

Social media battle beyond viral feminism: the cognitive and affective attitude divide toward #MeToo in tourism workplaces

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Abstract

Purpose – This study proposes a conceptual framework that conceptualizes attitudes toward the #MeToo movement as comprising both cognitive and affective dimensions. Furthermore, it investigates how these attitudes, shaped by social media use, influence individuals' perceptions of the perceived benefits and potential costs associated with the movement within tourism and hospitality workplaces.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing a quantitative research design and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), data were collected via an anonymous online questionnaire completed by employees in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Findings – Findings reveal that social media use significantly enhances cognitive attitudes, fostering comprehension, awareness, and acceptance of the movement's aims, while it negatively impacts affective attitudes, often leading to emotional exhaustion and caution. Furthermore, cognitive attitudes emerge as significant predictors of perceived benefits, including empowerment, heightened awareness, and organizational reform, whereas affective attitudes are associated with perceived costs, such as fear, discomfort, and social polarization.

Practical implications – Tourism and hospitality organizations should acknowledge that exposure to #MeToo-related content on social media has the potential to shape both cognitive and affective attitudes within the workplace. The findings suggest that organizations should enhance employees' cognitive awareness through targeted training initiatives, clearly defined reporting procedures, and a visible commitment from human resource management. Simultaneously, attention should be given to employees' affective responses by promoting supportive leadership practices, establishing safe and open communication channels, and implementing structured protection mechanisms to ensure a secure and inclusive work environment.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the existing literature by differentiating between cognitive and affective attitudes toward the #MeToo movement and by examining their distinct influences on perceptions of the movement's benefits and costs within tourism and hospitality workplaces.

Keywords MeToo, Cognitive attitude, Affective attitude, Tourism workplace, Social media, Perceived benefits and costs

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Social media has reshaped how social movements gain momentum, giving new visibility to issues of inequality and injustice. The #MeToo movement exemplifies this shift by exposing experiences of sexual harassment and violence, thereby revealing underlying cultural biases (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Gordon, 2023). As one of the most influential cases of online activism, #MeToo has elevated global awareness of sexual harassment, gender inequity, and abuses of power in both professional



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and public settings (Prothero and Tadajewski, 2021; Saguy and Rees, 2021). Digital platforms have demonstrated their capacity to reshape social narratives and foster collective action (Zou and Qiu, 2020). Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram have increased the movement's visibility and have served as spaces for empowerment and support. Nevertheless, #MeToo has generated mixed reactions, prompting debate about its effectiveness and broader societal impact (Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Zarkov and Davis, 2018).

The #MeToo campaign empowers victims and challenges established gender norms, eliciting a wide range of emotional responses. Perceptions of the movement differ significantly by gender, beliefs, and personal experiences (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019). In some contexts, #MeToo is viewed as a catalyst for institutional reform and for advancing of women's empowerment (Alaggia and Wang, 2020). In contrast, it has also been criticized for overgeneralization and for contributing to social polarization (Wright, 2018).

Social media functions as more than a medium for content dissemination; it also actively shapes users' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations of social issues. It has played a pivotal role in altering societal attitudes toward both the costs and benefits associated with publicizing gender-based violence. Cognitive processes involve processing information and evaluating the impacts of social movements, while, as Osnat *et al.* (2019) assert, emotional attitudes encompass vulnerability and disapproval, thereby generating social tension. In professional contexts, a more nuanced understanding of these factors is required. Previous research indicates that attitudes toward the #MeToo movement are shaped by patterns of social media use, modes of engagement, and underlying ideological beliefs (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019).

This issue is particularly pronounced in the tourism industry, where a predominantly young female workforce and persistent power imbalances create conditions ripe for harassment (Ram, 2021). Reports of sexual harassment are often downplayed (ActionAid, 2020; Poulston, 2008), and women, despite being the majority, frequently lack access to secure or leadership roles (Poulaki *et al.*, 2023). Patriarchal norms and persistent stereotypes further perpetuate workplace inequality. Despite the global visibility of #MeToo, little is known about how social media exposure shapes attitudes toward the movement in tourism workplaces, or how these attitudes inform perceptions of risk and benefit.

Investigating the interplay between attitudes toward #MeToo and social media use represents a critical but insufficiently explored domain of research. This study addresses how diverse reactions to social media campaigns inform perceptions of their effectiveness and risks, with a particular emphasis on employees in tourism and related sectors. By clarifying these underlying mechanisms, the research aims to enrich both theoretical frameworks and practical strategies for empowering workplaces where sexual harassment often remains inadequately addressed. Highlighting the distinct roles of cognitive and emotional attitude components, the study underscores the necessity of nuanced understanding of social media's influence on public acceptance. Such insights are especially vital for high-risk sectors like tourism, where they can inform the design of targeted awareness, training, and anti-harassment interventions.

Although research on #MeToo, social media activism, and digital feminist activism is expanding, most studies have assessed attitudes toward the movement as either broadly favorable or unfavorable, often using unidimensional or valence-based measures (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019). Limited attention has been given to the internal structure of these attitudes, particularly the distinction between cognitive evaluations (such as awareness, perceived legitimacy, and acceptance of the movement's aims) and affective responses, including discomfort, fear, emotional fatigue, or unease. Evidence is especially scarce within tourism and hospitality workplaces, where gendered power relations and frequent customer interactions heighten the risk of harassment. Furthermore, empirical research explicitly examining how these distinct attitudinal dimensions influence perceptions of the benefits and costs of #MeToo remains limited, particularly in occupational contexts marked by gendered power asymmetries and high interpersonal interaction. To address this gap, the present study focuses on tourism and hospitality workplaces, empirically distinguishing between cognitive and affective attitudes toward the #MeToo campaign and examining their distinct roles in shaping perceptions of the movement's benefits and costs.

