The Transnational Construction and Maintenance of Digital Feminist Media Activism: Engagement Practices in the Global South and North

Mariana Fagundes-Ausani[ID]
University of Brasilia and University of Rennes

Abstract: The article observes, from a transitional perspective, how feminist activists appropriate digital spaces to produce informative content about gender equity and how they organise themselves to maintain feminist media projects in terms of content production and public access to this information. The research focuses on analysing three Brazilian publications (*AzMina*, *Lado M*, and *Think Olga*) and three French ones (*Georgette Sand*, *Les Glorieuses*, and *Madmoizelle*). The global North-South category is mobilised to propose a dialogue between feminist journalism practices in Brazil and France, using both countries because they are important players on the international geopolitical scene. I use theories of gender studies and feminism as bibliographical support and draw on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism correlated with social worlds from a Beckerian perspective to trace the conventions and forms of cooperation, interaction, and negotiation used by the journalists and contributors to these publications. The methodology is based on in-depth interviews with actors who participate to different degrees in the composition of the world (of feminist media activism) – content producers, support teams, and audiences – and direct observation of the practices developed by participants in these spaces to enable a multi-site comparison and provide transnational evidence of the ways in which digital feminist media work.
Keywords: transnational feminisms, digital media activism, engagement

For more than a decade, we have seen a variety of feminist initiatives emerge on the internet, which are of different persuasions but have in common the use of digital tools to disseminate content. In this context, neofeminism has emerged, a concept that defines the new women's political movements emerging in the 21st century, driven by mobilisations from the Global South – from countries such as Brazil, Egypt, and India (Borba, Moreira 2015; Pinheiro-Machado 2019). This phenomenon is strongly connected to the internet, enabling a combination of digital practices and actions in the physical space (Jouët 2022).

This article analyses a segment of digital feminism, feminist media activism, which, in short, is the process in which feminist activists use sociotechnical devices to build new forms of creation and writing on the web using digital technology, online platforms, social media, and the appropriation of journalistic techniques. This is a new digital practice, which has been gaining momentum since 2015, in which feminist collectives, NGOs, and publications share information on the internet relating to the gender debate and the rights of women and feminised groups. Although they are projects with different statuses (non-governmental organisations, collectives, women's magazines, feminist magazines, websites), they share the central aim of producing quality feminist information, based on journalistic investigations and precepts of form and writing derived from standard reporting.

Based on fieldwork and 63 in-depth interviews with actors who make up the space of feminist media activism in Brazil and France, this paper uses ethnography as a methodology for understanding the construction of the social world[1] (Becker 1982; Morrissette, Guignon, Demazière 2011) of feminist media activism and its ways of functioning. Thirty interviews were conducted in France and 33 in Brazil with different participants in the social world (reporters, editors, columnists, readers, and accounting and fundraising teams, etc.) from October 2020 to November 2022. The relevance of the work is that it proposes listening to in-depth accounts of the trajectories of the members of this space and monitoring, through field research, the forms of cooperation and negotiation the group uses to maintain their projects.

Media activist content has a collaborative, intersectional, and activist character and is concerned with extending the narrative to defend certain causes, involve the public, and pluralise the debate on gender through feminist media activism (Santos, Miguel 2019). Groups that produce media activism have started to use digital-media technologies to carry out engaged interventions. To mediatise the content they

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[1] The notion, proposed by Becker (1982), is based on the interactionist view that the social world is a procedural entity, which is continuously being constructed/constituted and reconstructed/reconstituted through the interactions between actors and the cross-interpretations that organise the exchanges between them (Morrissette et al. 2011: 1).

produce, they rely on sociotechnical devices. The term sociotechnical proposes the observation of technology as an interrelational system that combines technical and sociological characteristics (Coutant 2015), in an articulation between the technical sphere and the complexity of the social (Miège 2007), which includes the use of the internet and social networks for various purposes and the use of computers, cell phones, smartphones, geolocators (GPS), and other technological instruments that enable socialisation between people. Media activists orientate their action strategies towards ensuring that information is up to date, which is made possible by the absence of a programme schedule. They exploit the technical possibilities of mobile communication by streaming transmissions and are able to publish videos and photos on social networks on a minute-by-minute basis (Sousa 2017). In terms of production, professional activists use a variety of audiovisual formats, such as videos, audio, images, memes, and gifs, as well as texts, and seek to carry out mobile and cyber-digital journalism.

Media activism is, therefore, a phenomenon that predates the internet and interactions on digital networks, but which is being strengthened in a scenario of mutations that are transforming the medium and altering processes of the production, reception, and circulation of content. However, the movement is by no means limited to the online environment, it is a practice that is built up as it permeates the stories and intimacies of the actors who make up the milieu and who insert themselves into events in such a way as to ensure that media activism goes beyond the simple fusion of the notions of media and activism (Braighi, Câmara 2018). It is a concept that is expressed not only through words and techniques but above all through people.

Feminist media also find support in networked productions, tracing new forms of creation and writing from technology (Lemos 2009) and using these spaces to implement their desires for a less hierarchical militancy (Blandin 2017) in relation to traditional militant bodies such as trade unions. In cyberspace, publications can engage in debates that journalists are not usually able to delve into when writing for the hegemonic media (Ferreira, Vizer 2007; Andrade, Pereira 2022), bringing up agendas that deal with human rights or the rights of women, LGBTI+ groups, and racialised people. Appropriating new media is more than an instrumental process, it is also a cultural and social movement (Manovich 2005), a way for minority groups to make themselves socially visible, giving rise to a new way for them to politically exercise their rights (Martín-Barbero 2014: 108).

A sociotechnical community dimension was then created within the feminist movement, which was used by activists to mobilise, giving rise to the concept of cyberfeminism, which refers to all the possibilities offered by technologies for society to break free from patriarchy (Blandin 2017). An example of the appropriation of digital tools by the feminist movement is the communication strategies of the 'Ni Una Menos'

movement in countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. The mobilisation was a form of offline activism facilitated by information and communication technologies. Extending this specific case to the world of online activism, it is possible to list the impacts of the use of technology on political action: rapid interaction, the multiplier effect, internal organisation, network cohesion, and global reach. The use of ICTs by cyberactivists has facilitated the mobilisation of participation and the coordination of actions and has been used as a tactical tool in itself (Accossatto, Sendra 2018: 123).

