

Article

## The Use of Social Media by Spanish Feminist Organizations: Collectivity From Individualism

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### Abstract

In recent years, social media platforms have become a popular tool for feminist activists and the main medium of communication for new feminist organizations to gain higher visibility. However, along with opportunities, they also bring a reshaping of communication forms and challenges in the modes of organization of these groups, which seek to transform the prevailing individualist logic of the mediated social media landscape into a collective identity. Through the findings of qualitative, semi-structured interviews and the analysis of the content published online, this article looks at the structures of interactions and organizing processes in the social media accounts of new Spanish feminist groups. The findings show that although the committees are aware of the importance of an online presence, they face many obstacles in the creation of collective profiles due to the lack of guidelines, having no clear organized steps on how to post content with consensus within each committee, and the many demands of the speed-driven nature of social media platforms.

### Keywords

digital feminism; feminism; feminist media studies; feminist organizations; organizing processes; social media

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms have played a leading role in the rise of the feminist movement and its presence in the public sphere at both national and international levels, being the main engine of the fourth wave of feminism (Zimmerman, 2017). These networks and their ecosystems have introduced new methods of communication and organization that have influenced how the movement has developed in recent years, allowing, among others, the transformation of individual into collective discourses, the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices and dialogues (Baer, 2016; Clark, 2014; Davis, 2019), and the democratization of the public sphere.

Social media platforms are also the core of the new feminist organizations, giving them a sense of connectedness with other feminists, facilitating the contribu-

tion towards a common identity, and establishing a networked, counter-public sphere for debates (Calhoun, 2011; Edwards et al., 2019; Williams, 2016). Despite its potential, the use and integration of social media is also a challenge for established feminist organizations due to their institutional constraints, which are more aligned with collective political action. While they rely on centralised coordination and a clear organizational structure, the logic of online connective action requires individuals to self-express willingly on social media (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

Spain has been one of the countries with the greatest increase in feminist mobilizations over the last five years, which has led to the launch of a considerable number of new women’s committees (Navarro & Coromina, 2020; Willem & Tortajada, 2021). These activist organizations were created to organize the first feminist

general strike in the country on March 8, 2018, to coincide with International Women's Day. This was also the second International Women's Strike under the slogan "if women stop, the world stops" in favour of gender equality and against sexual violence, which was followed in more than 170 countries, mainly in America and Europe, with a much higher international response than in the previous year. In Spain, over 30 regional and local organizations were created across the entire country to lead and spread the feminist messages and became the main organizers of this mobilization. These groups have maintained their activities since then and have also developed into permanent activist committees.

While the strike was organized offline by these committees, its success was possible because of the interplay between digital actions and offline groups. Thus, the activity on social media platforms helped to increase the scope of the mobilization, particularly in the week before the main event. The committees considered the establishment of their collective social media profiles as a necessity to start the conversation and spread their messages. Furthermore, the widespread online resonance successfully helped to set the agenda for the public debate on other platforms, such as conventional media, including general-interest television channels, radio networks, and print and digital newspapers.

Considering this context, this research article aims to understand the organizational processes of the new Spanish feminist committees when using collective social media accounts. The study focuses on the organizational structures established by these groups to post on and update social media, the profile of the volunteers in charge of this task, and the coordination and flows of communication when deciding the content published on the accounts. To do this, 12 semi-structured interviews have been undertaken with the women in charge of updating the official social media profiles of the different committees. In addition, the results obtained have been complemented with the analysis of the content published by the committees analyzed on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

## 2. Social Media and Feminist Organizations

Social media platforms are the main engine of the fourth wave of feminism (Zimmerman, 2017). The functionalities and possibilities of social networks in terms of connections and creation of communities are undeniable, as well as the amplification and reinforcement of the scope of discourses of feminist activist organizations (Maloney, 2017; Tufekci, 2014). This means connecting different social groups and creating new forms of activism, visibility, and protest (Baer, 2016), thus helping to reflect on and revise its identity and self-understanding (Şener, 2021).