2. Literature review

2.1 #MeToo campaign

The #MeToo movement stands as one of the most transformative and globally recognized examples of digital feminist activism. Initially founded by Tarana Burke in 2006, #MeToo gained international momentum in 2017 when Alyssa Milano's viral hashtag on Twitter encouraged survivors of sexual harassment and abuse to publicly share their experiences. Within hours, millions responded, rapidly elevating #MeToo into a worldwide symbol of resistance to gender-based violence and a catalyst for collective disclosure (Alaggia and Wang, 2020). More than a fleeting social media trend, #MeToo represents a digitally mediated social movement that fundamentally challenges entrenched power structures and redefines public discourse. Its core mission is to condemn sexual harassment and spotlight systemic gender inequalities, amplifying the voices of those previously marginalized (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019). While #MeToo's influence is global, its impact varies by context: in countries with robust debates on women's rights, such as the United States and Sweden, the movement has spurred legislative and labor reforms; in more conservative societies with restricted free speech, it has encountered resistance, skepticism, or even backlash towards victims (Zou and Qiu, 2020).

#MeToo's significance is particularly pronounced in workplace contexts, where power imbalances, economic dependence, and a lack of protective mechanisms often render reporting abuse exceedingly challenging (Clair *et al.*, 2019; Saguy and Rees, 2021). The tourism and hospitality sector, in particular, is marked by high rates of harassment, with sexual violence frequently underestimated or concealed (ActionAid, 2020; Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022). Despite the movement's substantial presence on social media, questions remain about its tangible impact on citizens' and workers' attitudes, especially in professions characterized by gendered hierarchies. This is especially true within tourism, where women are routinely evaluated against gendered behavioral expectations and customer service roles, making them more vulnerable and less protected (Poulaki *et al.*, 2023; Ram, 2021). Such cultural norms not only perpetuate harassment but also normalize discriminatory attitudes. Understanding how social media exposure to #MeToo shapes attitudes toward harassment, both cognitively (rationally) and affectively (emotionally), is critical in environments where moral condemnation often coexists with fatigue, indifference, or resentment. #MeToo, therefore, is not merely a social phenomenon but a focal point for examining public attitudes, social change, and the mediating role of digital media. Exploring how #MeToo shapes or is constrained by public attitudes provides valuable insight into the acceptance, rejection, or distortion of social movements across diverse social and professional environments.

2.2 Social support theory

Social Support Theory, originally developed in the field of mental health studies (House *et al.*, 1988), is a conceptual framework that adequately explains the process of disclosure in relation to online sexual harassment. According to House's (1981) theory, social support is classified into four types: emotional, informational, evaluative, and instrumental support. Emotional support includes displays of care, understanding, and sympathy. Informational support involves providing advice and knowledge to help people cope with a situation. Evaluative support assists individuals in self-assessment or reflection on their experiences through social comparison. Instrumental support involves practical aid or resources. While much research has focused on the effects of disclosure in face-to-face interactions (Ullman and Peter-Hagene, 2014; Moors and Webber, 2012), less attention has been given to disclosure in digital contexts, particularly on platforms like X (formerly Twitter). Nevertheless, the #MeToo movement provides a framework for widespread support, enabling survivors of sexual violence to give and receive aid globally, often with a speed and emotional intensity that surpasses in-person interactions.

Communicative media campaigns, whether digital or traditional, play a critical role in shaping social behaviors and attitudes through both cognitive and affective pathways (Wakefield *et al.*, 2010; Hornik and Yanovitzky, 2003; Arsenis *et al.*, 2020). These campaigns are designed to enhance awareness, lower barriers, and foster positive social norms, thereby increasing individuals' willingness to adopt new attitudes. In recent years, most social campaigns have migrated to social networks, which function as the primary medium for direct, participatory, and decentralized communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Lev-On, 2018). Audiences are no longer passive recipients; instead, they actively co-create content, amplifying campaign impact through identification, interaction, and sharing (Fernando *et al.*, 2014). The #MeToo movement exemplifies how digital communication technologies can empower marginalized or excluded groups, especially where traditional mass media falls short.

2.3 #MeToo campaign and attitudes

Social media has revolutionized the way social actors communicate, mobilize, and push for transformation. It has significantly altered communication processes, public interactions, and cultural discourses on social justice, gender equality, and activism (Khoja-Moolji, 2015). These networks facilitate public feedback and engagement and have significantly influenced people's attitudes and perceptions of societal matters (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Lev-On, 2018). Unlike consumers, social media consumers are active content producers and sharers, engaging through likes, shares, comments, and the expression of personal or public opinions (Zou and Qiu, 2020). Given that they are highly interactive digital media, social media are both information and socialization tools, and they are also the sites of the perpetual reinterpretation of meaning (Zhang and Vos, 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Lev-On, 2018). Social media can significantly impact people's attitudes towards presented content through cognitive processes (e.g. critical information processing) and emotional reactions (e.g. empathy, anger, or frustration) (Zhang and Vos, 2014). It is crucial to distinguish these two aspects when analyzing social media effects. According to Roth-Cohen *et al.* (2019), social media favors cognitive processing much more frequently with documented, statistical, or informative content. However, emotionally intense, experiential, or discursive content elicits stronger emotional reactions, leading to spontaneous or intense responses (Wright, 2016; Sills *et al.*, 2016).

In line with established attitude theory, attitudes are commonly conceptualized as consisting of distinct yet related components (Breckler, 1984; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Gill *et al.*, 2024). In this study, the focus is on the cognitive and affective (emotional) dimensions of attitudes toward the #MeToo movement. The cognitive component refers to individuals' beliefs, evaluations, and judgments regarding the movement and its workplace implications, for example, what people *think* about #MeToo, such as whether it is useful, fair, or effective in improving workplace conditions (Breckler, 1984; Gill *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, the affective component reflects emotional reactions and feelings toward the movement (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Chatzopoulou and Tsogas, 2017), such as what people *feel* about #MeToo, such as discomfort, concern, anxiety, or tension about its consequences. Although these two dimensions may be associated with an overall favorable or unfavorable stance, they represent conceptually distinct psychological processes and may therefore have different effects on perceived workplace benefits and perceived workplace costs.