Driven by cyberfeminism, publications such as magazines, websites, NGOs, and feminist collectives are sharing information in the digital environment related to the gender debate and the rights of women and feminised groups, giving rise to the notion of digital feminist media activism. Without neglecting professional techniques and ethics (Sousa 2017), media activism absorbs resources characteristic of network communication to reach out to the public. For example, it uses hashtags, terms associated with information that have high potential for organising and distributing content (Hollanda 2019).

The activists of this new generation are experts in the production of visual narratives (images, video, etc.) and in the use of unconventional repertoires of action (such as humour and satire) aimed at the internet (Jouët 2018). Feminist publications require certain know-how and specific digital production skills from their contributors (Jouët 2022). Sociotechnical devices contribute to the propagation of a journalistic production model that includes concepts of activism and allows the focus to shift away from strictly factual news, deepening the coverage of issues related to human rights. The construction of a digital technoculture (Van Dijck 2013) allows media activists to use technology and rely on the skills that members of the group who are more proficient with these tools have to amplify their activism and compensate, in some way, for the considerable discrepancy in funding for their projects and for traditional media journalism.

Methodological paths

The article is based on an analysis of feminist and digital media activism projects – in other words, an analysis of online publications that produce journalistic information, claim to be feminist, and focus on the gender debate. In Brazil, through the Agência Pública project, which mapped independent journalism in the country, it was possible to identify 18 proposals that fall within this scope. In France, bibliographical readings and studies mapping gender activism and journalism in the country over the last few decades revealed 14 such publications (Bard, Chaperon 2017; Blandin 2017; Hache-Bissette 2017; Olivesi 2017; Jouët 2022).

I decided which projects to select based on their social media profiles, interactions (measured by engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments), and their numbers of followers. The selected projects in Brazil are the *Think Olga* NGO, the magazine *AzMina*, and the website *Lado M*. The selected projects in France are the *Georgette Sand* collective, the newsletter *Les Glorieuses*, and the magazine *Madmoizelle*.

To choose what media activists to interview, I checked the 'about us' tab or equivalent on the websites of each selected media project. When the names were not clearly listed on the websites, I turned to the projects' LinkedIn page to locate the participants. Some names were also located via social media or on the projects' websites. To locate readers, I used the strategy of identifying profiles on social networks that interact through comments with the publications studied.

Over the course of four years (between 2019 and 2023), digital ethnographies were conducted in the content publication spaces of the projects studied and, when there were physical offices or face-to-face meetings, in the newsrooms and meeting spaces of the media activists. As for the number of interviews, for each publication I tried to talk to five of its contributors (which includes support staff, as well as reporters, columnists, designers, among others) and five readers. In the process, I discovered that there were no or very few men on the project teams. Likewise, male readers were sparse and those I did find and contact did not get back to me, with the exception of one reader of the *Lado M* website, who is the only male representative of the audience of these projects.

In general, the interviews were conducted remotely, via conventional phone calls, audio calls on WhatsApp, or video calls on Zoom or Instagram, depending on the preference of each interviewee. Face-to-face interviews were conducted only with the French media activists – since the period of interviews in Brazil took place during the pandemic – and only with those who accepted or preferred to meet me face-to-face (there were five in total).

The in-depth interviews had a semi-structured format, based on scripts of questions prepared in advance, which allowed me, however, some freedom to go down paths that were not initially planned. The interview scripts were divided into three types: the first focused on feminist media content producers (reporters, columnists, editors), the second focused on the support team (with more specific questions about what kind of work they do and what their roles and influences are within the group), and the third was designed to be applied to audiences. I tried to let the interviewees tell their own life stories. The interviews mainly covered the professional and personal trajectories of the feminist media activists and their readers. From there, it was possible to understand the group's path in terms of careers, journalism, and political activism.

From South to North – transnational digital feminisms

The political, social, and historical differences between Brazil and France indicate that the development of the feminist movement did not take place in parallel in these countries. In Brazil, at the beginning of the 1970s, an ongoing military dictatorship was at its height, while in France feminists were winning important rights in terms of gender politics, such as access to legal and safe abortion for all. These mismatches in the activist scene and in the progress made on equality issues are still reflected today in the way feminist activism is organised in each country and in the way the social world of feminist media is constructed from North to South. This is because the experiences and trajectories of the people who make up this world are equally affected by historical and political events.

Sociohistorical research themes, such as economic development, industrial policy, race and ethnic relations, national identities, the emergence of democratic and authoritarian governments and gender and women's rights, have gained prominence (Rueschemeyer, Mahoney 2003). Drawing a parallel between cases in Brazil and France as representative of the global South and North seems therefore to support the application of a transnational perspective to analysing the world of digital feminist media activism, permeated by the context of engagement based on the use of sociotechnical devices.

Elements of national identity and the habits of using technology or even militant and activist tools make observing these two cases more dynamic as the field unfolds and analyses begin to emerge. Factors such as digital immersion, for example, make Brazilian militant movements stand out in activism on networks, where new techniques of militancy and engaged action are launched online. This happened with media activism initiatives in Brazil in 2015, long before MeToo and its developments in France.

The interdependence of phenomena between different places is linked to factors such as globalisation, reciprocal influences, an increase in the cross-cutting nature of public policies, and the growing role of international actors in terms of public actions (Hassenteufel 2014). It is this context that has led me to conduct transnational research on a recent sociopolitical phenomenon that is unfolding not only in Brazil and France but around the world.

Sociodemographic profiles of media activists and audiences

Understanding elements of the trajectories of media activists and audiences from a demographic, age, ethnic, and gender perspective can help us understand how their performances are reflected in the exploitation of activist and journalistic practices and allows us to better situate them in the social world.

Among media activists, there is a concentration of young women in their twenties and thirties from an upper-middle- or upper-class background with higher education, who are producing feminist information on the internet. Considering the ethnic-demographic data for Brazil, where more than half of the population is racialised, there seems to be less racial diversity in Brazilian publications, with French media being more inclusive, even though concerns about intersectional and decolonial agendas are more strongly expressed in the narratives of the Brazilian interviewees.

