Combating Anti-Feminism and Building Strategies for Gender Equality: The World of Digital Feminist Media Activism in Brazil and France

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Abstract

This study examines digital feminist media outlets in Brazil and France, exploring their strategies to promote gender equality and combat hate speech. Focusing on three outlets from each country, the research employs a multi-site ethnographic approach, including 63 in-depth interviews with content producers, support teams, and audiences. The findings reveal that discovering sexist and exclusionary sociopolitical structures often catalyzes engagement in feminist activism, with emotional responses—particularly anger and frustration—serving as primary drivers for action. Engagement in digital feminist spaces fosters collective exchange and creates connections extending beyond the digital sphere. The research highlights the complex interplay between digital platforms, feminist ideology, and grassroots activism in shaping contemporary gender equality movements, contributing to our understanding of how digital feminist media navigate online activism challenges while fostering community and driving social change.

Keywords: Digital Feminism; Media Activism; Online Harassment; Anti-feminism; Feminist Journalism; Cyber-violence; Emotional Labor; Collective Identities

Introduction

The article analyzes transnational strategies for combating anti-feminist narratives and promoting gender equality through engaged feminist information production projects, based on digital feminist activist media outlets in Brazil and France. The integration of feminist media activism into the social world[1] (Becker 1982; Morrissette et al. 2011) exposes its practitioners, contributors, and supporters to various forms of violence[2] in both the digital and physical spheres, as well as organizational violence (Le Cam et al. 2021). Additionally, it

[1] Becker (1982) proposed the concept of the social world as a dynamic entity. This interactionist view sees society as continuously evolving through interactions between individuals. These interactions, and the mutual interpretations that shape them, constantly compose and recompose the social fabric (Morrissette et al., 2011).
[2] This refers to the sexist and sexual violence experienced by the interviewed women, particularly focusing on symbolic violence, which occurs without leaving explicitly visible marks or traces (Bourdieu 1980).

subjects them to potential attacks from anti-feminist and/or traditionalist groups that oppose the expansion or strengthening of the rights of women and feminized people - which includes also queer individuals.

Actions of the anti-feminist movement have become an inherent element of digital activism and feminist media activism. This opposition impacts both the experiences of feminist media activists and the practice of producing gender-focused content. The increased visibility of digital feminism has led to a rise in aggressive cybersexism, as Jouët (2018) points out, emphasizing that in all Western countries, feminists are facing resurgent reactionary forces that claim feminist causes threaten values linked to the ideal of Christian family (Cruz and Dias 2015). These anti-feminist discourses are gaining traction in a political and social context where neoliberalism and neoconservatism combine to reinforce reactionary ideals (Devreux and Lamoureux 2012). Consequently, a tension exists between feminism's growing influence and the intensifying conservative forces in Western societies. This clash pits feminism's expansion against anti-feminist movements that oppose women's pursuit of equal rights. A multi-site analysis of the transnational circulation of the phenomenon of digital feminist media activism indicates that these forces are also at work in the Global South, and resistance actions have been spearheaded by countries located there. As a Latin American researcher, by proposing a dialog between feminist and media activist practices based on cases from Brazil and France, I am trying to build paths that can show the North how to reach the South and how to learn from and with it.

Confronting anti-feminist violence evokes a range of emotions in the collective of those engaged in feminist information production: shock, fatigue, and disgust, but also a sense of solidarity and cohesion. This shared experience underpins the group's sociability and allow its members to create a shared social, political, moral, and emotional space (Andrade 2020). The collective project of feminist media activism includes and is strengthened by uniting against the sexist socio-structural elements that affect the community as a whole. Paradoxically, the violence becomes a catalyst for producing engaged feminist content.

The World of Feminist Media Activism

Over the past decade, diverse feminist initiatives have emerged on the internet. While representing various ideological currents, these initiatives share a common approach: using digital tools to disseminate content (Jouët 2022). This new wave of activist and combative feminism has emerged globally, combining digital tools with traditional social movement

strategies such as strikes and street demonstrations. This transnational current has spread to diverse countries, with globally resonant slogans circulating as hashtags (Arruzza et al. 2019). The movement, however, is gaining particular momentum in the Global South (Pinheiro-Machado 2019), where it is evolving to localize and reinvent the meanings of the international #MeToo movement.

This phenomenon has been evolving since the 2010s and continues to develop, representing a model of activism still under construction (Castro and Abramovay 2019; Paveau 2020; Perez and Ricoldi 2019; Pinheiro-Machado 2019; Oliveira 2019). This form of activism is characterized by a strong presence of its members on various digital media platforms, organization through collectives, and demonstrates an increased focus on diverse social factors intersecting with gender, embodying intersectional feminism (Perez and Ricoldi 2019). It organically integrates class, gender, and race, addressing different systems of oppression in its action strategies (Castro and Abramovay 2019, 24).

Digital feminist media activism has emerged as a key component in the reconfiguration of feminist activism. Despite its name, it is not limited to the online environment but extends street-level engagements and involves activists' interactions with journalism and with each other (Braighi and Câmara 2018). This concept transcends the simple fusion of media and activism, manifesting not only through words and techniques but above all through people's actions. In this context, media activism is marked by both embracing and rejecting journalistic conventions. It produces content characterized by collaboration, advocacy for social causes, and engaging the public in debates (Santos and Miguel 2019). Employing digital activism strategies, it aims to generate diverse and inclusive (Bentes 2015).

I use symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework to reflect on the engagement strategies of media activists promoting gender equality and countering anti-feminist discourses. This perspective views the social world as a dynamic entity, constantly being shaped and reshaped through the interactions between actors and the cross-interpretations that organize the exchanges between them (Becker, 1982; Morrissette et al. 2011). By applying this lens, we can better understand how are formed and maintained engagement strategies of media activists aimed at promoting gender equality and combating anti-feminist discourses.

Methodological Paths

This paper employs ethnographic methodology to examine the strategies and tools of feminist activism and gender equality promotion. The research is based on fieldwork and in-depth interviews. The fieldwork involved an ethnographic effort of digital and in-person monitoring of media activists, feminist activists, and journalists covering gender debates. Additionally, 63 in-depth interviews were conducted between October 2020 and November 2022, with 30 in France and 33 in Brazil. Participants represented various roles within feminist media activism, including reporters, editors, columnists, readers, and accounting and fundraising team members. The study's significance lies in its comprehensive approach, providing valuable insights into feminist media activism in Brazil and France through in-depth accounts of participants' trajectories and observations of their collective strategies in countering anti-feminist agendas.

