observe how through the interaction between user practices and platform technologies, relations of publicness substantially change shape over time. Moreover, as technologies, users practices, and the composition of user populations substantially differ from platform to platform, publicness also takes shape differently on each platform. Since this is by no means a uniform process, tracing larger trajectories of publicness can be particularly challenging. It entails analysing how particular platforms and specific pages or hashtags become vehicles of public expression and connection. Subsequently, we need to examine how such specific sites of publicness become tied to other spaces, both online and offline, and how in the process new actors become involved and new issues are raised (Kavada & Poell, 2017).

As we have observed, platform-mediated publicness has an important affective dimension: notions of collectivity are continuously projected on streams of social media communication. Yet, even though such imagined collectives are vital for bringing people together and setting off collective action, they are never self-evident or stable. In fact, our analysis suggests that collectivity tends to disappear as quickly from social media platforms as it appears. The relations between platform-mediated and offline processes of publicness are especially interesting in this regard. Sometimes platform-based moments of collectivity are translated to offline collective action and vice versa. This is, however, never guaranteed. It is especially difficult to translate fleeting online expressions of collectivity to more sustainable communities. Our Indian case study showed the hard work that goes into building enduring connections. Whatever the examined episode of public contention, the analytic challenge is to untangle such translations, tracing how connections and expressions of publicness take shape across particular technologies and locations.

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[1] After the New Delhi gang rape incident of December 2012 and the large protests that followed, a dataset was collected of approximately 15 million tweets containing the words "rape" or "gangrape," sent by more than 5 million unique users over the period of a year, from 16 January 2013 until 16 January 2014. These tweets have been scraped and analyzed with the Twitter Capture and Analysis Toolset of the Digital Methods Initiative (Borra and Rieder, 2014). Subsequently, from this dataset, the ten keywords most frequently included in tweets pertaining to the Delhi gang rape case have been selected: "India," "Delhi," "Nirbhaya," "Damini," "Delhigangrape." "Delhirape," "MumbaiGangRape," "Asaram," "Suryanelli," and "Tejpal." Querying the full dataset on the basis of the ten keywords generated a subset of 1,008,460 tweets, specifically focused on the Delhi gang rape case and related issues. These tweets were sent by 311,611 unique users. To contextualize the analysis of the Twitter data and to gain further insight in the social relations constructed in relation to the Twitter communication, we conducted, between February and April 2014, fifteen semi-structured interviews via Skype with eight Indian feminist activists and seven journalists and bloggers involved in the Twitter communication on the Delhi gang rape.

[2] All available data exchanged through the entire lifetime of the Kullena Khaled Said page, from June 2010 to July 2013, was extracted via a customized version of the Netvizz application (Rieder, 2013). Given that the most intense communication on the page took place between January 1 and February 15, 2011, three days after Mubarak stepped down, we have focused the analysis on this period. In these one and a half months, 1629 admin posts and 1,465,696 user comments were made on the page. Examining this material, we have translated and analyzed the most engaged with messages: the posts that received most comments and likes, and the comments that received most likes. Furthermore, to gain insight in the larger political, sociocultural configuration in which this communication took place, we have consulted the many studies on social media and the Egyptian uprising.

[3] Binalakshmi Nepram, Skype interview by Sudha Rajagopalan, April 2, 2014.

[4] Rita Banerji, Skype interview by Sudha Rajagopalan, March 13, 2014.

[5] These observations do come with an asterisk. Exploring the Facebook page, we could only examine the interaction on the page itself. We could not observe what happened in user news feeds. Hence, we know little about the interactions between individual users triggered by Kullena Khaled Said posts and comments. In the case of Twitter, we did get insight into individual interactions around particular issues. This affects how we understand the nature of the relations between users. Of course, this is, to an important extent, also true for the Facebook and Twitter users themselves. Platform architectures shape how users perceive and imagine their relationship to a larger collective.

[6] Anindita Sengupta, Skype interview by Sudha Rajagopalan, April 4, 2014.

[7] Sakshi Kumar, Skype interview by Sudha Rajagopalan, March 11, 2014.

[8] Natasha Badhwar, Skype interview by Sudha Rajagopalan, March 21, 2014.