A significant share of the professionals interviewed live in large urban centres, not least because of the demands of their work and the geographical concentration of media systems and/or activism in feminist projects. The vast majority of the group live in metropolitan areas with more than 1 million inhabitants, and they are mainly concentrated in the greater São Paulo area and in and around Paris. The dynamics of the world of feminist media activists follow the logic observed by Becker (1982) about dissident social worlds, which begin with a local reach and then, if they manage to establish themselves, achieve a distribution that reaches other locations. More details on the group's demographic information are available in Appendix 1.

As for the sociodemographic profile of readers, of the 30 people interviewed (14 Brazilians and 16 French speakers) who read, watch or listen to content produced by feminist publications, 29 are women. Only one man who is part of the feminist media audience agreed to take part in the research.

Just 2 interviewees, both French, declared themselves to be racialised. Another 14 people indicated that they considered themselves white (8 Brazilians and 6 French). There were also 14 individuals who did not refer to racial issues (8 Francophones and 6 Brazilians). Possibly because they didn't consider the issue to be relevant in the narrative of their own trajectories, which would indicate that racial inequalities tend to affect this group less directly and that these readers have been less sensitised to the anti-racist debate in their activist journeys.

Unlike the media activists who collaborate directly with feminist media, readers live in cities and regions with smaller urban agglomerations, generally below 1 million inhabitants. Contrary to what I initially assumed, the publications seem to be reaching regions that go beyond the main centres of journalistic production and financial concentration in their respective countries. Information from digital feminist media projects is reaching audiences in small and medium-sized towns, peripheral regions, and even rural areas.

Regarding the academic and professional profiles of the readers interviewed, there is a clear concentration of individuals from the humanities, a group that numbers 25 people. Only 5 readers have a background in the exact or biological sciences. The significant presence of readers linked to the field of communications among the interviewees is also worth noting, with 6 people having a degree in this area. Also

noteworthy is the number of people whose professions relate to the field of art and culture, who accounted for around one-third of the public interviewed. A summary of the readers' demographic information is available in Appendix 2.

Thus, it can be seen that the groups of collaborators in the projects analysed here, who come from different locations and socioeconomic backgrounds, are different ages, and whose media activist and feminist practices are being transnationalised, are trying to create, through the production of digital feminist information, an inclusive and unifying narrative that is effective in combining spontaneity and organisation and new and old activist practices at the national level, but with global potential.

The main aspects characterising digital feminist media activism

Actors in the world of digital feminist media activism are motivated to participate in this world by the possibility/opportunity to explore a professional path that has the potential for social impact through engaged action. These publications seek to produce journalism with a gender perspective, creating content informed by the concept of diversity and seeking out a polyphony of sources, in an anti-patriarchal logic of breaking with the hegemony of male voices. These are incipient initiatives by young professionals in independent journalism, using multimedia language, with their own production logic, generally without consolidated financial autonomy (Rocha, Dancosky 2018: 407). Media activists value the fact that in feminist media it is possible to write about one's own experiences and give the journalistic content a certain personal touch. The practice moves through the mobilisation of personal narratives to deal with the collective, a characteristic of the new feminisms (Hollanda 2018; Pinheiro-Machado 2019).

Feminist media activist publications are not horizontal. These structures reproduce the forms of organisation observed by Ferron (2016) in the context of French-speaking alternative media, where relationships based on an unequal distribution of economic, political, and journalistic capital exist in such a way as to allow a group of people to occupy dominant positions over others. There is a reproduction of business logic within the groups, which means that women who are appointed leaders or coordinators have more power, while others have less space or voice. For example, the existence of exclusive communication groups for specific people has been identified, where the inclusion of members is based on emotional criteria and not necessarily on professional and technical grounds.

These hierarchical and emotional configurations mean that some employees feel less listened to and taken seriously than others. Co-optation mechanisms[2] (Juban et

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[2] Understood as the search for and selection of a candidate within a restricted network of people known directly or indirectly or through recommendations from members of that network (Juban et al. 2015).

al. 2015) were observed in the recruitment processes and the access and permanence of new members in the social world, with recurring cases of media outlets that tend to choose people they know or who belong to circles of acquaintances to make up their teams, limiting the expansion of the diversity of repertoires – in terms of profiles, stories, and experiences – within the scope of digital feminist media activism.

Existing relationships and personal affinities between actors seem to factor more immediately into the structuring of this practice and into the ways in which media activists organise and interact with each other, forming subgroups and segments within the world. The hierarchies within feminist media, which seem to be based not only on professional relationships but especially on emotional ties, prevent publications from achieving greater representation and heterogeneity within their teams and, consequently, from producing content that reflects this diversity, resulting in unequal distributions of resources and power. In the case of feminist publications, cooptation dynamics limit the space to a profile of media activists that is largely made up of white women from big cities and with higher education degrees from renowned institutions.

Media activism reproduces the unequal distribution of the – economic and political – capital of hegemonic journalism, so that these imbalances allow certain individuals or groups to occupy dominant positions in the social world, while others – notably those who work as occasional collaborators, volunteers, or freelancers – become dominated. Despite the precarity that engaged media inherit from journalism, however, these publications have the advantage of offering symbolic rewards (Ferron 2016) – of social and cultural capital – that compensate for the voluntary or low-paid nature of professional practice.

Forms of team interaction and organisation

Intersections with other worlds allow people from outside the world of journalism to participate in feminist media activism, as is the case with a third of the contributors interviewed. Most of this group invests themselves in support activities, working mainly to raise material resources for the group, recruit staff, and create and maintain networks of contacts for these publications. However, as the teams are small, more than half of them are also assigned to writing and editing processes and in this way they are introduced to journalistic conventions.

In terms of work organisation, there is a certain flexibility for the actors to divide up the tasks and choose their topics of interest to work on. Generally, each one deals with a subject that has to do with their area of training (journalism, writing, music, administration) or with professional or personal experiences (such as talking about the experiences of a Latin American woman taking part in an exchange programme in Europe or writing about the experience of being a disabled woman), and they can

dedicate themselves to other topics depending on the circumstances. The editors, for example, specialise in different themes, while the support staff are allocated to areas such as fundraising and community management. Decision-making processes are centred on the group's leaders, who are responsible for determining fundraising methods, strategies for recruiting people, and the distribution of tasks between teams. These professionals have long-standing ties to the publications and in most cases have been part of the teams since the given project's inception or early days.