The digital technoculture of feminist media activism operates in a complex landscape. The global rise of reactionary political-ideological currents has emboldened sexist discourse both online and offline. While the internet offers opportunities for social emancipation, it simultaneously provides fertile ground for groups that attack social minorities and reinforce existing power structures (Jouët et al. 2017). However, the backlash from "trolls" and "haters" paradoxically indicates that feminist voices are heard online. This suggests that feminist media activism is at the center of transformations with the potential to challenge the established order.

I analyze feminist and digital media activism projects, specifically online outlets producing journalistic content with a feminist perspective and focus on gender debates. In Brazil, 18 relevant projects were identified through the *Agência Pública*'s mapping of independent journalism. In France, I identified 14 outlets based on bibliographical research and studies mapping gender activism and journalism over recent decades (Bard and Chaperon, 2017; Blandin, 2017; Hache-Bissette, 2017; Olivesi, 2017; Jouët, 2022). From these, I selected projects that were particularly significant during the "Feminist Spring"[3] (Alves, 2017), based on their social media profiles, interactions (measured by engagement metrics like likes, shares, and comments), and follower counts. The chosen projects in Brazil are the non-governmental organization *Think Olga*, the magazine *AzMina*, and the website *Lado M*. In France, the selected projects are the collective *Georgette Sand*, the newsletter *Les Glorieuses*, and the magazine *Madmoizelle*.

[3] The "Feminist Spring" refers to a series of protests in 2015 that sparked feminist actions and mobilizations on social media.

My study draws on a multi-site ethnographic approach, combining online and in-person observations of feminist media newsrooms and offices. Digital ethnography involved monitoring interviewees' social media activities, including posts, shares, likes, comments, and personal narratives, providing insights into the trajectories of media activists and their audiences. I made face-to-face visits to shared offices and newsrooms when possible, considering COVID-19 restrictions and the physical existence of these spaces. In-depth interviews complemented the ethnographic process, aiming to understand the beliefs, attitudes, values, feelings, desires, and motivations driving individuals' behaviors in specific social contexts (Gil 1987; Bauer and Gaskell 2002; Dantas and Lima 2018). Detailed information about the selection of interviewees, interview procedures, recording, processing, and questionnaires are available in Appendix.

To analyze the involvement of feminist media activists in their social world, I apply Unruh's (1980) four categories of actor involvement. The first category is "strangers". These actors, while not directly belonging to the world in question, must be considered by its inhabitants. They remain on the periphery of the central world. In the context of feminist media activism, this category includes writers, artists, politicians, and renowned personalities who engage with or oppose the feminist cause. Though external to the world of feminist media activism, these figures serve as important reference points for those creating content to disseminate feminist information.

Unruh's (1980) framework further categorizes participants as "tourists" and "regulars" in social worlds. "Tourists" are spectators occasionally present in the world, connected to it out of curiosity but with little long-term commitment. In the studied group, Mathilde from *Georgette Sand* exemplifies this category. As a historian and university professor, she indirectly collaborates by allowing reproduction of her academic content, but does not directly produce content for *Georgette Sand.* "Regulars" are habitual participants fully integrated into the world's ongoing activities, demonstrating significant commitment. In feminist media activism, this group includes paid professionals linked to content production processes. Examples are reporters, videographers, podcasters, and support staff such as administrative assistants, fundraising managers, and PR professionals. This category comprises 14 of the study's interviewees.

In the context of feminist media activism, an intermediate category emerges between Unruh's (1980) "tourists" and "regulars." This group, which I call "floating team" includes mainly columnists and volunteer reporters. They maintain an occasional presence within the world as there are no strict deadlines for content delivery or specific demands on their time.

This flexibility allows them to contribute on their own terms while still remaining integrated into the space's ongoing activities. Although they are engaged in feminist activism, they have to adjust their routines to carry out conventional paid work in shifts opposite to the volunteer work. These individuals often balance their activism with conventional paid work, reminiscent of Becker's (1982) concept of "day work" in the art world. This category comprises 14 interviewees in the study.

The final category in Unruh's framework is "insiders." These are individuals deeply embedded in the organization, possessing privileged information and a high level of involvement. Insiders have the authority to control or shape the structure and character of the social world. Their role includes creating and maintaining activities for other participants and recruiting new members. In feminist media activism, the insiders are typically the creators and directors of projects. They control restricted information, such as the initiative's financial history, and possess in-depth knowledge of the group's operational mechanisms. These insiders determine who joins or leaves the editorial team and regulate access to team interaction environments, like WhatsApp groups.

This distribution of social roles and varying forms of engagement contribute to the formation of the analyzed world. To be part of the inner circles of regulars or insiders, one must master both journalistic and activist conventions and/or have symbolic/cultural capital. Tourists who remain on the periphery—historians, artists, or writers—provide conventions that help shape the studied practice.

Violence against Media Activists

The analysis of interviews with actors from the social world reinforces that violence and attacks against feminist media activists have emotional consequences. Intimidation and fear emerge as primary tactics used by individuals and social structures attempting to maintain dominance and limit the reach of media promoting gender equality. The most prevalent forms of violence identified in this study include cybersexism, gaslighting, bullying, attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, and conflicts within family and social circles. These forms of violence often manifest as threats, aggression, and harassment. The specific consequences of these experiences for the interviewees are detailed in the following sections.

Digital attacks are the most prevalent form of violence among the interviewed media activists. Out of 33 participants, 17 directly reported experiencing cyber-violence as a consequence of them producing feminist content. Social media platforms, particularly

Twitter/X, seem to provide fertile ground for gender-related controversies due to their techno-semiotic properties, including concise statements, simultaneous circulation of texts and images, and the use of hashtags. These features appear to facilitate the production of controversial discursive entities and reinforce the polarization between opposing viewpoints on gender issues (Julliard 2016).