#MeToo movement, an influential case of hashtag activism, has generated global echo and social anxieties. Initially well received by the public between 2017 and 2019, studies found significant attitudinal splits by gender, harassment status, and cultural approaches (Brüggen, 2021; Kunst *et al.*, 2018). Women are more likely to be strong identifiers of feminism, to positively view #MeToo, both cognitively and emotionally, and to consider using it as an advocacy, prevention, and empowerment tool. Males, by contrast, are likely to be skeptical of the movement's legitimacy, feel personally attacked, and have negative

affective responses toward it (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Osnat *et al.*, 2019). Exposure to social awareness campaigns on social media, such as #MeToo, is associated with more favorable attitudes, particularly among those highly confident in the media, according to Roth-Cohen *et al.* (2019). Likewise, Kunst *et al.* (2018) observed that favorable attitudes toward #MeToo content were associated with higher feminist identity and weaker acceptance of Rape Stereos.

Nevertheless, the association isn't always definitive. Pearlman and Bordelon's (2022) study in the tourism industry found that excessive exposure to content related to the movement may have detrimental effects, such as activism fatigue, doubt about the movement's intentions, and even distrust toward the movement. Thus, social media serves as both a social influence and a double-edged sword of promotion and deterrence, dependent upon the cognitive and affective constitution of the user. Brüggén's (2021) survey demonstrated that those who are active and regular on feminist issues on social media are likely to have more negative perspectives on sexual harassment and more favorable perspectives on the movement. However, male respondents carrying intense sexist attitudes or believing present "rape myths" are likely to be apprehensive or dismissive of the movement (Kunst *et al.*, 2018). Research in tourism also shows that deep-rooted gender stereotypes and mistrust toward women's professional capacities persist in the sector, shaping attitudes and reinforcing unequal power relations (Poulaki *et al.*, 2023). Women are frequently considered less suitable for leadership due to family roles or maternity perceptions, limiting opportunities and creating environments where harassment is more easily silenced.

Tourism and hospitality are industries where sexual harassment risks are very high, and they are even higher for women and seasonal staff (Poulston, 2008; ActionAid, 2020). Disparities in power between customers and staff, job insecurity, and the culture of "the customer is always right" create an atmosphere of unease and silence. Most states, including Greece, lack specific anti-harassment policies for this sector, underscoring the importance of understanding how attitudes shape perceptions of #MeToo and the possibilities for institutional reform. If employers and customers are negative or unconcerned about the movement, staff are less likely to benefit from it, which in turn inhibits their motivation to adopt prevention strategies.

In this case, awareness of the advantages of #MeToo largely aligns with the attitudes of employees, employers, and the public. When the employees have the right cognitive attitudes, viewing MeToo as a useful tool towards empowerment and education, they are well-positioned to actively participate in initiatives related to the workplace. If negative emotional attitudes, including fear of retaliation or a sense of guilt, dominate, the readiness to participate or even accept the need for transformation declines significantly (Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022). An individual's attitude towards a social phenomenon, such as the #MeToo movement, significantly determines how they regard its advantages and benefits. Attitudes shape the cognitive and affective bases upon which social acceptance, the level of support towards the public, and the readiness to participate in any movement of this nature are built (Ajzen, 1991; Eagly and Chaiken, 1993).

Although several studies document predominantly positive evaluations of the #MeToo movement, particularly among women and individuals with strong feminist identification (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019), other research highlights ambivalence, emotional exhaustion, and resistance emerging from prolonged exposure to emotionally charged content and polarized online discourse (Wright, 2016; Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022). These mixed findings suggest that public attitudes toward #MeToo cannot be adequately captured by a simple positive-negative dichotomy; instead, they reflect qualitatively different evaluative processes that combine rational assessment and emotional experience. This observation reinforces the need to examine attitudes as multidimensional constructs, especially in professional contexts where both awareness and emotional safety are critical.

2.4 Attitudes and benefits

In the case of the #MeToo movement, cognitive attitudes align with beliefs about social progress, institutional transformation, women's empowerment, and workplace openness. However, affective attitudes are revealed through the sentiment of fear, anger, sympathy, shame, or unease (Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Osnat *et al.*, 2019). Both components have major effects on the perception of the person on the #MeToo movement as a forum offering societal and personal benefits.

Perceived benefit of exposure to or engagement with social campaigns has been a major concern in social support and the theory of behavior modification (House *et al.*, 1988; Wakefield *et al.*, 2010). Individuals active on social media and with favorable cognitive beliefs about #MeToo are most likely to experience benefits such as increased awareness of gender violence, reinforcement of institutions' structural prevention mechanisms, and the empowerment of victims of harassment (Zou and Qiu, 2020).

Attitudes shaped by empathy, identification, or collective responsibility reinforce the perception that the movement benefits public discourse and social culture (Alaggia and Wang, 2020; Wright, 2016). Those holding negative or doubting emotions, on the other hand, underestimate or doubt the movement's worth even though they recognize some personal improvements. Kunst *et al.* (2018) revealed that the support for #MeToo gets formed by public attitudes, particularly in the region of feminist identification, sexist ideology, and tolerance of "rape myths." Cognitive attitudes predominate whenever the user regards #MeToo as a social change instrument. Roth-Cohen *et al.* (2019) found that those holding strong cognitive attitudes toward the plus side are more likely to view the campaign as less effective, while those holding affective attitudes are less consistent in evaluating the advantages. Additionally, Osnat *et al.* (2019) developed an extensive model of attitudes towards #MeToo, revealing that perceived personal advantages (such as empowerment and safety) are positively correlated with both cognitive and affective attitudes, though with distinct influences. Those cognitive attitudes are better at predicting social acceptance, while the affective attitudes are better at explaining the intention of support and the personal engagement.