It is the financial relationships that tend to determine the forms of participation and engagement of collaborators in the projects' publications. Half of the media activists interviewed work for pay. The other half join publications to do voluntary work. Volunteering is concentrated in publications that do not have regular or direct funding (the *Lado M* website and *Georgette Sand* collective), which do not seek to monetise their projects. A third of media activists say they don't need to have an extra job beyond the one at the feminist publication where they work, since they are employed as full-time members of the media and, financially, this job is viable for them. The 20 interviewees who are not permanent members of the media outlets studied have alternative jobs to their work as feminist media activists. Most of them are journalists who combine more than one occupation (freelancer, regular journalist for another media outlet, communications consultant, writer and creator of their own feminist publication). The others are professionals in other areas: teachers and financial auditors.

There are also interviewees who contribute unpaid to feminist media as columnists. This group's professional relationship with the publications is based on being given space on the website in exchange for creating content – generally not on a regular basis and with no deadlines – which, although it doesn't involve financial benefits, generates prestige and visibility for both parties. The permanent staff of *AzMina*, *Les Glorieuses*, *Madmoizelle* and *Think Olga* are only hired for a fee.

As for the volunteers, as well as believing in the feminist cause, they keep volunteering because their activist work gives them personal satisfaction and professional recognition, as they gain visibility in the media by being part of feminist project teams. They also report using the publications as laboratory spaces where they can develop creative exercises and experiment with new content, from which we can infer that the writing and editing practices of feminist publications are based on conventional journalistic standards but go beyond them. Media activists appropriate the precepts of media activism as a social and political phenomenon, acting as a laboratory for innovation and experimentation with media and social models capable of creating forms of self-management of communication (Pasquinelli 2002).

The ways in which media activists participate in publications refers to new organisational arrangements for work and financial support, in which companies, associa-

tions, individual micro-entrepreneurships, and other formats make news production possible. More than just a legal form of employment relationship, these arrangements have become alternative spaces for the survival of journalistic activity and converge in the search for creative ways to carry out news production, although these organisations often do not offer paid work (Figaro, Marques 2020).

The formats of professional participation in and contribution to engaged media have been rendered more flexible by the modern-day configurations of capitalism and the increased use of the internet, where there are looser employment ties and more work is being done on the basis of informal, fixed-term, or freelance contracts by workers who are working remotely or in a hybrid arrangement and often combining more than one form of paid activity. On the one hand, the financial fragility of the interviewees is exacerbated by the precariousness of their careers as journalists, while on the other hand their digital activism and use of sociotechnical devices in their work expand the possibilities for greater visibility and professional recognition. Thus, the experience of media activism is marked by financial precariousness as opposed to the constitution of professional and cooperative networks of action, enhanced by the circulation of information through the digital space.

Thus, it is possible to identify an important distinction between the ways in which feminist media are organised and maintained: there are publications that have permanent funding (which constitute themselves as media companies or NGOs, for example) and can offer fixed employment or at least some form of remuneration to their collaborators; and there are organisations that are fundamentally based on volunteering.

This means that publications that fall into the first group – the magazines *AzMina* and *Madmoizelle*, the newsletter *Les Glorieuses*, and the *Think Olga* NGO – choose to allocate a larger number of people (around a third of their members) to financial and administrative activities in order to find ways to support themselves financially. The content producers and support staff recognise that, although there is personal pleasure and professional recognition to be derived from the practice of producing information of an engaged nature, the difficulty of obtaining funding cuts across the social world and, consequently, the routines and work of the actors who make up that world. The predominant view of media leaders and regular collaborators is that funding is a key element in guaranteeing the continuity of publications. These publications are more akin to those in the world of journalism and business communication and want to pay their collaborators. The media activists behind these publications believe that to produce and disseminate engaging information, it is necessary to give in to commercial and market logic.

Publications that are structured without the support of private companies and sponsors, such as *AzMina* magazine and the Georgette Sand collective, rely more heavily on collective funding and contributions from the public. The interviewees

who worked in the hegemonic media before joining the world of media activism and who work in publications without advertisers emphasise the advantages of doing financially independent journalism, without having to adapt to the demands of private sponsors. Some of the publications analysed (*Les Glorieuses*, *Madmoizelle* and *Think Olga*), however, choose to resort to financial support from private companies and institutions to guarantee the maintenance of their projects.

In short, the informational and journalistic publications analysed here seek to reconcile private sponsorship with public funding and state fundings to support social projects. In these cases, the media activists try to make it clear in the content that there is funding, specifying in their materials who the sponsors are. Across the board, the instability of projects is a constraint that surrounds media activists' narratives and creates a fear in them that their activist actions will not continue. In the world of feminist media activism, financial factors seem to be the main obstacle to the functioning of this space. The funds raised by the publications directly influence the channels' production routines (Duarte et al. 2017), so that when they get more funding, they consequently produce more content and increase their teams, and vice versa.

The forces and conventions surrounding feminist media activism

The world of digital feminist media activism is constantly influenced by forces that come from the economic, political and technological fields, and the dependence on or autonomy of each publication from these fields varies according to the status and forms of funding and maintenance of the groups. As engaged media gain visibility in other worlds, such as journalism and culture, an expanded network of actors is formed who are engaged in promoting these information production spaces, backed by networks of sponsorships from individuals and legal entities – such as companies and institutions.

Feminist media activism takes conventions from the world of journalism, with which it intersects and dialogues directly, to establish itself as a practice for producing information that is recognised as serious and reliable. In the interviews with contributors to the publications studied, what stood out was the concern with using journalistic techniques of verification and checking in the production of content. The audiences also emphasised the use of investigative journalism resources in the work of media activists, listing the statistical and data base of feminist media as the most relevant resource when asked about the differences between them and hegemonic newspapers. The world of media activism is also based on the conventions of political militancy, with the foundations of militantism underpinning the ways in which projects are conducted and maintained, from financial capture mechanisms to the very involvement of collaborators in activist spaces, a relationship that transcends the professional and personal lives of group members.