For the interviewed media activists, attacks primarily occur through comments and private messages received by email, social media, or on the websites of feminist outlets. The latter is less common, as these projects often have hate speech policies that effectively shield their teams, according to the interviewees. This pattern of harassment extends beyond individual contributors, affecting the institutional structures of feminist media outlets as well. These organizations face attacks through their websites and social media platforms, and regularly endure hacker attacks, especially when addressing more sensitive issues in public debates, such as abortion rights.

Anthony, a black and queer journalist from the Paris region who works for *Madmoizelle*, experiences cyber harassment on a regular basis, typically once a month. He emphasizes that this violence significantly impacts mental health. According to Anthony, the majority of the aggressors self-identify as masculinists and "on Twitter, they are much more virulent and also much more organized." Despite the seemingly dire context of recurring aggression, Anthony notes that those who experience it eventually develop a degree of resilience (Anthony, 20 July 2022).

Twitter/X remains one of the most popular social media platforms in Brazil and France, despite losing ground over the last decade. Characterized in the digital environment as a space that reinforces gender and racial inequalities (Messias et al. 2017), Twitter/X is frequently cited by interviewees as a common setting for cyberattacks. These accounts are supported by a 2021 survey coordinated by *AzMina* magazine, with the support of the International Center for Journalists. The survey reveals that women journalists in Brazil receive more than twice as many offensive comments as their male colleagues on Twitter. However, interviewees also mention other digital platforms as settings where harassment and violence occur, including YouTube, Instagram, and even Wikipedia.

Mathilde, a historian associated with *Georgette Sand* and a prominent French feminist activist with a large social media following, reports receiving numerous violent comments and even threats, especially on Twitter/X, where she has over 125,000 followers (interview, 2 August 2022). Her reactions vary depending on her mood and disposition. Sometimes he chooses not to respond at all. At other times, she mocks those spreading hate speech. In

these instances, Mathilde employs strategies such as sending satirical images to her "hater," such as a drawing of herself created by a feminist illustrator, featuring the phrase "Drink my menstruation." Mathilda's approach illustrates how media activists strategically adopt humor as a militant weapon (Breda 2022), using playful responses as a counter-discourse to anti-feminist groups.

Some attacks, however, prove too severe for such defense strategies to provide adequate security or peace of mind for the victims. Two interviewees, Amanda (*AzMina*) and Rebecca (*Les Glorieuses*), shared personal accounts of harassment involving death threats. Their experiences suggest certain factors that may make some media activist profiles more vulnerable to intense digital harassment.

Rebecca, as the creator and spokesperson of her feminist newsletter, has greater media and online visibility. Other interviewed publication directors or coordinators similarly report facing more intense aggression compared to collaborators not in leadership positions. Amanda, a columnist for *AzMina* magazine, draws attention from anti-feminist groups, even though she does not hold a managerial role or does not serve as an institutional representative. Her prominence stems from her work as a sports journalist, a field traditionally associated with male audiences, exposing her to constant hostility from various "haters." In the most serious incident, she received death threats and faced virtual harassment from a group of soccer fans, who disputed her claim that a coach's remark during a match was sexist[4]. The threat extended to Amanda's then-husband and family members.

The manifestations of cybersexism described above are not limited by national borders. Across the Atlantic, journalist Marguerite (*Georgette Sand*) reports similar experiences of cyber-harassment following her soccer articles. The experiences of these reporters demonstrate ongoing resistance to women's participation in activities traditionally perceived as masculine, such as sports journalism, particularly in soccer coverage.

The prejudiced nature of these attacks extends beyond gender issues, often intensifying when the victim is associated with other socially marginalized groups, such as Black people and people with disabilities. For example, Leandra, an *AzMina* columnist who is a disabled woman writing about the rights of disabled women, experienced a hacking attack on her livestream just she was about to give a presentation on her genetic bone disease. Similarly, structural racism is aggressively reflected in the experiences of Black media activists. Cris, an *AzMina* columnist and television presenter, faced severe digital attacks after

[4] The coach had commented that the team was playing so poorly that even a pregnant woman could score against them.

publishing a photograph of herself participating in a Black feminist campaign. Her image went viral, resulting in both misogynistic and racist attacks:

> I ran a campaign that featured a photo of me with a sign that read "My name is not the brown-skinned girl. My name is Cris Guterres." This photo generated a virtual attack. The image was shared more than 200,000 times. It was a photo with a text attached talking about the intersection of racism and sexism, how people called me a brown-skinned girl invalidated my existence, and objectified my body. It was very brutal! (interview, 3 September 2021)

The emotional toll of this violence is evident in how media activists reorganize their routines. Cris recounts that after this particular incident, she avoided leaving her house out of fear of exposure and of being recognized and attacked on the street, as well as feeling shame. While she maintained her social media profiles, she stopped publishing content and tried to distance herself from the internet for a period. Rebecca, founder of the newsletter *Les Glorieuses*, shares a similar experience (interview, 22 September 2022). She reveals that at one point, her fear was so intense that she removed her surname from the intercom to avoid being identified.

Media activists often consider seeking legal support, as both Amanda and Cris did. However, they frequently conclude that the potential financial compensation does not overweight the emotional strain of legal proceedings. Moreover, victims' responses to these attacks are influenced by a range of emotions, including humiliation, embarrassment, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem. These feelings, which form the comprehensive core of society's emotional culture (Koury 2018), shape how victims behave and position themselves in the world after such attacks. As a result, they tend to reduce their social media engagement and may even question their career choices and professional paths.

It is noteworthy that women who report not experiencing what they consider "more serious" violence—namely, incidents causing physical and/or psychological trauma—often describe themselves as fortunate. This element of interviews highlights the micro-political dimension of emotions in this context. In an environment where the relationship between humiliation and gender is frequently exploited to undermine the political activism and digital engagement of the actors within the studied social world, perceiving oneself as a "non-victim" evokes a sense of relief. Moreover, occupying this position creates an impression of privilege.

In sum, the cyber-harassment experienced by feminist media activists is typically associated with several key factors that amplify the scale of these attacks. The most prominent factors, as highlighted in the interviewees' narratives, are political events, identity factors, and increased visibility. Political events include national elections or prominent

international debates on gender-related issues. Identity factors encompass ethnic-racial background, cultural identity, or sexual orientation, such as identifying as Black and/or LGBTQ+. Increased visibility refers to instances where an activist's name or a feminist publication is mentioned on far-right channels or in journalistic projects with wider reach than the surveyed media, including other media activist channels.