2.5 Attitude and costs

Perceptions of the #MeToo movement often encompass both its perceived benefits and associated costs, a duality recognized across personal and professional domains. These costs may manifest socially (e.g. reinforcing gender divisions), morally (e.g. presumption of guilt before innocence is established), emotionally (e.g. fear of exposure or retaliation), or professionally (e.g. reputational risks for organizations). Importantly, the evaluation of these costs is not objective; it is fundamentally shaped by individuals' cognitive and affective attitudes toward the movement. Social psychological theory conceptualizes attitudes as predispositions shaped by beliefs and emotional tendencies toward social phenomena (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). In the context of #MeToo, negative cognitive attitudes may derive from beliefs that the movement is punitive, overreaching, or fosters collective guilt, leading some to perceive #MeToo as a threat to justice and workplace cohesion rather than as a driver of social progress (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019). The affective dimension may amplify these perceptions, particularly when accompanied by feelings of insecurity, shame, or alienation. Thus, judgments regarding the harms of #MeToo are inherently subjective, reflecting pre-existing attitudes. Emotional exhaustion from prolonged exposure to harassment-related content can result in "anti-reporting reactions," wherein individuals view the movement as having surpassed its social utility (Wright, 2016; Zou and Qiu, 2020). Similarly, fear of unjust targeting, based on gender or professional status, can foster negative perceptions of #MeToo even in the absence of direct adverse experiences. Notably, such harm judgments frequently coincide with the dismissal of the movement's benefits; individuals with strongly negative cognitive or affective attitudes are likely to discount its social or institutional

value, thereby magnifying perceived negative impacts (Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Gordon, 2023). This dynamic is particularly salient in tourism and hospitality, sectors marked by transient relationships, high customer exposure, and inadequate institutional protections against harassment (ActionAid, 2020; Poulston, 2008). Tourism managers, concerned about reputational damage or customer attrition, may view social movements like #MeToo as threats rather than opportunities for positive organizational change (Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022). Concurrently, employees, who harbor affective reservations about #MeToo may be less inclined to participate in prevention training or support anti-harassment policies. In contexts where negative cognitive beliefs prevail, such as perceptions of exaggerated or malicious complaints, prevention policies are often seen as superficial or unwarranted (Brüggen, 2021; Osnat *et al.*, 2019). Recognizing the central role of attitudes in shaping perceptions of #MeToo's benefits and drawbacks is thus crucial for effective intervention in tourism workplaces. Promoting favorable cognitive attitudes through targeted information, education, and dialogue can reduce resistance and encourage hope for organizational transformation. In sectors long characterized by silence, reshaping these attitudes is a foundational step toward advancing workplace safety and equity.

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design to systematically investigate employees' cognitive and affective attitudes toward the #MeToo movement in the tourism and hospitality sector, as well as their perceptions of the movement's benefits and costs. Descriptive quantitative research is suited to identifying population characteristics and examining the relationships among key variables, such as attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, using standardized procedures (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The research design was strategically developed to ensure the collection of data from a sufficiently large and representative participant pool, thereby facilitating the identification of meaningful patterns and associations within the target population (Bryman, 2016). The quantitative approach was chosen for its ability to generate statistically robust and generalizable results through standardized measurement and replicable procedures (Muijs, 2011). By applying rigorous quantitative methods, this study effectively transforms subjective attitudes into measurable constructs, ensuring the production of reliable and valid findings that advance both academic knowledge and practical application in the tourism and hospitality sector (Neuman, 2014).

3.1 Measurement

An online, structured questionnaire was used as the data-gathering instrument, serving as the primary tool for descriptive and quantitative research. It allows simultaneous data collection from hundreds of respondents (Dillman *et al.*, 2014). The Google Forms platform was used to gather responses, ensuring respondents' anonymity, the safety of personal data, and ease of distribution via digital means, thereby ensuring the ethical tenets of research were observed (Babbie, 2020). Through an online questionnaire, a diverse sample was recruited from across different geographic and professional locations within the tourism and hospitality industry.

The questionnaire was developed to some extent by adopting accredited attitude scales used in studies on social movements and hashtag campaigns. Questionnaire comprised of three sections, (1) attitude towards social media and the #MeToo campaign, where questions concerning the respondents' attitude towards the #MeToo campaign adapted from Roth-Cohen *et al.* (2019), (2) the #MeToo campaign within the tourism workplace, where the questions concerning the dominant attitude towards the cases of sexual harassment, utilized the Kunst *et al.* (2018) and Brüggen (2021), and Pearlman and Bordelon (2022), and (3) the benefits and the costs adopted by the #MeToo campaign, where the questions concerning the

dominating attitude towards the actions of the #MeToo campaign, utilized the [Kunst et al. \(2018\)](#) study.

3.2 Sampling

Following the development of the questionnaire, pilot test was undertaken to identify potential ambiguities, technical difficulties, and interpretative issues in the questions. Pilot testing is particularly crucial for quantitative research, as it provides the primary appraisal of the instrument's usability ([Bougie and Sekaran, 2019](#)).

The sampling methodology used both convenience and purposive sampling, typical in social studies with limited population bases ([Muijs, 2011](#); [Neuman, 2014](#)), to collect 268 usable questionnaire responses. Participants were recruited through an online call shared via the social media channels. Eligibility criteria included: being 18 years or older and being currently employed or recently employed (within the past 12 months) in tourism, hospitality, or tourism-related services (e.g. accommodation, food and beverage, front-line guest services). Respondents who did not report any connection to tourism-related employment were excluded from the final dataset.

To narrow the selection and to include people with workplace experience in the field of tourism and with access to social networks, purposive sampling was used, ensuring the answers were applicable to the purpose of this study. This methodology prevents the results from being generalized to the full population but serves the purpose of descriptive studies and identifies trends and associations related to the #MeToo movement, attitudes, and social networks.