Therefore, the circulation of conventions and the ways in which conventional models reach the world of feminist media activism are processes associated with the collaborators' relationships with the journalistic production environment, with the practices of using sociotechnical devices, such as computers and cell phones, and with immersion in feminist collectives and militant movements and/or with the engagement of individuals in activist actions. The ways of working in these environments are absorbed and reproduced or adapted to a focus on producing feminist information.

The regular renewal and expansion of the teams, with the arrival of young professionals, also seem to contribute to the maintenance of the feminist media, which is immersed in a mutational context intrinsic to the digital environment and therefore needs to find ways to reinvent itself permanently. This observation reveals, on the one hand, a mechanism for renewing conventions by rejuvenating newsrooms. On the other hand, it implies limiting the possibility for contributors to develop career projects in these publications. Feminist media, then, maintain themselves while creating tactics to reinvent themselves over the years and as technologies change. There is a feedback loop between the public's demand for feminist media content – not only from women but also from men who want to understand gender debates from a didactic perspective – and the need for feminist publications to count on the financial support of these publics to continue to exist. In other words, the maintenance of publications depends on the support of individuals, as both donors, funders, and distributors of media activist products.

In addition, changes in the world of journalism itself influence the establishment and maintenance of the world of media activism. Engaged digital media emerged at a time when the profession of journalist was being transformed in the face of sociotechnical devices and in response to the repositioning of audiences, who are also beginning to produce content. At the same time, the intersection with activism allows the group to create new production spaces and encourages professionals who produce engaged information to rethink notions of neutrality and objectivity. For the journalists interviewed who used to work for hegemonic newspapers, these changes encourage them to redefine their career paths and move closer to producing activist information.

Digital feminist media activism is constituted not just by the sum of individual and separate practices behind it, but rather also through a dynamic and collective infrastructure moulded by cultural elements that encompass the specific characteristics of each locality or region in which the publications are developed, but which integrate experiences from multiple realities and territories. The transnational nature of the publications allows hope and optimism to circulate among the professionals, backed by the confidence that it is possible to improve situations of social injustice.

Choosing to adhere to the practice of digital feminist media activism seems to be a way for the contributors to this space to amplify emotions of hope in their daily professional and personal lives. The intersections between journalism, digital activism, and feminist political engagement create a transnational social world, maintained by bonds of identification and empathy between the media activists themselves and their audiences. Media activism is not merely a professional choice or a career-related area of activity; it is enshrined in the routine of these people as a model of life, in which working time merges with time for other activities linked to living, and interactions between the group's participants form a vital space of community activity (Malini, Antoun 2013). Intersecting journalism and feminism, this engaged practice appropriates the characteristics and action strategies of social movements, building an inventive, performative and effective news production environment.

A new form of activism in the face of old gender barriers

Within the context of the reproduction of hegemonic forces, journalism tends to replicate the wider general inequalities in society, so that the professional culture of journalism generally adopts a masculine point of view of what is news and what is not (Wolf 1992; Silva 2010). Journalistic practice encompasses social representations about women and men, as well as expectations about the social roles of the actors who make up the world of journalism (Machado, Schons, Melo-Dourado 2019). In general, culture takes on male interpretations of what should or should not become news, since decisions about what is worth watching or not are based on men's points of view.

In an attempt to subvert this structure, feminist media try to construct discourses that reflect on gender as a way of giving meaning to power relations (Scott 1986), while at the same time dealing with their own constructions and deconstructions of stereotypes that perpetuate forms of domination. They make writing and news production choices that are different from the traditional ones, using new conventions relating to news values and production processes that permeate journalism. To realise this shift in discourse and modes of information production, feminist media activists end up using formats from the so-called women's press and recreate and reinforce these models online.

There are discursive and content equivalences between these strands, with the feminist press using strategies that come from the women's press, such as the use of the first person singular or the second person plural in texts, the use of lists and tutorials, and the use of more informal and relaxed language to get closer to the reader (Lévêque 2009; Olivesi 2017). But there are also relevant differences, such as the fact that feminist journalism often covers topics related to the body, but in a way

that tries to give them a perspective that encourages women to feel good even if their bodies don't meet the socially stipulated standards of weight, measurements, size, and colour. By making use of resources and themes from the so-called women's press, feminist media activism publications offer, for example, texts in the form of entertainment tips (which range from advice on love relationships, motherhood, and work to movie and series suggestions) – a recurring content presentation strategy in magazines conventionally aimed at women (Bittelbrun 2019) – while still producing in-depth investigative reports – based on the methods of informative journalism. At the same time, they use technological tools to disseminate their content.

Feminist media activism is guided by the pedagogical concern of providing a kind of political education on gender for readers (Silva 2017). The producers of this content challenge established conventions and reformulate journalistic production practices, seeking to position women as agents of their own lives and to detach them from the prejudices and stereotypes that aim to condition the female gender to be a supporting player in the sociopolitical debates that impact the totality of their existence. Using cell phones, computers, social networks, and other sociotechnical devices, activists appropriate the technological environment to achieve their demands and set out to master techniques on how to cause a stir and make noise on the internet, exploiting the viral potential of social media (Jouët 2018) and provoking new forms of activist and journalistic production that emerge from the historical mutations of the feminist movement.

The exchanges between engaged media and audiences via social networks reveal how transformations in journalism resulting from the implementation of new technologies can lead to changes in interactivity practices and in the nature of audience contributions (Calabrese, Domingo, Pereira 2015). To open up space to receive contributions from female readers, some of the publications (*AzMina*, *Lado M* and *Madmoizelle*) are willing to host and reproduce the testimonies of women who want to share their stories. As *Lado M* reporter Vanessa explains (interview, 19 July 2021), this process is conducted in such a way that, when editing the texts, the media activists are careful to respect the people who are sharing difficult experiences and to warn people the stories' readers that they may come across sensitive topics.

AzMina and *Madmoizelle* have specific sessions in which stories shared by the public are published. The teams receive the testimonies from readers, talk to the people who are telling the story, collect details and elements they consider important from the stories, and then organise the text in a journalistic format. When they think it's appropriate, they also consult specialists, such as doctors and psychologists, for additional information or content.