The persistence of attacks on feminist projects is closely linked to the cyclical nature of content and debate surrounding their issues. As media activists' published information fades from web circulation, the attacks tend to diminish correspondingly. Similarly, the outlets most frequently targeted by hate speech propagators are those with the highest national profiles. Highly publicized controversies have the unique ability to be tailored for different audiences, depending on the media outlet and target demographic. This adaptability allows conflicts to be framed in various ways (Cervulle and Julliard 2018), enabling controversies to gain prominence in specific media channels and focus on particular audiences.

Interviewees generally confirm that attacks by anti-feminist groups tend to occur on specific occasions, corresponding to the relevance of an issue in social and political debates. Among the testimonies collected, the most emblematic case of this process involves an article by *AzMina* explaining how a safe abortion is performed—an episode cited by more than half of the women interviewed related to the magazine as readers or staff.

This article, based on a WHO technical guideline for safe abortion, explains abortion procedures in Brazil, as well as in countries where it is fully legalized. *AzMina* contributors report that movements opposing abortion decriminalization in Brazil—including Catholic and evangelical religious groups, right-wing and far-right politicians, and anti-feminist movements—interpreted the article as an abortion tutorial. Beyond provoking outrage among reactionary segments of Brazilian society, the case led to personal lawsuits against the reporter and editor responsible for the article. It also resulted in public condemnation via social media from members of Jair Bolsonaro's then-government.

In terms of violence, more than a third of the media activists interviewed report experiencing psychological abuse perpetrated by men in various forms and spaces, both digital or physical. When analyzing the nature of violence faced by the group, two prominent patterns emerge. First, media activists routinely suffer verbal aggression aimed at offending them by highlighting physical characteristics. They are called ugly, fat, old, or have specific elements of their bodies or faces particularly for criticism. Second, they experience verbal aggression that seeks to offend by using slurs associated with passive sexual behavior (such

as "whore," "bitch," "slut," or "stag"). This language serves to demarcate spaces in which men and women are expected to operate, reinforcing the dominant male position (Zanello and Gomes 2011).

The digital environment's mechanisms facilitate the spread and amplification of hate speech, making insult-based attacks on social media a routine occurrence. This dynamic appears to be fueled by the relative anonymity of those who initiate these attacks (Julliard 2016). As media activists gain prominence through their activism and professional activities, their bodies increasingly become targets for social media attacks. Consequently, the more voice and space these activists acquire, the more intense online harassment becomes.

In more subtle ways, these activists also experience situations where their intellectual and psychological capacities are questioned. This occurs at various levels. One example comes from Marília (interview, 18 August 2021), a journalist from *AzMina* magazine. She represented the publication on a radio program to discuss an app created by the media outlet to combat domestic violence. Marília noticed that the presenters displayed a lack of interest in both the topic she was invited to address and in her as an interviewee. This was evident in their apparent lack of preparation for the discussion and in getting her name wrong. Such incidents exemplify how these women are not listened to or taken seriously, even in professional settings where they are invited as experts.

More extreme episodes occur where the sanity or skills of these professionals are directly questioned. They are often labeled as crazy, stupid, or unprepared. Vanessa, a reporter for *Lado M*, frequently experiences this. She maintains a website focusing on cinema and films made by women, where she regularly receives messages from men claiming that she and her colleagues are unfit to analyze certain films or series. As Vanessa explains, "they make it seem like you don't understand the film because you are a woman and therefore have no references" (interview, 19 July 2021).

Finally, media activists routinely face sexist discourses claiming that their feminist activism and information from a lack of romantic or sexually involvement with men. Anti-feminist groups and individuals employ this reaffirmation of androcentric positions as a tactic to intimidate the action of these media activists. They resort to gender-based humiliation, seeking to reinforce ideas of hierarchical power positions between men and women.

Having outlined the most common forms of violence against media activists, we can observe that the emotional fallout from these experiences is complex. It encompasses feelings and actions of fear and intimidation in response to attacks but also firmness and determination to continue their work. Many media activists experience psychological

exhaustion due to constant psychological attacks. However, their strong sense of identity and belonging to the group, coupled with their commitment to feminist and gender agendas, often motivates them to remain active in this social world.

Resistance to Anti-Feminist Violence

Media activists' fight against sexist violence their community experiences focuses on two strategic approaches. First, the editorial teams of feminist media implement systematic measures to combat cyber sexism and other forms of violence against contributors. Second, interviewees adopt individual strategies in their daily routines to protect themselves from potential aggression, supported by networks built through feminist interaction and engagement.

Feminist project coordinators strive to shield their teams from attacks, particularly in the digital environment where information produced in their social world primarily circulates. All publications face periodic hacking attempts, which are primarily addressed by team leaders and IT staff. These individuals provide guidelines to their colleagues on protective measures and procedures to be adopted by all team members, focusing on optimizing password protection and securing access to shared digital workspaces.

The interviewees who discussed anti-cyber-sexism measures emphasized feeling protected by the shielding strategies employed in their projects. Comment moderation and the reduced exposure to insults and aggressive messages for reporters and columnists provide a sense of relief. Generally, these individuals prefer to avoid encountering attacks on their work or themselves. However, there are exceptions, such as journalist and video artist Emilie from *Madmoizelle*. Emilie expressed indifference towards negative comments her videos and publications receive on social media (interview, 22 July 2022).

Media activists develop personal strategies to shield their private spaces on social media from haters and anti-feminist aggression. One such strategy involves refraining from explicitly mentioning their work in feminism, though this approach inadvertently contributes to the silencing of feminist voices. For example, Paula from *Think Olga* usually identifies as a professional working in NGOs, omitting her direct association with a feminist project (interview, 13 August 2021). Rayana from *AzMina*'s financial fundraising team, shares a nuanced approach (interview, 28 July 2021). While she does not feel intimidated or ashamed to identify as a feminist, she consciously avoids using the term "feminism" in environments she perceives as less conducive to debate. Instead, she engages in discussions about gender equality and advocates for women's rights without explicitly labeling her stance.