3.3 Methods of analysis

Data processing was performed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics and factor analysis applied to key variables. Additionally, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was utilized to examine the data, employing SmartPLS software, 4th ed. ([Ringle et al., 2022](#)). PLS, as noted, represents a flexible version of covariance-based SEM, seeking to predict and maximize the variance explained by endogenous latent variables without imposing multivariate normality requirements ([Hair et al., 2024](#); [Reinartz et al., 2009](#)). Its application was deemed appropriate, given that the research is exploratory, it deals with a new domain, and involves relationships that complex and grounded in a theoretically complex model, including numerous latent and multidimensional indicators. The sample size is moderate, supporting the application of PLS-SEM rather than CB-SEM.

4. Analysis and results

4.1 Sample profile

A detailed profile of the questionnaire participants is essential for contextualizing and accurately interpreting the study's findings. The majority of participants were female (69.2%), with the predominant age group being 18–30 years old (85.9%), followed by 31–45 years old (8.97%). Regarding educational attainment, 53.85% were high school graduates, 34.62% were university graduates, 7.69% had postgraduate education, and 3.85% had completed compulsory education. In terms of professional occupation, the largest proportion of respondents worked in Tourism (39.74%), followed by Hospitality (19.23%) and Food and Beverage (F&B) (15.38%).

4.2 Factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to confirm that the attitude measurement items separate into the two theoretically established components of attitudes: cognitive and affective attitudes. Applying factor analysis to the concept using the Principal Component method, it is found that the first two components indicate two distinct factors, explaining 62% of the attitude concept ([Table 1](#)). It was noted that attitudes 1–6 are influenced by cognitive criteria, whereas attitudes 7–8 are influenced by emotion ([Figure 1](#) and [Table 2](#)).

Table 1. Factor analysis

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction sums of squared loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	3.469	43.365	43.365	3.469	43.365	43.365	3.444	43.053	43.053
2	1.491	18.639	62.003	1.491	18.639	62.003	1.516	18.950	62.003
3	0.875	10.942	72.946						
4	0.573	7.161	80.107						
5	0.492	6.150	86.257						
6	0.442	5.525	91.782						
7	0.345	4.306	96.088						
8	0.313	3.912	100.000						

Note(s): Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Source(s): Authors' own work

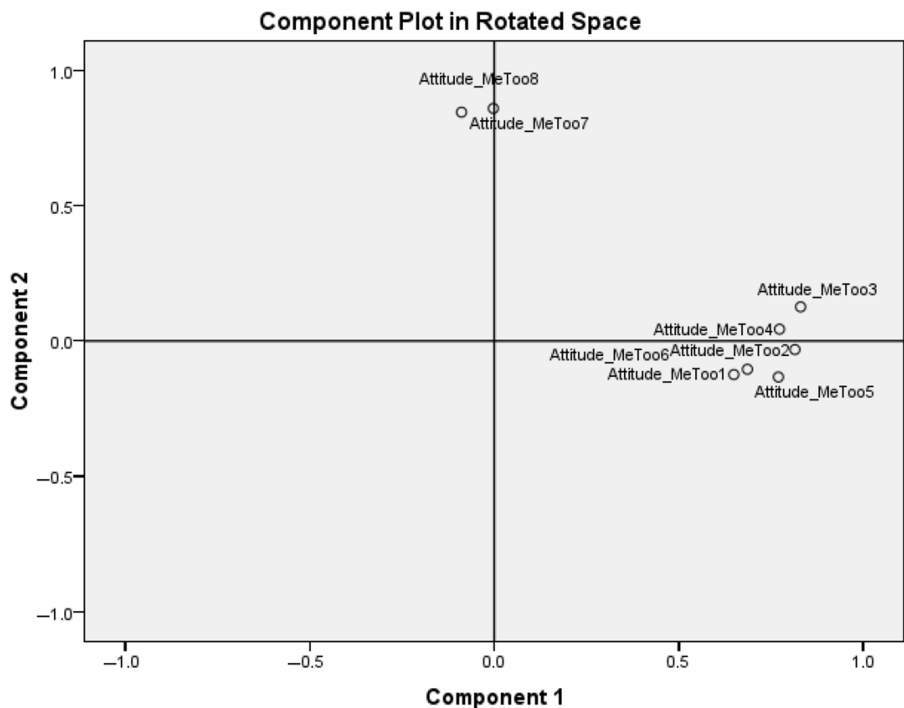


Figure 1. Rotated component plot of attitude toward #MeToo items. *Note.* The figure presents the rotated component plot derived from exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Component 1 is plotted on the horizontal axis and component 2 on the vertical axis. Items *Attitude_MeToo3*, *Attitude_MeToo4*, *Attitude_MeToo5*, *Attitude_MeToo0*, *Attitude_MeToo6*, and *Attitude_MeToo1* load primarily on component 1, indicating a cognitive dimension. Items *Attitude_MeToo7* and *Attitude_MeToo8* load on component 2, representing an affective dimension. Loadings are displayed based on their spatial position relative to the component axes. Source: Authors’ own work

Table 2. Principal component analysis table

	Component 1	Component 2
People who have been sexually harassed should stop being targeted whether they are women or men	0.659	−0.051
Men need to know that the rules have changed and they can no longer do whatever they want with a woman	0.813	0.060
The campaign is a kind of educational project that will help young girls understand that they should not be silent about any sexual harassment	0.811	0.218
This campaign harnesses the power of social media and its ability to spread information quickly	0.763	0.130
This is a legitimate and welcome revolution aimed at reducing sexual harassment	0.780	−0.046
This campaign is very important and testifies to the power of women, who have been silenced and disempowered until now	0.694	−0.027
It is a shame that this campaign has ‘killed romance’ and any romantic courtship is now gone because of men’s fear of being accused of sexual harassment	−0.099	0.854
This is an unfair prosecution of men, most of whom are innocent, only to provide powerful media headlines	−0.183	0.830
Source(s): Authors’ own work		

4.3 Reliability and validity

The reliability indicators confirm the quality of the measurements in the evaluation of the measurement model. Specifically, all indicators present Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. The absence of excessive cross-loadings and the high individual loadings of the indicators (>0.70) also indicate internal consistency and strengthen the overall reliability of the measurement model.