A reporter named Océane, who was in charge of *Madmoizelle*'s testimonials section, explains that the space was created because the publication received a lot of

emails and contacts from readers who wanted to share their personal experiences. The interviewee received these emails and prepared the articles based on the stories. She says that she had a lot of work to do because the readers created emotional bonds with the publication, so the team considered it important to meet each demand, responding and giving feedback to the public: 'At that time, *Madmoizelle* was a bit like an older sister for many girls and young women, so there was a lot of work to be done because there were a lot of emails and it was important to try to respond to as many people as possible' (interview, 2 September 2022).

In the world of digital feminist media activism, audiences take on the role of support staff for the practice, through consumption, dissemination, and engagement through the reuse of the products made by the publications analysed to build their own forms of activism. While feminist publications become alternative environments to hegemonic media, proposing counter-discourses to dominant social representations, they are also spaces for exchanges between content producers and followers, who become part of a feminist community (Jouët 2022). Readers are continuously and assiduously committed to this social world, collectively contributing to its maintenance.

Interactions with audiences are the factor cited as the main foundation for sustaining the world of digital feminist media activism. The dissemination of feminist information and the availability of contact channels with readers creates powerful support and reception networks around these publications, as indicated by a statement from Carolina, a journalist and the institutional and fundraising director of *AzMina* magazine:

We directly reach readers who are looking for information on how to get out of an abusive relationship, on how a legal abortion works, women who have been raped and can't access legal abortion services. We give them information on how to access their rights. When they read the articles, the testimonies, the reports, they find the strength to get out of abusive relationships, to get out of the violence they have suffered. Almost every week we receive testimonials from women thanking us for this work. (interview, 6 November 2020)

The media activists believe feminist publications are maintained because there are specific audiences who are interested in the issue and who form communities that support these publications: 'I think community is the word. The internet has been moving towards these niches' (Nana, a contributor to *Lado M* and *Think Olga*, interview, 1 September 2021). Audiences also describe their admiration for the media activists' willingness and ability to mobilise. Operations manager Rafaela (a reader of *Les Glorieuses*) believes that there are different scales of activist investment possible for women, depending on their trajectories and life contexts, and she admires the work of feminist activists who manage to act beyond their own social circles:

Every feminist woman, at her own level, is doing something. For me, it's about fighting for my salary without shame. It's about encouraging other people around me to do the same thing, to open up, to talk to other people about it. What I'm doing is microscopic, it's in my little universe. Some women who are incredible do it on a much larger scale. (interview, 22 September 2022)

In addition to engaged action, the reactions of the public corroborate the notion that journalists have a collective power of influence as a group (Neveu 2019). Maintaining journalistic investigative techniques lends credibility to the work of media activists, which means that contributors to feminist publications gain recognition in the world of journalism and in other spaces – through awards, participation in events and lectures, and the reproduction of their content in other media. Digital feminist media activism, therefore, depends on conventional mechanisms linked to journalism to establish itself and continue.

The relevance of engagement by audiences

The readers interviewed usually rely on two central arguments to justify their interest in following the publications that make up this research: 1) Audiences point out that the content proposed by feminist media tends to be based on a greater foundation in statistics and data than hegemonic newspapers, and it is this characteristic that makes around two-thirds of readers follow these publications; 2) Readers complain that mainstream media present information in a more general way than engaged media, without contextualising the facts and only noting events – as in the case of feminicides, where the deaths are pointed out, but not the circumstances that lead to these losses.

Thus, annoyed by the perception that there is a lack of visibility for issues relating to women's rights and feminised groups in the world of journalism, audiences look for news content that reinvents conventional journalistic logic. They believe that, although gender issues are beginning to be addressed in the hegemonic media, this is done from a perspective that does not debate the origin of the problems, focusing only on reporting situations of violence, without presenting the sociostructural circumstances surrounding them.

Cultural producer Keyla, a reader of *AzMina*, claims that mainstream newspapers have historically continued to blame women who are victims of sexist situations, without giving credence to what they say or relativising the actions of men who harass or rape them: 'It's never a more affective look at the situation of women and what they are going through' (interview, 11 July 2021). Debora (a *Madmoizelle* reader), a stage manager in film shoots, speaks in a similar vein: 'I think that women who are

victims of violence are immediately put in the position of being to blame, like all she had to do was not go out at midnight, not go out wearing a miniskirt, not be alone on the street, even in broad daylight, or even at 3 o'clock in the afternoon' (interview, 4 August 2022). Cassie (a *Madmoizelle* reader) also views classic media with suspicion and prefers to be informed by engaged media, as she believes that these publications 'talk about real things and use real words too' (interview, 21 July 2022).

The widening of contact with engaged media and activist spaces through the digital sphere prompts the audiences of feminist publications not only to question the discourses of the hegemonic media, but also to stop consuming information from it and to give preference to media activism – and not just feminist media. Therefore, the central space of engaged interaction for the readers interviewed is digital. It is through sociotechnical devices such as smartphones and laptops that they manage and give meaning to their activist habits and practices. In results that converge with those shown by Jouët (2018), when she conducted in-depth interviews and an ethnography on neofeminism and how feminists use digital media to promote their cause, this research shows that the audiences interviewed are or have been willing to interact online, making comments, sharing content, signing petitions, and engaging in debates. Digital media allow the feminists interviewed to express themselves, exchange ideas, and build their identities (Jouët 2018). In addition, depending on whether there is a need to externalise concerns related to the gender debate, these women can join demonstrations and street performances or engage in the creation of authorial feminist content.

The audiences interviewed want to support the feminist cause in some way, and they have sociotechnical devices at their disposal to do so. The engagement of this group takes place at different levels. There are figures who limit themselves to sharing posts from feminist projects they follow, while other readers drive activism by getting involved in online campaigns and digital actions.

Even if there is a hidden audience and even if we take into account the difficulties of measuring the circulation of digital content, the sharing of feminist information by followers is an amplifier of the movement's discussions. The appropriation of sociotechnical devices by activists has shown itself to be an elementary promoter of agendas and discussions in the context of neo-feminism, making the role of individuals whose circles of contact did not usually dialogue with gender reflections strategically relevant, a reality that is altered by the digital activism of these interviewees.