Some media activists, particularly those in support teams and leadership roles who frequently encounter violent content and attempted attacks, opt for restricted profiles on social networks instead of public ones. This protective measure sometimes extends to the type and format of information shared in digital spaces. As such, Megan, a journalist for the newsletter *Les Glorieuses* reveals that she refrains from publishing photographs of her face online and minimizes personal exposure to avoid drawing attention as an activist. However, these strategies are not always viable for professionals in the field. Given their work in communication and media, many depend on social media platforms to promote their work.

Other media activists choose to ignore attacks directed at them. For instance, Océane from *Madmoizelle* recounted an incident where her colleagues alerted her about a member of a masculinist group sharing her images online alongside content she had produced for the magazine (interview, 22 September 2022). Rather than investigating the situation, Océane consciously chose not to explore what was being said and shared about her in anti-feminist spaces. Her reasoning behind this decision was that if the target of an attack remains unaffected, the aggressor fails to achieve their desired outcome.

Media activists employ self-preservation tactics and strategies to combat sexist attacks while avoiding reinforcement of violent mechanisms. These approaches mitigate the intensification of negative emotions like anger, humiliation, frustration, and stress triggered by harassment and gender-based aggression. Emotional management is crucial for professionals working on women's rights and issues affecting feminized individuals. By adopting these protective measures, activists can sustain their digital activism and feminist militancy efforts despite ongoing challenges.

Interviewees report that emotions within editorial teams and newsrooms are less restricted than in traditional journalism environments, influencing the structure of their professional spheres. This approach contrasts with conventional organizational handling of emotions and affections, which often associates them with disorder, partiality, excess, amateurism, slowness, and time-wasting, suggesting that affections should remain outside the work environment (Jeantet 2021).

In pursuit of an achievable utopia through alternative lifestyles within engaged media proposals (Andrade and Pereira 2022), the outlets included in this study tend to encourage contributors to take ideological positions, such as openly identifying as feminist. They also promote emotional exchange among team members through various means: group therapy processes, convivial gatherings like lunches or "happy hours," and social interactions that encourage sharing of feelings, such as weekly team meetings dedicated to discussing personal

experiences rather than work matters. This approach represents a significant departure from traditional media environments, embracing a more holistic and emotionally open workplace culture.

Confronting anti-feminist violence evokes shock, fatigue, and disgust, while also awakening feelings of solidarity and cohesion in the collective. This dynamic underpins the group's sociability, leading members to establish a shared social, political, moral, and emotional space (Andrade 2020). The common project uniting media activists is amplified by their collective fight against sexist socio-structural elements affecting them. Consequently, violence becomes a component fostering the action of producing engaged feminist content.

Tactics for Promoting Gender Equality

Media activists employ diverse engagement strategies to promote gender equality and combat hate speech and anti-feminist movements. They focus on producing quality information and establishing activist projects as reliable sources and references in debates on inclusion and feminism. The six outlets utilize various formats — from apps and newsletters to social media campaigns — to reach their audiences. *AzMina* develops tools like the PenhaS app for combating domestic violence, while *Lado M* focuses on creating a space for learning and debate on women's issues. *Think Olga* created the social innovation advisory service Think Eva to find solutions for gender inequalities through both digital and non-digital strategies. In France, *Georgette Sand* uses humor to challenge societal representations of women, *Les Glorieuses* shares weekly newsletters on diverse feminist topics, and *Madmoizelle* employs a lighter tone with memes and gifs to address socio-political issues. Their content ranges from serious discussions on workplace inequality to body positivity and inclusive feminism. These outlets extend their impact beyond digital spaces through events, consultancies, and partnerships, creating a multifaceted approach to feminist media activism that blends online and offline strategies to challenge societal norms and promote gender equality.

Before approaching feminism, media activists and their audiences typically identified with other forms of activism related to class, race, and diversity issues, rather than engaging in feminist media activism or traditional political activism associated with parties or social movements. Digital activists generally have solid experience with various forms of political mobilization, combining both online and offline actions (Breda 2022). These individuals become familiar with engagement discourses through family, academic, and professional environments and are accustomed to navigating activist spaces.

The majority of interviewees reported a gradual immersion into collective feminist activism, yet, for some, this process was more challenging due to class and racial contexts, age-related factors, or specific personal experiences. Pain usually appears in the context of the private, as a solitary experience (Ahmed 2014). Through activism, however, interviewees reframe this concept, giving a collective dimension to their individual pain and that of other women and feminized individuals.

Structural situations of gender violence or prejudice (racial, gender, sexual orientation) emerged as background elements in all interviews. These experiences generated anger, sadness, and frustration in the interviewees, but also a desire to share their experiences and transform pain into activist or militant engagement. In feminist contexts, denouncing or sharing past violence serves as a strategy for collectivizing experiences that affect the group as a whole and generate activist social mobilization. It expresses hope for another kind of world, another way of inhabiting the world (Ahmed, 2014). Emotions—anger, acceptance, empathy, revolt, sadness, fulfillment—typically lead the interviewees to engage in feminist action and, subsequently, to act within digital feminist media activism.

Feminist actors in media activism seek rewards beyond career advancement, including personal and professional non-material benefits (Enriquez 1990; Becker 2008; Gaiger 2016; Andrade 2020). These individuals engage in producing feminist content and information about gender equality, which serves multiple purposes. Through this engagement, they position themselves in relation to others and develop relationships within their activist circles (Bernard 2017). The process generates emotional experiences and cultivates a sense of belonging through their activism. This involvement with the social world through media activism enables feminists to become part of a larger community and find purpose beyond traditional career goals.

Media activism is not merely a professional choice or a career-related area of activity. It is enshrined in the routine of these individuals as a lifestyle, where work time merges with other life activities, and the interactions among group participants form a vital space of community activity (Malini and Antoun 2013). Intersecting journalism and feminism, this engaged practice appropriates the characteristics and action strategies of social movements, building an inventive and performative news production environment.