Nevertheless, the role played by these networks on improving and changing society is still largely unknown, provoking polarized opinions on the role of social net-

works as an activist tool. These debates bring to light that social networks are not the utopian horizontal dialogue public spaces that were imagined in the beginning (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018). In addition, this reality has also become the highest expression of individualism, linked to the networked individualism (Wellman, 2002), which witnessed the appearance of a new type of feminism, "pop feminism" (Banet-Weiser, 2018), also known as "feel-good feminism" or "mainstream feminism" (Phipps, 2020).

Pop feminism adopts an individualistic and performative notion of feminism based on the decontextualization and depoliticization of the movement, being available to the general public, "largely because it has lost all sense of intellectual rigour or political challenges" (Kiraly & Tyler, 2015, p. 10). The endorsement of celebrities and influencers has been crucial in the expansion of this phenomenon. The latter, in addition, are considered by Rottenberg (2014) as an example of the individualist feminist that has developed within the neoliberal consumer culture, driven by the belief that a certain type of equality has already been reached.

From this perspective, the hegemonic feminism of social networks is accused of being led by straight, white, and privileged women, and therefore there is greater visibility of the matters and issues that concern them. Also, it is argued that the very practices that characterize the influencers is the promotion of "do it yourself" and self-exploitation values (Banet-Weiser, 2018), linked to neoliberal culture, the cyber-fetishism (Morozov, 2009) context as well as the commodification of feminist ideas. This leads to commodity feminism (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017) or femvertising (Varghese & Kumar, 2020) since it involves using feminist messages and ideas with the aim of obtaining economic gain. Authors such as Maloney (2017) show that this phenomenon can give rise to an accidental feminism formed by people in social networks who, without engaging in feminist activism, are considered feminist references due to the type of messages and activity found on their profiles.

This point is linked to the term "performative activism" or "slacktivism" (Christensen, 2011; Rotman et al., 2011), which results from the union of "slacker," a vague or lazy person, and "activism." It can be defined as activity produced in social networks with low risk and low cost to the user whose purpose is to raise awareness and produce some type of change or satisfaction on a reduced scale compared to the person involved in the activity (Rotman et al., 2011). This can include small social media interactions such as liking or sharing a feminist post. Although these terms initially had a positive connotation, creating movements of change at a low level, the high levels of proliferation in recent years by influencers, microcelebrities and the general presence of opinion leaders and public figures on social networks has led to its use being associated with negative effects. These include the need to "go viral" to attract

interactions and relevance on the platform instead of social change.

With the rise of feminism on social media, offline feminist organizations have considered having a social media presence as a necessity (Fotopoulou, 2016) to become a part of the digital public sphere. However, the presence of these groups on social networks forces them to enter a complex and contradictory terrain, moving from a sense of collectivism to an individualistic perspective which challenges the way these women's groups work. With this in mind, the multiple Spanish committees created for the organization of the feminist strikes convened in recent years for International Women's Day presents a case of study to unravel the organizations' structures and the patterns of their digital presence. Thus, the main aim of this study is to analyse how these committees use social media to portray their collective identity. Accordingly, the following research questions are posited:

RQ1: To what extent have the committees established a working organizational plan to guide the updates of their social media profiles from a collective perspective?

RQ2: What is the profile of the women that are responsible for the social media accounts in terms of their knowledge and relationship to social media?

RQ3: What type of content is published on the accounts and how is it decided?

### 3. Material and Methods

In order to answer the objective and the research questions set, a series of semi-structured interviews with the women in charge of updating and posting on the offi-

cial social media accounts of the committees have been carried out. The semi-structured interviews have been developed around the following main topics: the dynamics carried out to keep the profile updated, the coordination flows within the committee, the professional profiles of the women in charge of the social media profiles, and their relationship with the social networks including their level of knowledge and expertise towards the platforms in their personal life and also their professional field. The committees were found by reviewing the information on the Spanish committee website ([www.hacialahuelgafeminista.com](http://www.hacialahuelgafeminista.com)) at the end of 2018 and its social media profiles. In total, 38 different committees were found and contacted through direct private messages on social media, or an email was sent through the authors' institutional university's email address if available from the profile.