To assess the validity of the structural model, convergent and discriminant validity tests were performed. Convergent validity was examined through the AVE index. The AVE values for all constructs exceed the acceptable limit of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), as shown in Table 3. Discriminant validity was assessed through the Fornell–Larcker criterion. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE of each construct should exceed its intercorrelations with other constructs. In the table below, the diagonal values (square roots of the AVE) appear larger than the off-diagonal correlations for all variables. In addition, the HTMT index was examined, with all observed values falling below the 0.9 threshold, further strengthening the discriminant validity between the constructs. Tables 4 and 5 present in detail all the validity indices values presented above.

To assess the possibility of common-method bias, a full collinearity test was conducted using variance inflation factor (VIF) values. The results showed that all VIF values were below the recommended threshold ($VIF < 3.3$), indicating that common method bias is unlikely to be a major concern in this study.

4.4 Measurement model analysis

The analysis of path coefficients revealed that the variable “SM and #MeToo” has a significant positive effect on cognitive attitude ($\beta = 0.627, p < 0.001$), and a negative effect on affective attitude ($\beta = -0.340, p = 0.008$). Furthermore, cognitive attitude has a strong positive relationship with perceived benefits ($\beta = 0.632, p < 0.001$), while its relationship with perceived costs is marginally non-significant ($\beta = -0.205, p = 0.090$). In contrast, affective attitude has a positive effect on perceived costs ($\beta = 0.615, p < 0.001$), but is not related to perceived benefits ($\beta = -0.050, p = 0.634$). Therefore, cognitive attitude plays a crucial role in how participants evaluate the movement's positive dimensions, while affective attitude is more related to perceptions of costs. Cognitive attitude processes play a more important role than emotional ones in evaluating the usefulness of participating in the #MeToo movement.

The R^2 values support the above observations, as shown in Figure 2. The dependent variable Cognitive Attitude is explained by 39.3% by the independent variable “SM and #MeToo”, while Affective Attitude is explained by only 11.5%, indicating weak predictive power. However, for the variables Costs and Benefits, R^2 values of 0.445 and 0.409, respectively, are observed, which are interpreted as satisfactory levels of explanation according to the literature (Hair *et al.*, 2019). These values are considered moderate to satisfactory, especially for the main dependent variables (Benefits and Costs).

Table 3. Reliability indices

	CA	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Attitude #MeToo_Affective	0.744	0.766	0.840	0.726
Attitude #MeToo_Cognitive	0.845	0.851	0.889	0.617
Benefits	0.904	0.932	0.927	0.718
Costs	0.837	0.857	0.902	0.754
SM and #MeToo	0.734	0.740	0.845	0.731

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 4. Validity indices – HTMT matrix

	Aff_Att	Cog_Att	Benefits	Costs	SM and #MeToo
Aff_Att					
Cog_Att	0.157				
Benefits	0.151	0.670			
Costs	0.816	0.332	0.211		
SM and #MeToo	0.509	0.841	0.738	0.514	
Note(s): Aff_Att = Attitude #MeToo_Affective; Cog_Att = Attitude #MeToo_Cognitive					
Source(s): Authors' own work					

Table 5. Discriminant validity assessment – Fornell-Lacker criterion

	Aff_Att	Cog_Att	Benefits	Costs	SM and #MeToo
Aff_Att	0.852				
Cog_Att	−0.101	0.785			
Benefits	−0.114	0.637	0.847		
Costs	0.635	−0.267	−0.206	0.868	
SM and #MeToo	−0.340	0.627	0.581	−0.385	0.855
Source(s): Authors' own work					

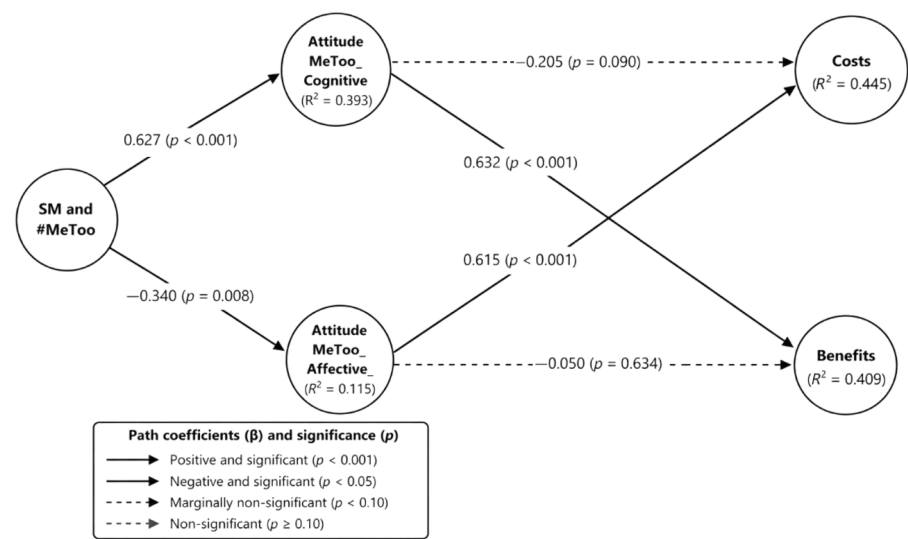


Figure 2. Structural model. Source: Authors' own work

The assessment of predictive validity through the Q^2 index revealed positive values for all variables. These positive values demonstrate that the model has sufficient predictive power.

In addition, an effect test was performed using the f^2 (effect size) index to determine the contribution of each independent variable to explaining the variance of the dependent variables. The f^2 indicates the strength of the effect of an independent variable on the

dependent variable. According to Cohen (1988), the values are interpreted as follows: 0.02 = small effect, 0.15 = medium effect, 0.35 = large effect. The f^2 values indicated that the Affective Attitude toward #MeToo variable has a very small effect on perceived benefits ($f^2 = 0.004$), but a large effect on costs ($f^2 = 0.674$). Correspondingly, the cognitive attitude strongly influences perceived benefits ($f^2 = 0.669$) and, to a lesser extent, costs ($f^2 = 0.075$). Finally, the influence of social media (SM and #MeToo) is strong on cognitive attitude ($f^2 = 0.647$) and moderate to weak on affective attitude ($f^2 = 0.131$). These values confirm that the model's main predictive power stems from cognitive attitudes and social media's influence, while the role of emotional attitudes remains limited.