In short, there are processes of negotiating experiences in the digital and physical spheres that have different meanings in each of these universes and lead to different attitudes on the part of the actors who circulate in these spaces. In the context of technology-mediated communication, individuals feel more comfortable expressing their opinions without fear of retaliation, restrictions, or limitations based on the con-

ventions of the social worlds in which they move. In emerged in the interviews that in the stances they adopt these activists seek not just to reflect on the inequalities in the world around them but also to assert the legitimacy of their actions and opinions, positioning themselves and defending the agendas for which they are engaged, especially in the environment of digital interactions (Breda 2022).

The platforms on which audiences defend the feminist cause can be considered spaces of activism in themselves, while at the same time they try to combat violent reactions against the feminist cause and activism on these platforms that are one of the products of the regression of rights and are also driven by access to sociotechnical devices in contemporary times (Breda 2022). Although she feels stressed and dejected in the face of the attacks she faces, Anna, a reader of *Georgette Sand* (interview, 12 August 2022), says that she continues her commitment because activism is for her a source of excitement and euphoria. This statement reinforces the idea that exposure to anti-feminist violence generates ambivalent emotions among readers. While they feel exhaustion and feelings of fear, anger, and frustration, they also feel encouraged to continue their actions because, to some degree, this engagement brings satisfaction and joy and, above all, it triggers a sense of identification with and belonging to the group.

Conclusion

In the space of feminist media activism, the digital environment is used as a tool to give visibility to the actions of the members of this world. Both media activists and audiences rely fundamentally on the publications' websites and especially on social media to communicate and disseminate feminist content.

Having reference feminist figures within the group helps those publications gain visibility at an early stage. But the visibility that these people receive leaves them more exposed to attacks from anti-feminist groups, so that there are changes in the publications' strategies to remove the focus from the figure of a single person and redirect it towards the structure of the collective. The existence of continuity in the work of media activists is linked to factors such as the influence and previous contacts of insider members, who can mobilise social, political, and cultural capital through networks that help make projects visible and publicly recognised.

Factors such as the possibility of continuing the projects, organisation, the quality of the materials produced, recognition, the creators' previous experience with the social world of journalism, the media strategy for the dissemination of content, and the development and management of fundraising techniques all contribute to maintaining the social world. There are also certain forms of cooperation and interaction that contribute to the existence of the social world. Individuals show that they want

to remain in this space because of the feedback they receive both from audiences and from the publications' colleagues and leaders, which is converted into appreciation and recognition for the work they do. In addition, the actors maintain a relationship of admiration for the practice of media engagement.

The continuity of the social world is based on a set of conventions appropriated from journalism and activist spaces by the contributors and adapted to the space of feminist media engaged in the digital sphere. In this sense, the existence of dissident professionals from other worlds – such as journalism and political activism – who are committed to producing feminist information is relevant. The ways in which actors negotiate, emphasising the importance of support teams and the role of audiences, make it possible for the practice of feminist media activism to continue.

The teams fundamentally rely on digital platforms and applications to interact with the entire group and to create and edit content. Face-to-face interactions are nevertheless also valued and desired by the group and especially by the collaborators in leadership positions, who try to create options for physical meeting places to carry out the work.

The forms of professional participation in and contribution to engaged media have been rendered more flexible by the modern-day configurations of capitalism and the increased use of the internet, where there are looser employment ties and more work is being done on the basis of informal, fixed-term, or freelance contracts by workers who are working remotely or in a hybrid arrangement and often combining more than one form of paid activity. On the one hand, the financial fragility of the interviewees stems from the precariousness of the journalist profession, while on the other hand their digital activism and use of sociotechnical devices in their work expand the possibilities for greater visibility and professional recognition.

Reflecting on the changes taking place in the media environment also means rethinking our understanding of the position that journalism has historically been assumed to occupy as lying between economic, political, and intellectual powers (Darras 2017). To avoid naïve readings of journalistic practice, it is important to interpret the relationships that pass through journalism from the perspective of economic interests and pressure groups (Neveu 2019). The power of journalists needs to be questioned and should not be understood as an immediate ability to generate influence in the social sphere.

From positions of economic and political privilege and the mobilisation of previously existing social and cultural capital, media activists, especially people in leadership positions, use power mechanisms to try to break with the structures of domination in terms of the gender, race, and sexual orientation that they want to combat. They take advantage of the fact that they are women circulating in decision-making spaces in academic (renowned educational institutions), media (contacts with journalists

from hegemonic, widely-circulated media), and political (professional or personal links with individuals in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches) terms to implement strategies for founding and maintaining feminist projects.

They mostly come from families whose mothers and fathers had access to higher education and who were able to pass on social capital – with past relationships or access to people in prominent positions in society and able to contribute to the visibility and spread of the publications – to their daughters as well as cultural capital – diplomas and degrees and an accumulation of experiences that allow the media activists to expand the creative and innovative potential of their projects, such as a strong command of their own language and knowledge of foreign languages – and symbolic capital – in the form of personal, professional, family, and academic recognition and prestige.

The ethnographic observation of transnational circulations, connections, and spaces (Saunier 2004) described in this paper shows how the group can act as a solidarity network and how joint co-operation practices accentuate its members' sense of belonging to a wider collective. The internet and social media are established as an inherent part of the world of digital feminist media activism. Sociotechnical devices are thus a medium that shapes the social experience of this kind of activism, providing challenges and opportunities for teams and transforming the boundaries of interaction and identity experiences (Hine 2017). Digital activism and online interactions provide the support that underpins the existence of engaged media and function as networks that foster these projects with the support of their audiences.

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STATI / ARTICLES

Mariana Fagundes-Ausani is a journalist and researcher. She has a joint PhD
in communication (University of Brasília and University of Rennes). She is a member
of the humanities and social sciences research unit Arènes and of the Laboratory
of Journalistic Practices and Identities (LaPIJ). ORCID: 0000-0003-3361-3607.
Contact e-mail: mariana.fagundes@anatel.gov.br.