Ethnographic research focusing on transnational connections and spaces, particularly in Brazil and France (Saunier 2004), reveals that feminist media activist groups form solidarity networks. Their cooperation practices strengthen members' sense of belonging to a broader collective. In this context, the internet and particularly social media are integral to this social

world. These socio-technical devices shape collective experiences, presenting both challenges and opportunities for feminist communities while transforming the boundaries of interaction and identity formation (Hine 2017). Digital activism and online communication provide crucial support for engaged media, functioning as networks that nurture these projects with the backing of their audiences.

Contributors to the studied publications have established a support network for women, defined in Bourdieu's terms (1980) as the product of efforts to create and maintain beneficial group relationships. Readers' personal messages expressing gratitude for feminist media's impact reinforce these networks. This feedback highlights the mobilizing power of personal narratives as a key political tool in networked feminism (Joeüt 2018; Hollanda 2019; Pinheiro-Machado 2019).

"The longer the community lasts, the stronger the identity" (Enriquez 1990, 150), a principle evident in the shared identity among feminist media activists that sustains their social world. The longevity of these outlets enhances their visibility, creating a cyclical effect that further supports their continuity. Cooperation within this sphere is built on emotional expressions aligned with community sentiment, serving as a central strategy to promote gender equality and counter hate speech and anti-feminist movements.

This research reveals that feminist media activism projects have successfully reached previously non-feminist readers through engaged content. These media outlets are actively diversifying their collaborators across social, ethnic-racial, economic, and territorial backgrounds, thereby expanding their audience reach. However, interviewees acknowledge the constraints of their activist efforts, particularly in reaching male audiences and women outside their immediate circles. The discrepancy between the actual circulation of content and expectations leads to frustration among activists. As a relatively new social movement, feminism faces challenges beyond media competition, economic models, and organizational practices. Feminist movements struggle to keep their issues and discussions consistently visible and important to their audience because the digital landscape changes so quickly and constantly demands new content. Digital activism, while a tool for change in the political-institutional sphere, has limitations (Bonfim and Nunes 2017) tied to various factors. These include socioeconomic conditions determining web and social media access, age-related differences in digital literacy, and the influence of algorithms in redirecting online interactions. Technology thus has a dual impact on feminist media activism. It accelerates the spread of feminist information and facilitates the organization of engaged actions,

promoting gender equality. Simultaneously, it constrains the potential reach of media activist production due to its inherent limitations.

Both producers and consumers of digital feminist information question the internet's potential for equalizing of power. They recognize that algorithms, marketing strategies, and advertising practices increasingly limit content circulation. These factors tend to amplify extreme—and often hateful—discourses while pushing users with different political views further apart. The use of digital tools by independent media activists to promote social justice and democracy requires careful consideration because, to spread their online content, activists must navigate systems imposed by hegemonic institutions. Tech giants like Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, and Twitter/X control software, search engines, social media, and other key online spaces (Lanham 2007; Smyrnaios 2017), creating an oligopoly in the digital sector and effectively restricting broad web access.

Jouët (2018) argues that digital feminist activism emerges from contemporary neoliberalism, driven by individuals seeking recognition in neoliberal societies. This means that digital practices and feminist engagement stem from global liberal principles, even as feminists critique these same principles. In this context, we must be wary of techno-optimism and technological determinism, recognizing that the internet is not a free space. While social movements use the internet to advocate for social justice, other actors also appropriate it for their interests, such as governments that employ technology to map and monitor activists (Sousa, 2017).

In the realm of feminist media activism, therefore, the challenge is to use cyberspaces to expand communication and exchange multidisciplinary knowledge among activists, fostering feminist consciousness through technology (Bañón 2013). Importantly, to reach diverse audiences and broaden the gender debate, activists must act both online and offline. This multi-site activism moves fluidly between streets and networks, employing parallel techniques in digital and physical spaces to maximize impact and engagement.

Feminist media activists experience moments of doubt and fatigue, grappling with anguish, frustration, and discouragement when faced with the need to constantly reiterate their messages. Despite this, they find renewed motivation through their interactions with the public, both online and offline. The interviewed activists assert that their work in producing feminist content and information about gender equality makes a tangible impact on their communities and countries. This sense of meaningful contribution through their professional efforts reinvigorates their commitment to the cause.

Comparative Insights on Feminist Media Activism in Brazil and France

The comparison between Brazilian and French feminist media reveals notable differences in team composition and fundraising strategies. Brazilian outlets in the study maintain all-women teams, sparking ongoing debates. Some activists advocate for women-only spaces in feminist discourse and content creation, while others push for male inclusion to broaden understanding and engagement. This debate often evolves when team members become parents, especially to sons, prompting reassessment of gender inclusion in feminist spaces. French feminist media projects, conversely, often include men on their staff. Leaders and team members of these publications view male participation as both valid and valuable, seeing it as crucial to their mission of promoting gender equality.

Fundraising approaches also differ significantly. French non-voluntary media actively pursue sponsorships and brand partnerships for financial stability. Brazilian projects, however, show greater reluctance to link feminist agendas with private companies, a hesitation rooted in both journalistic principles and activist ideologies.

In both France and Brazil, the complexities surrounding the monetization of publications pose a significant challenge for teams striving to balance activism with professionalism. Feminist outlets often turn to donor funding as a strategic approach to mobilize communication, raise public awareness, and encourage collaboration to sustain content production. This strategy also serves as a means to circumvent limitations imposed by advertisers. However, for feminist-engaged media in both Brazil and France, relying solely on donor support may not be a viable or sufficient solution, prompting media activists to explore alternative methods to ensure the continuity of their social impact. The financial burdens associated with engagement frequently constrain the capacity for action among contributors to these outlets. This is particularly true for volunteers who, despite their desire to dedicate more time to media activism, must maintain regular employment to support themselves.

The interactive spaces that form the social world of these feminist media communities serve dual purposes. Firstly, they create personal and emotional support networks for contributors and readers. Secondly, they facilitate networking among professionals from various fields, political activists, and digital activists. These networks facilitate global feminist interactions and collaborations. They provide participants with access to job opportunities, professional referrals, and recommendations for relevant services and products. Additionally, these networks connect individuals who share an interest in gender issues, thereby enriching and expanding the broader discourse on gender equality.