From these initial contacts, 12 interviews (Table 1) were conducted with activists from 10 different commissions (26.3% of response rate). In two of the assemblies, they considered that it was not appropriate to only speak with one person since the networks were collective and two interviews were made with those in charge, evidencing the first result on their mode of organization. The scope of the commissions ranges from the autonomous community level, such as Aragón, Asturias, and Catalonia, to a local level such as Badajoz, Jaén, Leganés, or Valencia. The online semi-structured interviews took place throughout 2019 and lasted between one and one and a half hours.

The semi-structured interviews were based on four thematic sections: (a) the profile of the woman in charge of social media, including questions related to their socioeconomic information (age, profession, education, residency) and to their experience in offline and online activism; (b) the social media of their committee, where questions around the objective, the creation

**Table 1.** Sample description.

Committee	Scope	No. of			
		Interviewees	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram
Aragón	Regional	1	8MAragon	8MAragon	8maragon
Asturias	Regional	1	AsturiesFeminista8M	Asturies8M	Asturiesfeminista8m
Badajoz	Local	1	Plataforma8MBadajoz	8MBadajoz	8mBadajoz
Burgos	Local	1	Huelga8MBurgos	—	Huelga8mburgos
Catalunya	Regional	1	vagageminista8m	vagafeminista8M	Vagafeminista8m
Jaén	Regional	2	Feministas8MJaen	—	Feministas8mjaen
Leganés	Local	1	—	8MLeganes	—
Lleida	Local/Regional	1	grupdoneslleida	doneslleida	—
Segovia	Local	2	8MSegovia	8MSegovia	8msegovia
Valencia	Local	1	assembleafeministavalencia	AssembleaVlc	—
Madrid	Regional	—	FeminismosMad	feminismosMad	Feminismosmadrid
State	State	—	Huelgafeminista	Huelgafeminista	8mhuelgafeminista

process, and the organization expectations and reality were raised; (c) content published, where aspects of the type of content posted, the selection of the posts and topics, censorship topics, and established guidelines were discussed; and finally, (d) general opinion. Regarding the latter, three specific questions were asked in terms of (a) the consideration of social media as platforms to create a collective identity within the committee and with other women in their region; (b) their opinion on the relationship between their online presence and their offline success; and (c) their considerations of social media as key elements of the success in the rise of feminist activism in the last years.

In 2021, all women interviewed were contacted again and meetings with eight from the sample were conducted (Aragón, Asturias, Badajoz, Jaén [two interviews], Lleida, Segovia, and Valencia). The main objective was to acknowledge if there had been significant changes in the role of the social media profiles of the committee, the method of organization, and the type of content published, with conversations lasting around 30 minutes.

In addition, a quantitative content analysis has been conducted on the posts published on the social network profiles of the committees, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, between March 1 and March 31, 2019, and 2021, excluding 2020 due to the beginning of the pandemic. It should be noted that all the publications of the interviewed commissions were considered, but the profiles of the state commission and that of Madrid were also added to the sample due to their relevance. In total, 4,073 posts have been coded and analysed with an inductive approach, exploring the sample to discover patterns, and interpreting their meanings and implications without having pre-existing categories, so as to have a specific understanding of the data (Gray, 2014; Tong & Zuo, 2018), being in line with previous studies with a feminist interpretative approach to content analysis (Fotopoulou, 2016; Leavy, 2007; López et al., 2018). In detail, the sample is divided into 2,213 tweets, 1,287 Facebook posts, and 573 Instagram posts.

The results have been placed into seven categories: knowledge dissemination, strike information, activities, media coverage, rallying cries, covid restrictions, and others. Each post was individually coded and classified by examining text captions, hyperlinks, and attached media.

It was decided to select March as a sample because despite all the committees being active during the entire year, they were initially created for the organization of the strike, coinciding with International Women's Day, on March 8. Thus, both the online and offline activity rises during this month, and it is a good sample to observe the diversity of posts and the content strategy of the accounts.