In summary, the PLS-SEM model demonstrates strong, statistically significant relationships among social media, attitudes, and cost-benefit perceptions in the context of the #MeToo movement. Social media strongly influences participants' perceptions of the movement, primarily through cognitive attitudes.

5. Discussion

This research examined the relationship between social media use and attitudes toward the #MeToo movement, emphasizing how cognitive and affective attitudes influence perceptions of benefits and costs. The conceptual model was adopted from previous theories on the dual nature of attitude (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Albarracin *et al.*, 2014) and contextualized within the broader literature on social media's impact on social action and public opinion (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019). Quantitative analysis confirmed that social media utilization positively predicts cognitive attitudes toward #MeToo, indicating increased information, comprehension, and acceptance. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that internet exposure to social justice movements enhances active awareness and critical engagement with societal issues (Brüggen, 2021; Osnat *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, the observed negative correlation with affective sentiment suggests that frequent exposure to #MeToo content may lead to aversion or reservation due to emotional fatigue, corroborating the concept of "digital fatigue" as discussed by Wright (2016) and Zou and Qiu (2020).

The findings also highlight the relevance of Social Support Theory in explaining how social media shapes informational and emotional dynamics around #MeToo. Specifically, social media use appears to reinforce informational support and cognitive appraisal but also intensifies emotional responses that can lead to fatigue or perceived social costs.

The distinction between cognitive and affective attitudes clarifies the findings. Cognitive attitudes involve workplace-focused evaluations of #MeToo's benefits and effectiveness, while affective attitudes reflect emotional concerns that may heighten perceived interpersonal risks. As a result, even when respondents acknowledge the benefits of movement, emotional reactions can still influence perceived workplace costs. This underscores the importance of analyzing both components when assessing #MeToo perceptions in tourism workplaces.

The differential impact of the two attitude forms on benefit and cost perceptions stands out particularly. Cognitive attitudes show a significant statistical association with viewing the movement's benefits, confirming the presumption that rational processing promotes a favorable perception of the social alterations it induces. However, affective attitudes are significantly related to viewing costs, suggesting that negative affect, such as filtering out or distancing from the social purpose of the movement, is associated with lower viewing costs. This lopsidedness in cognitive and affective viewing aligns with attitude models that distinguish rational thinking from experiential and affective components (Albarracin *et al.*, 2014). The literature on the impact of the #MeToo movement also recognizes this dichotomy. Whereas the movement increased awareness and induced legislation (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022), it has also been blamed for inducing guilt, overwear, and polarization of the social context (Zou and Qiu, 2020). This study demonstrates that these are affect-based attitudes that precede or amplify how the content comes across on social media.

This pattern substantiates the interpretation that attitudes toward #MeToo can be conceptualized through a “benefit versus harm” framework in workplace settings. Specifically, the positive relationship between affective attitudes and perceived costs suggests that individuals exhibiting heightened emotional concern or stereotypical reservations are more inclined to accentuate the movement’s potential drawbacks in professional interactions. Conversely, the positive path between cognitive attitudes and perceived benefits implies that individuals who adopt a rational, evidence-based appraisal of #MeToo’s aims are more likely to recognize its advantages while minimizing perceived risks. Collectively, this asymmetry reinforces the premise that cognitive appraisals drive benefit-oriented judgments, whereas affective responses intensify cost-oriented perceptions.

In the tourism industry, where the study was carried out, the results take on special importance. The industry features strong interpersonal exposure, hierarchical inequalities, and frequent institutional insecurity, circumstances that make the harassment discourse uniquely vulnerable (Poulston, 2008; ActionAid, 2020). Tourism managers with the proper cognitive attitude tend to view #MeToo as an effective prevention and education tool (Atwater *et al.*, 2021), whereas those with a negative affective attitude view it as a threat or a source of legal and communicative risks. The results highlight the importance of an integrated approach when developing interventions and policies for industry: on the one hand, increasing the dissemination of information and fostering rational communication; on the other, governing the emotional climate of the organisms to mitigate fears, prejudices, and resistances. Evidence from the tourism field shows that supportive structures, such as mentoring programs and gender-inclusive HR policies, strengthen women’s agency and reduce tolerance for discriminatory behavior (Poulaki *et al.*, 2023, 2024). When employees perceive a genuine organizational commitment to gender equity, attitudinal alignment shifts toward empowerment rather than apprehension or resignation. Importantly, cultivating appropriate cognitive attitudes must be complemented by establishing an environment of emotional safety, wherein workers feel empowered to voice concerns, access educational resources, and take action without fear of stigmatization.

Overall, the study substantiates that attitudes are intrinsically multifaceted and complex, and that digital socialization is instrumental in their formation. The acceptance or rejection of social movements such as #MeToo is contingent not only on message delivery but also on the interpretive processes, both cognitive and affective, employed by recipients.

5.1 Implications for theory

From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the literature on digital social movements by refining how attitudes toward #MeToo are conceptualized and interpreted. Rather than treating attitudes as unidimensional or purely valence-based, the study demonstrates that cognitive and affective attitudes constitute analytically distinct components that shape evaluations of the movement in different ways. In line with established attitude theory (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993; Albarracín *et al.*, 2014), cognitive attitudes are shown to operate primarily through evaluative processes related to awareness, legitimacy, and perceived usefulness, thereby predicting perceptions of benefits. In contrast, affective attitudes reflect emotional and experiential responses (such as discomfort, fear, or fatigue) which are more closely associated with perceptions of costs. By empirically linking these differentiated attitudinal processes to benefit and cost perceptions, the study advances prior research on #MeToo and social media activism (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022) and provides a more nuanced understanding of how social movements are cognitively legitimized while simultaneously generating emotional ambivalence or resistance.