Feminist engagement and the production of content aimed at gender equality broaden the actors' circles of contacts and strengthen their socialization, both online and offline, guided by intersectional feminist ideals. Offline interactions involve family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, which activists try to bring closer to the feminist agenda. Online interactions take place via social media with acquaintances and strangers, as well as through publications and other content. The group's interactions transcend the internet, functioning as an "incorporated, embodied and everyday phenomenon" (Hine 2017, 17). This blurs the boundaries between material and virtual realms, causing various media to intersect and resonate with each other (Batista and Souza 2020). Interviewees from both Brazil and France strive to exercise their political-ideological activism in their social groups and usual spaces of operation. For them, digital feminist media activism is more than just a job, hobby, or means of exchanging information. They view this social world as a collective network with transformative potential and, above all, tangible hope.

Tracing Individual Journeys in Collective Feminist Projects

The ethnographic research and interviews with members of the feminist media activism social world reinforce a key insight: the feminist movement's organization allows individual stories to represent a broader, collective dimension of this space structured to combat gender violence. Despite the diverse personal and professional trajectories of media activists, a set of common factors unites these actors within this social world, creating a convergence of narratives.

Feminist media activism borrows and adapts practices from various fields to create a functional and sustainable model. Group members implicitly commit to following conventions that organize participation, task division, and interactions. These conventions constantly interact with other spaces, primarily journalism, from which media activists draw most of their operational practices. Additionally, feminist media activists, especially insiders involved in creating publications and those responsible for fundraising and recruitment, must learn conventions from other fields. These include entrepreneurship, administration, and organizational communication, which are necessary for making projects viable and maintaining them.

Internal divisions within teams shape actors' involvement in media activism, reflecting both formal work relationships and personal ties that pre-exist or develop over time. These dynamics reveal hierarchies within feminist media based on professional and emotional connections. Consequently, the space becomes limited to a profile of media

activists primarily comprising urban, white, highly educated women from prestigious institutions.

The organization and task distribution in feminist media activism involves "insiders," "regulars," and some "floating team." Interviewees describe their social world as being based on high team integration and constant dialogue to align activities across information production, fundraising, social media content, artwork, and design. In all outlets studied, contributors routinely monitor and edit each other's work across all media platforms. Regarding public involvement, interviewed readers alternate between the categories of "tourists" and "regulars," predominantly falling into the latter category based on reports and field observations. These individuals demonstrate continuous commitment to this social world, collectively contributing to its maintenance through engagement and producing original content aimed at promoting gender equality.

In sum, the analysis of trajectories as the organizing axis of social action in feminist media activism reveals that collective identity and a sense of belonging foster engagement and continuity. This shared space functions not only as a work environment but also as a supportive network, inspiring hope for transformative potential through personal connections.

Interviewees collective narrative reinforces the inherently community nature of digital feminist media activism, aligning with Becker's (1982) concept of social worlds. This practice relies on support staff, with audience feedback serving as a primary motivation for media activists. The social world's structures also highlight forms of violence and domination affecting both activists and their audiences. These groups mobilize various forms of capital—social, cultural, economic, and symbolic—to engage in producing or consuming gender-perspective information. The Bourdieusian approach provides a theoretical framework to reconceptualize gender as a social category, offering insights into the consequences of viewing gender as socially constructed. This perspective incorporates everyday details into a broader social analysis of power (Moi 1991). While contemporary women's positions in power structures are more complex than Bourdieu's theories suggest, this theoretical lens helps understand the forces directly influencing the studied practice.

Power structures play a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of feminist media, contributing to their stability and continuity. Media activists often leverage their positions of power to advance feminist projects. The socio-economic backgrounds, geographical locations, and educational institutions of key members, especially founders, significantly influence the visibility, recognition, and direction of these projects. These factors

shape the composition of the group in terms of class, race, and territory. Hence, a key finding of this study challenges the notion of horizontality often associated with feminist activism. The studied outlets reproduce business hierarchies within their structures. This results in power imbalances where designated leaders or coordinators wield more influence, while others have limited voice or space. Consequently, some employees feel less valued or heard than others. The study also uncovers co-optation mechanisms (Juban et al. 2015) in recruitment processes. Media outlets frequently select new members from existing networks or acquaintances. This practice limits the diversity of profiles, stories, and experiences within digital feminist media activism.

Anger emerges as a central motivating force for digital activism and political engagement among the interviewees. This emotion arises when they observe or personally experience gender inequalities, spurring them to engage in the production or consumption of feminist content and information about social justice. In this context, emotions are transformed into tools or techniques, as described by Ahmed (2014), and a new form of action is created from pre-existing feelings, sensations, or emotions. The actions of both media activists and readers are driven by a complex emotional landscape, including outrage at the persistent lack of gender equality (anger), concerns that hard-won rights may be lost (fear), and joy and fulfilment derived from the belief that their actions are positively impacting other women and feminized individuals. Notably, satisfaction appears to be the predominant emotion, encouraging both media activists and their audience to maintain their engagement with the social world of feminist media activism.

The interviewees' narratives consistently reveal a desire to transform social structures. These actors aim to counter the attacks on solidarity-based forms of organization—such as the promotion of individualism and social distancing—led by institutions aligned with neoliberal principles of wealth and power concentration (Chomsky, 2017). Through their activism, they seek to transform the various social worlds they inhabit. This shared desire for change acts as a unifying factor, motivating both media activists and their audiences to invest in engaged actions. Although interviewees recognize the limited impact of their productions or dissemination efforts, the experience of collective mobilization provides the necessary incentive to continue their engagement with feminist agendas, despite these limitations. As noted by Pinheiro-Machado (2019), once individuals experience the power of being, organizing, and living in a community, they develop a strong sense of belonging that makes leaving these spaces undesirable and nearly impossible.

The feminist media activist groups operate on multiple fronts, ranging from amplifying readers' testimonies to give voice to previously silenced women, to engaging in institutional actions and campaigns that influence state-level policies to combat sexism. This article's primary contribution is presenting the world of digital feminist media activism, which emerged primarily from 2015 onwards, from the perspective of its constituent actors. The research serves as a platform for welcoming and listening, where information producers, support teams, and audiences can express themselves and share their experiences with feminist content engagement. The functioning and participation processes within this practice are founded on cooperative forms whose continuity is linked to shared emotional expressions of euphoria, pleasure, solidarity, and hope. These socialized emotions sustain the maintenance of the space and the engagement of its participants.