Appendix 1

Table 1 presents the group's interviewees' demographic characteristics in terms of age, gender, ethnic-racial self-declaration and place of residence:

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of feminist media activists

Name	Age group	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	City
Agustina Ordoqui (*Les Glorieuses*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	Buenos Aires – Argentina
Amanda Celio (*AzMina*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	Rio de Janeiro (RJ) – Brazil
Anthony Vincent (*Madmoizelle*)	From 25 to 29	Male	Black	Paris (Île-de-France) – France
Bárbara Fonseca (*Think Olga*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	Interior of São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Blanche Baudouin (*Georgette Sand*)	From 40 to 44	Female	White	Tours (Touraine) – France
Bruna Escaleira (*AzMina*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Carolina Oms (*AzMina*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Catarina Ferreira (*Lado M*)	From 25 to 29	Female	Black	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Chloé Thibaud (*Les Glorieuses*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	Paris (Île-de-France) – France
Cris Guterres (*AzMina*)	From 35 to 39	Female	Black	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Emilie Rappeneau (*Madmoizelle*)	From 20 to 24	Female	White	Paris (Île-de-France) – France
Fayrouz Lamotte (*Georgette Sand*)	From 25 to 29	Female	Racialised (Moroccan origin)	Luxembourg – Luxembourg
Flay Alves (*AzMina*)	Not mentioned	Female	Black	São Luís (Maranhão) – Brazil
Gabriella Feola (*Side M*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Leandra Migotto (*AzMina*)	From 45 to 49	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Luisa Toller (*AzMina*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Malu Bassan (*Lado M*)	From 20 to 24	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil

Marguerite Nebelsztein (*Georgette Sand*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	Nantes (Pays de la Loire) – France
Mariana Miranda (*Lado M*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Marília Moreira (*AzMina*)	From 30 to 34	Female	Black	Salvador (Bahia) – Brazil
Marjana Borges (*Think Olga*)	From 25 to 29	Female	Black	Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul) – Brazil
Mathilde Larrère (*Georgette Sand*)	From 50 to 54	Female	White	Paris (Île-de-France) – France
Mathis Grosos (*Madmoizelle*)	From 20 to 24	Male	White	Paris (Île-de-France) – France
Megan Clement (*Les Glorieuses*)	From 35 to 39	Female	White	Montreuil (Île-de-France) – France
Morgane Frebault (*Georgette Sand*)	From 35 to 39	Female	White	Tours (Touraine) – France
Nana Soares (*Think Olga* and *Lado M*)	From 25 to 29	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Océane Viala (*Madmoizelle*)	From 25 to 29	Female	Racialised (Cameroonian origin)	Alfortville (Île-de-France) – France
Paula Chang (*Think Olga*)	From 35 to 39	Female	White	Campinas (SP) – Brazil
Rayana Burgos (*AzMina*)	From 20 to 24	Female	Brown/Black	Recife (Pernambuco) – Brazil
Rebecca Amsellem (*Les Glorieuses*)	From 30 to 34	Female	White	Paris (Île-de-France) – France
Sophie Castelain-Youssouf (*Madmoizelle*)	From 30 to 34	Female	Black	Saint-Ouen (Île-de-France) – France
Vanessa Panerari (*Lado M*)	From 25 to 29	Female	White	São Paulo (SP) – Brazil
Verena Paranhos (*AzMina*)	From 30 to 34	Female	Brown/Black	Salvador (Bahia) – Brazil

Appendix 2

Table 2 shows in more detail the sociodemographic profiles of the audiences, presenting only the information explicitly mentioned by them:

Table 2: Socio-demographic profile of the audiences interviewed

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	City	Media
Alicia	23	White	São João Del Rei (Minas Gerais)	*Think Olga*
Angel	50	Branca (daughter of Spanish immigrants)	Tours (Centre-Val de Loire)	*Georgette Sand*
Anna	27	Not mentioned	Small town near Toulouse (Occitanie)	*Georgette Sand*
Carol	41	Not mentioned	São Paulo (São Paulo)	*AzMina*
Cassie	27	Not mentioned	Tourcoing (Hauts-de-France)	*Madmoizelle*
Cecilia	17	Not mentioned	Sousa (Paraíba)	*Lado M*
Christel	43	White	Tarn (Occitanie)	*Madmoizelle*
Cristine	30	Not mentioned	Curitiba (Paraná)	*AzMina*
Crystal	21	Not mentioned	Nantes (Pays de la Loire)	*Georgette Sand*
Dayane	No mention	White	Maceió (Alagoas)	*Think Olga*
Debora	30	Not mentioned	Island of Corsica	*Madmoizelle*
Fany	42	White	São Paulo (São Paulo)	*Lado M*
Fleur	No mention	Not mentioned	Nomad	*Madmoizelle*
Inès	26	Racialised (family of Algerian origin)	Ain (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes)	*Les Glorieuses*
Julie	33	White	Val de Marne (Île-de-France)	*Les Glorieuses*
Karla	No mention	White	Jaboatão dos Guararapes (Pernambuco)	*Think Olga*
Keyla	24	Not mentioned	Osasco (São Paulo)	*AzMina*
Laetitia	44	Not mentioned	Namur (Belgium)	*Les Glorieuses*
Laura	23	Racialised (Black)	Bordeaux (Nouvelle Aquitaine)	*Madmoizelle*
Lucie	38	White	Caen (Normandie)	*Georgette Sand*
Magali	No mention	White	Nice (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur)	*Georgette Sand*
Maria Cecilia	Over 60	Not mentioned	Toledo (Paraná)	*Think Olga*
Nathalie	57	Not mentioned	Lyon (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes)	*Les Glorieuses*
Ophélie	No mention	Not mentioned	Liège (Belgium)	*Madmoizelle*

Patricia	46	White	Novo Hamburgo (Rio Grande do Sul)	*Think Olga*
Rafaela	35	White	Nyon (Switzerland)	*Les Glorieuses*
Suzanna	40	White	Recife (Pernambuco)	*Lado M*
Tamara	40	White	São Paulo (São Paulo)	*AzMina*
Tayná	25	Not mentioned	Araraquara (São Paulo)	*AzMina*
Victor	29	White	Santo André (São Paulo)	*Lado M*

Source: Author.