5.2 Implications for practitioners

For tourism and human resource professionals, the findings of this study offer clear and practical managerial implications. While the visibility of the #MeToo hashtag on social media contributes to increased awareness and understanding of workplace harassment, it may also generate uncertainty or fear when not accompanied by organizational guidance, education, and protective measures (Chatzopoulou *et al.*, 2025). This highlights the limitations of symbolic or communication-based endorsement of equality initiatives in the absence of institutional support, particularly in tourism workplaces characterized by close interpersonal interaction and power asymmetries.

In this context, tourism organizations are encouraged to invest in targeted staff training that addresses both the legal and ethical dimensions of harassment prevention, clarifies reporting procedures, and communicates organizational responsibilities (Atwater *et al.*, 2021). Such initiatives can strengthen employees' cognitive understanding of the movement and reinforce perceptions of its benefits. At the same time, the findings underline the importance of addressing the affective dimension of attitudes. Negative perceptions of the "costs" associated with equality and harassment prevention policies are often rooted in insecurity, emotional strain, or fear of unintended consequences rather than in principled opposition. These concerns can be mitigated through empathetic management practices, the provision of safe communication spaces, and access to appropriate support structures or professional counseling, which have been shown to be particularly important in the tourism and hospitality sector (Pearlman and Bordelon, 2022).

At the policy and sectoral level, the results support the systematic integration of gender and gender equity issues into tourism education and professional training frameworks, alongside the development of mechanisms for the ongoing assessment of employee attitudes. Monitoring attitudinal change over time allows organizations to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention initiatives and adapt managerial practices accordingly. Moreover, structured programs aimed at supporting women's professional development in tourism, such as leadership mentoring and formal equality initiatives, help disrupt persistent stereotypes, enhance women's visibility in decision-making roles, and create safer, more credible pathways for reporting harassment (Poulaki *et al.*, 2023).

5.3 Research limitations and future research proposals

Despite the significant findings of this research, some methodological and conceptual concerns limit the generalisability and the depth of interpretation of the results. First, purposive and convenience sampling do not allow the full representation of the tourism expert population or of the citizen population due to the intensity of exposure to social networks. Although the procedure makes the approach to the specialized sample feasible (Muijs, 2011), it involves the risk of systematic bias in the sampling type, because it does not guarantee that the participating individuals are representative in terms of demographic or professional characteristics. The study relies on purposive and convenience sampling, which may introduce self-selection bias, as individuals with stronger awareness or interest in gender-related issues may have been more likely to participate. In addition, the sample is predominantly female and young (18–30), which limits representativeness and restricts the extent to which gender- and age-based differences can be generalized to the broader tourism workforce. Finally, the cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretations among social media exposure, attitudes, and cost/benefit perceptions. Future research could employ probabilistic sampling, gender-balanced recruitment, and longitudinal or experimental designs to test causality more robustly.

Given the constraints mentioned above, future studies should employ qualitative or quantitative approaches, e.g. focus groups or interviews, to gain better insight into the emotional and cognitive processes underlying attitudes towards #MeToo and related social movements. Also, holding comparative studies through different professional domains, e.g. tourism, healthcare, and education, will assist in viewing how varied contextual environments

of work affect the perception and acceptance of #MeToo. Lastly, using experimental or intervention studies within institutions can determine the effectiveness of anti-harassment education campaigns in shifting attitudes, particularly by enhancing favorable cognitive perspectives and softening emotional resistance.

6. Conclusions

Use of social media has increased exponentially over the last few years and has become the foremost means of sharing information and engaging in social deliberation (PEW Research Center, 2021; Su, 2021). Facebook, Instagram, and even X/Twitter are used heavily not only for social networking but also for promoting social campaigns like #MeToo. However, current research only semi-analyzes the psychological and social impact of participating in these digital campaigns (Kunst *et al.*, 2018; Arsenis and Chatzopoulou, 2020; Roth-Cohen *et al.*, 2019; Zou and Qiu, 2020; Fardouly *et al.*, 2015; Poulis and Chatzopoulou, 2023). Drawing on the #MeToo movement, this paper examines the impact of social media on the cognitive and affective attitudes of tourism experts towards sexual harassment and on their perceptions of the movement's advantages and disadvantages. The results show that the use of social media positively influences cognitive attitudes by improving comprehension and acceptance of the movement's aims, but negatively correlates with affective attitudes, fostering a sense of silence or even panic towards its execution. Furthermore, cognitive attitudes are positively associated with benefits' perceptions, and affective attitudes are correlated with perceived disadvantage. These findings confirm that social media not only influences access to information but also significantly shapes attitude formation, as found in previous work (Diehl *et al.*, 2019; Su, 2021; Brüggem, 2021). Therefore, the #MeToo movement, as a digitally amplified social action, seems able to shape the lenses and behaviors of people in the professional sphere, promoting or limiting the acceptance of social transformation, depending on cognitive and affective evaluations. An exhaustive understanding of this dynamic is indispensable to defining the most effective equality measures, especially in industries defined by strong people interaction, such as the tourism industry.

This paper offers significant value to both scholarship and practice by elucidating how exposure to #MeToo-related content on social media distinctly shapes cognitive and affective attitudes in tourism workplaces. By empirically demonstrating that cognitive attitudes, enhanced through targeted training, transparent reporting procedures, and visible HR commitment, predict perceived organizational benefits, the study highlights actionable pathways for harnessing the positive impact of social movements. Simultaneously, it underscores the need for tourism businesses to address affective responses by fostering supportive leadership, safe communication channels, and structured protection mechanisms. Ultimately, these insights advance theoretical understanding of digital activism's multidimensional effects and provide practical guidance for developing more effective, emotionally attuned workplace interventions.

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