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Appendix: Research Design and Interview Questions

Interviewee Selection

Interviewees were selected from project websites, social media profiles, and professional networks. For readers, I identified profiles on Facebook and Instagram that interacted through comments with the studied publications. I then accessed each of these profiles, analyzed the published content, and liked posts connected to feminist agendas (in text or images) to create links and affinities with potential interviewees. This process only applied to open profiles or those with some open content. I kept my social media profiles open to the public so that these women and (a few) men could find out more about me, and see who I am and what I identify with. I let potential interviewees get to know me so that they would feel more comfortable introducing themselves.

Interview Timeline and Process

I conducted interviews between October 2020 and November 2022, with 33 in Brazil and 30 in France. For each publication, I interviewed approximately five contributors and five readers. Interviews were primarily conducted remotely via various digital platforms, with a few in-person interviews in France.

All interviews were recorded with permission and later transcribed. A total of 58 hours and 20 minutes of interviews were recorded across both countries. Interviews were conducted in the native language of each country, with two exceptions in France where English and Spanish were used.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed, including obtaining consent from participants. Media activists agreed to be named, while readers' identities were partially anonymized as per their preferences. In cases where personal information needed to be protected, testimonies were presented without naming individuals.

Interview Structure

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used, based on pre-prepared scripts but allowing for flexibility. Three types of scripts were developed: for content producers, support team members, and audience members. The interviews covered personal and

professional trajectories, experiences with feminism, and interactions within the social world of feminist media activism.

Examples of Interview Questions

1. Core Questions (for all participants)

1.1. Demographics

- Gender
- State (where you live)
- Age
- Profession
- Education/Training

1.2. Feminist Identity

- Are you a feminist? Why are you a feminist?
- What does being a feminist mean to you?
- When and how did you discover that you had an affinity with the feminist agenda?
- Do you participate in feminist activist groups? Which ones? What is/was it like?
- Do you feel in any way bullied for identifying with the feminist cause?
- Have you ever suffered threats or any kind of violence for aligning yourself with feminism?

1.3. Media and Feminism

- How do you think the media in general approaches the issue of violence against women?
- Does the media address structural sexism in society? If so, how?
- And how does the media approach the issue of decriminalizing abortion?
- What about the position of women in the labor market?
- How do you think fake news affects the feminist movement?

1.4. Pandemic Impact

- How has the pandemic affected your work?
- In your opinion, what impact has the pandemic had on the feminist movement?
- In your opinion, what impact has the pandemic had on feminist media initiatives and/or similar initiatives?

2. For Media Professionals (Editors, Columnists, Support Team)

2.1. Career Path

- Can you tell us about your professional career until you joined the independent feminist media project?
- Why did you decide to work for an initiative that does feminist journalism?
- Is this a financially viable choice for you?
- What is different between the feminist initiative and your previous work?
- What are the similarities between your previous work and your work in the feminist initiative?
- Do you enjoy what you do?
- How would you rate your professional career to date?
- Who are the people responsible for maintaining the website, building and updating the page, posting on social media, raising money, and funding to keep the initiative going? Do you have contact? What is this relationship like?
- In your opinion, what keeps the initiative going?

2.2. Work Dynamics

- What is a typical working day like?
- What tasks do you perform and how do you organize yourself to carry them out?
- Who do you interact with on a daily routine?
- How are tasks distributed among the team? Are there agenda meetings? Are there content production targets?
- Does the initiative have a physical space in which to carry out its work?
- How are working hours organized?
- What is your relationship like with your colleagues who also work for the initiative?
- How is the team's relationship with sources?
- Who do you write for? What is your reader's profile?
- Does the initiative have haters? How is your relationship with them?
- What is the team's relationship like with other independent media and feminist media groups?
- What role do technology and the internet play in the development of the group's activities?

2.3. Content and Impact

- Is what you do journalism?
- How does dealing with sensitive issues such as violence against women affect your routine?
- How do you think your work affects society?

- How does the initiative deal with the current situation of widespread dissemination of fake news?

2.4. Personal Reflections

- How does work affect your family life?
- Has your view of feminism changed since you started working in feminist journalism?
- Has your relationship with your partner changed?
- How do you feel when you carry out activities for the feminist initiative?
- What gives you the most satisfaction at work?
- What makes you most dissatisfied at work?

2.5. Additional Questions for Specific Roles

For Editors/Columnists

- Who are the people responsible for maintaining the website, building and updating the page, posting on social media, raising money, and funding to keep the initiative going? Do you have contact? What is this relationship like?
- In your opinion, what keeps the initiative going?

For Support Team

- How does the dynamic of cooperation between the team work?
- How important are the activities you carry out for the group as a whole?

3. For Public/Readers

3.1. Engagement with Feminist Media

- What motivates you to follow the work of the feminist journalism initiative?
- When and how did you find out about the initiative? And how did you start following the work?
- Do you also read/watch/listen to content from other similar initiatives?
- Which device do you use to access the content of the feminist media initiative?
- How do you access this content (portal, social media)?
- Where do you access it from (home, work, street)? How often do you access it? And what days and times do you access it?
- Can you name any subject/content that made an impression on you?
- Do you usually interact with the initiative (through comments, shares)?
- During the pandemic, did you start to follow the initiative more or less? Why?

- In your opinion, what impact has the pandemic had on feminist media initiatives and/or similar initiatives?
- As a reader, how do you deal with the current situation of widespread dissemination of fake news?
- In your opinion, how does fake news affect the feminist media initiative and/or similar initiatives?

3.2. Comparative Analysis

- What differences do you see between the coverage of this initiative and that of the traditional media?
- And what similarities do you see between the two covers?
- Do you think the initiative interacts with the public? Why?
- What positive features of this initiative would you highlight? Why?
- And what negative characteristics would you highlight? Why?

3.3. Personal Impact

- How has this identification with feminism affected your life?
- Do you live with other people who share your point of view? How is your relationship with them?
- How is your identification with this cause reflected in your relationship with your family?
- And how is this reflected in your relationships with friends? And in the workplace?