The data collection method has been conducted through different data mining processes according to the platform. Specifically, we have used the: (a) Twitter Full Archive Search API library for Python, provided by the Twitter platform for academic developers, to fetch all the

original tweets published in each selected Twitter profile; (b) the Facepager application based on the Facebook Graph API for the retrieval of Facebook posts; and (c) the Instaloader package for Python to gather Instagram feed data, not including stories due to their volatile nature. Each package fetches all the public posts published in the sample profiles on the basis of APIs. In order to ease the later analysis and treatment of data, all datasets, which were mainly retrieved in JSON data format, were converted to .csv files, containing information related to the textual, visual, and meta content of the posts and the available public metrics of each platform, including among others, the number of likes, comments, views, or media information.

#### 4. Results

All the committees analysed in this article, with the exception of the group "Dones Lleida," were created specifically to organize the first general strike for International Women's Day in Spain in 2018, launching their social media accounts before the first main event. This left only limited time to organize and debate how their online presence was going to be despite it being considered essential (Fotopoulou, 2016), with most of the organizations not initially discussing in-depth how were they going to act in the digital public sphere.

Since these organizations have continued and expanded their activities throughout the year, not solely for International Women's Day, their practices and organizational structures on social media have been evolving but still struggle to represent a collective non-hierarchical profile, being linked to the aim of non-hierarchical online social movements (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018).

##### 4.1. Organization Processes of Spanish 8M Committees

While all the Spanish committees were working independently, there was a willingness to create a common framework for the success of the general strike in the country. This led to discussions on certain aspects of their online presence in the Spanish general meeting that took place three months before the 2018 strike which brought together most of the Spanish local and regional organizations. In this meeting, a very broad protocol on how to publish on social networks was discussed, even though the information was not published or shared after the assembly.

In 2019, the state committee wrote more detailed guidelines, although still broad, on publishing content on social networks dealing with issues such as interaction with other users, social responsibility, or the relationship with media in order to unify their actions. "Very general guidelines were established that we had already followed the previous year and they did not bring changes in the way we were working" (Interviewee, Aragon's committee, December 3, 2019). In addition, more practical

aspects such as advice on how to write on each network and when to include images or make mentions were included. This information was greatly praised by the women in charge of social media on the regional and local committees, particularly volunteers above 45 years old, but was not considered relevant to younger women. An 18-year-old argues that “the advice on the different uses of each social network did not seem especially useful to us since they are platforms that we use on a daily basis and we already know how to adapt to each of them” (Interviewee, Segovia’s committee, March 20, 2019).

However, there was no shared discussion or sharing of best practices on how each committee should organize the work to maintain and update the collective profiles, which has been the most problematic issue of their online presence, especially during the first two years. “That first year, there was no time to discuss how we would organize to post content on social networks” (Interviewee, Badajoz’s committee, March 15, 2021). Therefore, while social networks had been considered a key element for the committees, establishing concrete guidelines and organizational structures for the committees were not a priority in the meetings.

In planning, large groups composed of eight to 10 women were created to oversee the social networks in the bigger committees whereas only three or four women were responsible in the smaller groups. This aimed to divide the work among several volunteers to maintain and update the accounts as well as to collectively decide the content posted through meetings or commenting on content before publishing it on social media accounts. “The objective was to talk about all these aspects [content, form, and frequency of publication] among all of us who were in the social network group, which were about 10” (Interviewee, Segovia’s committee, March 20, 2019).

Nevertheless, in reality, only two or three women were really constant in all committees when publishing content, sometimes with only a single person in charge of a social network, with no committee analysed being able to accomplish their initial objective. “I am posting the content I want to put but it should not be like this” (Interviewee, Asturias’ committee, March 23, 2019). These women claim that they were overwhelmed by the large number of activities that were organized, the success of attendance at them, and the strike participation for International Women’s Day. This highlights the importance of the offline essence of the 8M committees despite being created during the fourth wave of feminism, with social media at its core (Zimmerman, 2017).

These face-to-face activities are considered essential for the nurturing of a collective identity that includes all women, even those not using social media frequently or at all, which are often the older generations, as also found in feminist organizations in the UK (Fotopoulou, 2016). In addition, it helped committees to understand the real impact of their messages and activities: “We were getting engagement on Twitter, but we

didn’t know that our message had reached that amount of women until we celebrated our first offline action to prepare for the International Women’s Day strike” (Interviewee, Valencia’s committee, June 5, 2019). Thus, the curated online collective identity is considered relevant and necessary but not as tangible as the one cultivated offline, which evokes worries of slacktivism.

