NO DISRUPTION – ONLY EXPOSURE! A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CROSS-MEDIA DYNAMICS IN DUTCH MEDIATIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

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(Social) Media at the Roots of Rupture

Despite social media's profound role in mobilizing resistance and uprisings such as in the Arab Spring or #MeToo, they gained a reputation of being "problematic", "dangerous" and "troubling" (Dean, 2020). This is usually recognized in their power to destabilize hierarchies, disrupt states of balance, undermine truth and knowledge, and challenge democratic structures across various national and cultural contexts (Couldry & Hepp, 2018). As a predominantly US-driven, corporate form of "global" disruptive governance, social media have put growing pressure on regulation at national and transnational levels. The European GDPR legislation is one example of countermeasurement. But even beyond politics, social media have become a popular object of public debate in which they are often blamed for substantially causing the current "return" of racist and fascist sentiments across Europe (Boulianne et al., 2020).

Although social media's destabilizing power has led to substantial "progressive" change (Milan, 2016), concepts like 'data colonialism' (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) contextualize their business model based on data extraction and monopolistic 'algorithmic governance' (Katzenbach & Ulbricht, 2019) historically: social media remain a continuum of Western colonialist exploitation and governance frameworks (Zuboff, 2023). The recent surge in right-wing, nationalist and populist politics across the West alongside the popularisation of social media is hence no contradiction–but also: no surprise.

While social media are prone to grab all attention as primary "troublemakers", their entanglement within national media ecosystems requires a closer look at their "disruptive" nature (van Dijck, 2013). Are we witnessing "ruptures" – or outbreaks of pent-up issues that have largely remained ignored in Western societies and

their respective legacy media (Mueller, 2017)? Looking at the latter, the Western media coverage around Israel's war on Gaza formed a key turning point which exposed the cultural and political biases of legacy media (Hamas Elmasry, 2024; Tröger, 2024). Numerous social media audiences pinpointed to the circulation of disinformation and propaganda across established media outlets such as notable German public broadcasters, leading to a continuing cracking of their trustworthy and "factual" reputation (Hameleers et al., 2022). Amidst a drastically changing political landscape, it seems not only social media but also legacy media are deeply involved in not disrupting but maintaining historic legacies of White supremacy–albeit in different ways.

Conceptualizing Media Disruption through Convergence

Although skepticism towards the legacy media seems to increasingly move towards the center, their critical uptake in academia is anything but new. In particular feminist media critique has a longstanding tradition of analysing harmful representations of gender in legacy and mainstream media (van Zoonen, 1994), specifically television and film (Brunsdon, 1993). While today, most attention is still devoted to social media, the recent rise of such anti-establishment sentiments demands renewed attention from media scholarship on legacy media, which now faces the additional unique challenge of bridging legacy *and* social media analysis to better understand how "disruption" comes into place (Khosravinik & Unger, 2016).

Within media studies, the characterization of social media as "disruptive" has clearly emerged in contrast to traditional legacy media such as public broadcasting or the national press, characterised as more stable, "balanced", and tied to national modes of governance and normative frameworks of rationality and truth. Although new media theorists like Deleuze (2017) and critical scholars have highlighted how the unique problems of new media should not lead to romanticised ideas of a "better past" (Marres, 2018), we urgently need to stay attentive towards potentially rising idealisations of familiar stabilities. Up to date, national legacy media are of key importance for forming public opinion and politics. But even though conventional attitudes towards legacy media have become increasingly challenged through social media over recent years, there has been–with the exception of online news–little scholarly attention on their productive force in forging contemporary public opinion and politics (de Keulenaar et al., 2024).

Certainly, legacy and social media must be recognized as problematic and productive in their own ways. Yet, it is crucial to understand how media operate in *convergence* (Jenkins, 2004) as they mutually shape public discourse. For example, the work of de Keulenaar et al. (2024) found that the rise of transgressive far-right speech on Dutch Twitter has emerged in specific response to the strict and normative editorial guidelines

of Dutch public broadcasters. Despite the importance of such relational perspectives, most media research has focused on individual or a few US-centered social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook, without further exploring how national non-digital-native media foster "problems" in conjunction with digital-native media that operate transnationally.

Operationalizing Cross-media Research

One reason for existing gaps in cross-media research is *access* to data. Social media data was, until recently, easily accessible to researchers, which often led to strong focus on single platforms such as Twitter (Burgess & Bruns, 2012). In the current situation, however, growing restrictions imposed by corporate platforms but also regulatory frameworks such as the GDPR have made it increasingly difficult to research social media data (Bruns, 2021). As a result, there is a growing necessity to turn towards national archival media collections for conducting historical and systematic analyses of how cross-media dynamics enabled contemporary issues to manifest and operate today. Additionally, the heterogeneous nature of cross-media *data* presents technical challenges for conducting such research–despite the digitization of non-digital-native media such as television or radio. However, the rise of advanced and easily accessible pre-trained large language models offers novel possibilities for analysis in contextually nuanced ways (Törnberg, 2024).

In response to this gap, this paper develops a systematic longitudinal analysis of the mediation of sexual misconduct on Dutch Twitter and television. The issue of sexual misconduct allows re-connecting with the early media critiques of "second wave" feminism on legacy media on representation (Malinowska, 2020), which became themselves critiqued by Black and intersectional feminists over their leeway to sexual violence framings that not only marginalize men of color but also lack profound engagement with race (Crenshaw, 2013; hooks, 2014).

For operationalizing the analysis, the paper departs from the Dutch cross-media research infrastructure project Twi-XL, which makes different archival media collections accessible for social sciences and humanities research. Having access to television transcripts from 1981 until 2023 and Dutch tweets from 2011 until 2023, the paper introduces a methodological framework with BERTopic (Grootendorst, 2022) for systematically tracing how the "overexposure" of certain issues on social media has potentially emerged through their "underexposure" on legacy media.

Revisiting feminist critiques, the paper finds that Dutch television pays ample attention to the internal, structural and complex dimension of sexual misconduct, while neglecting the axes of gender and specifically race. Although television took an overall progressive and "feminism-oriented" position from the 1980s on, it typically engaged with the issue by unraveling individual cases within their specific environments such as sport clubs,

cultural sectors or the church. Television's structural, internal and "progressive" framing stands in clear contrast to the Dutch Twitter discourse. Here, the issue got predominantly reduced in complexity, externalized and hijacked by the far-right, in particular since the European "refugee crisis" in 2015. Feminist wordings and paradigms such as "breaking the silence" became appropriated for fueling the continuous surge in Islamophobic and racist sentiment within the Netherlands, which eventually peaked in the recent election of its far-right government.

Overall, the paper challenges binary views of social media as the sole driver of socio-political rupture by analyzing how social *and* legacy media perpetuate unreflected and distorting notions of race and gender. Introducing a novel methodological approach to conduct such analysis, it opens important pathways for further critical assessments of Western media systems as they risk to collectively sustain colonialist heritage in intricate ways.

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