In the most recent years, there has been a refinement of the process and an effort to publish and portray an online collective identity since the women in charge of the social accounts have improved in sharing the workload among themselves and how to decide the content from a more collective approach, despite the limitations to fully working cooperatively on these platforms observed through the interviews. Personal messaging apps, mainly WhatsApp and Telegram, have become a central element of the collective accounts as platforms being used to discuss polemic content internally. The private networks of the committees are considered a safer space to debate the different views of social media strategies or issues and are used to give a unified message later through digital media:

In 2019 we created a Telegram group for only the women in charge of social networks and some of the communication section and this has helped us to share more decisions, although you have to always be aware of the messages without being able to disconnect too much. (Interviewee, Aragon’s committee, December 3, 2019)

Nevertheless, posting content on the accounts of feminist groups is still, for the moment, a fairly individual action due in large part to the frenetic pace of social networks. This is a consequence of their technical architecture, a business model based on immediacy, and a marked lack of time for discussion, attention, and content production (Fuchs, 2018). In order for messages to be visible and reach the largest number of users (O’Meara, 2019), the feminist organizations are forced to publish on a highly recurring basis, making it difficult to collectively agree on all posts, even with the use of personal messaging apps. As can be seen on the Asturias committee Facebook page, a daily average of eight posts are published. This is accentuated around International Women’s Day and the celebration of the general strike, where all the committees increase their activity considerably, both online and offline, even reaching 89 posts between March 7 and 9, 2019, on the Madrid committee Facebook account.

#### *4.2. Profiles of Women Activists Behind the Social Media Accounts*

As mentioned above, the task of publishing on the social media accounts of the organizations lies with a very small number of women, all highly engaged with political movements but with no professional experiences



related to communication or social media. “I started to politically mobilize when I was studying at the university and I haven’t stopped since” (28-year-old Interviewee, Huesca’s committee, March 23, 2019). “I have been a member of the labour union in my work for more than 15 years” (47-year-old Interviewee, Aragon’s committee, December 3, 2019). Understanding and describing the profiles of the women in charge of social media can help to comprehend the organizational structures of these committees.

There is much awareness that the accounts represent a community and that it is not necessary to publish their personal opinions, although frequently they are the ones who decide what to publish, how, and when. This represents an overflow of unpaid work that some women find difficult to maintain. Many committees realized from the remarks of the women in charge of social media that the rate of publication at which they started could not be maintained, especially since the work fell on very few women. The frequency of publication throughout the year was reduced leaving only the days around 8M with a high level of publications.

In general, there are two different types of volunteers in charge, separated according to their age, which leads to different ways of organizing. On the one hand, the youngest women are the ones in charge of the social networks because they are the most comfortable using these platforms and they volunteer because they think their knowledge could be useful to the group. This is particularly visible when referring to Instagram since it is a platform mostly used by the younger generations (Statista, 2021). For example, in the Segovia committee, which doesn’t have a large number of members, an 18-year-old activist volunteered to be in charge of this platform since she was the only one who knew how to use Instagram.

On the other hand, a different type of volunteer in charge of social media is women over 45 years of age who decide or have to be responsible for the accounts because they are the ones with the most availability. In some other cases, they are the ones willing to make the sacrifice because they have more established professional jobs.

The imbalances in the level of digital media literacy among these two groups, mainly due to age and social class, conditions the actual content published on social media. Instagram is the least used network by the committees, not all of the groups have created a profile, and the ones that have only post regularly if a younger woman or women are in charge. In addition, when working with other women to divide and share the workload, these two types of women in charge of social media are often organized in different ways. While the youngest share the updating of the profiles among the group, mainly through personal messaging apps as mentioned before, the older women are more used to publishing individually.

However, we can also find some similarities between both types of profiles. First, all of the interviewees share

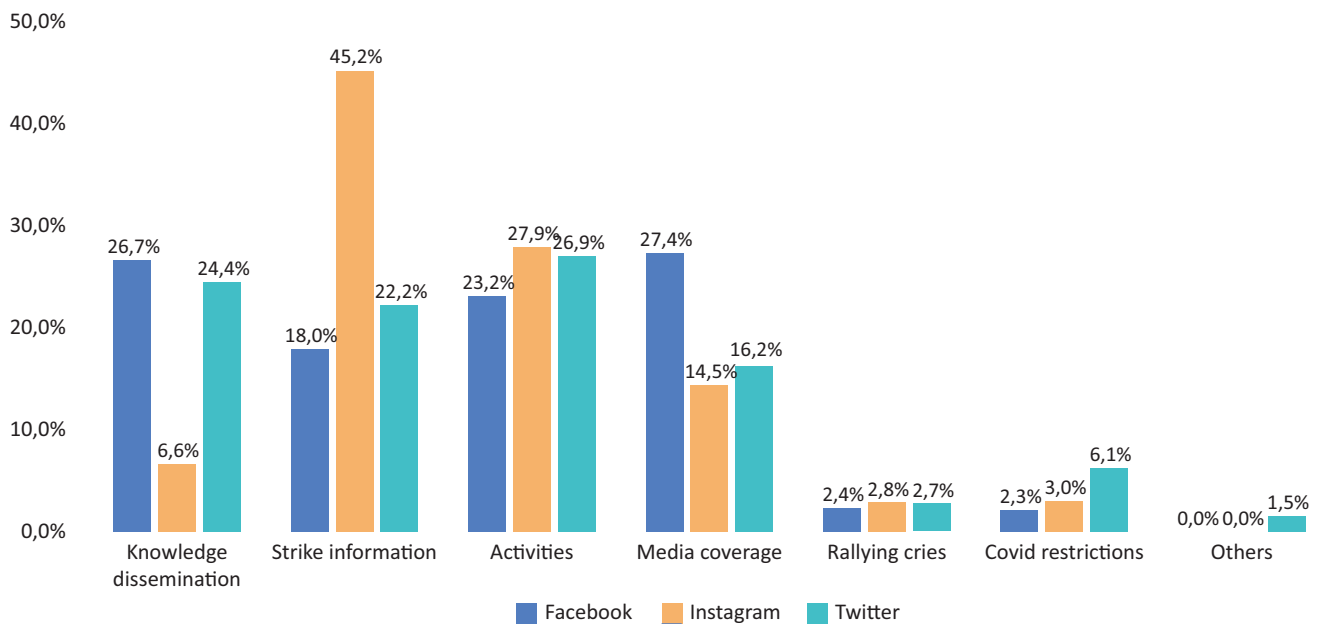
an interest in social networks, not at the level of personal use, but their role and possibility for social change. However, they do not have any training in communications or social network practices, with jobs or studies unrelated to this area. This has compelled them to search for good practices of digital activism by looking at feminist profiles that they consider to be references on different topics. Simultaneously, they have improved their technical skills over the years to be more efficient, for example by learning how to program publications for a specific time. In the initial years, this was done manually, involving a lot of work for them. Therefore, practice and experience have helped these women use social media more efficiently to help their feminist activist group.

#### *4.3. Content Considerations on Social Networks*

The last important aspect of the organizational structure of 8M committees on social media is the type of content published. During the initial two years, 2018 and 2019, the only recurring common agreement reached across most committees was regarding the topics that should not be included on the collective social media profiles. Mostly, they referred to topics without a consensus within feminism such as prostitution or surrogacy. In addition, there was, and still is, an explicit will not to support any political party and to not disseminate actions carried out by any institutional body. Therefore, there is a sense of self-censorship common in online spaces described as safe due to its purpose of creating an environment in which women can express themselves without fear. According to the Roestone Collective (2014) and Gibson (2019), safe spaces are sites for negotiating differences and challenging oppression, becoming platforms for women to find strength and a sense of community that cannot be found in free speech areas, which in many cases are burdened with historical and cultural connotations, exhibiting the sexist and racist tendencies of the broader culture (Gibson, 2019).

Also, most groups aimed to only share news from more independent media aligned with feminism so as not to give voice to media that goes against the movement. “We are aware of how they report on issues such as gender violence or how they talk about feminism without taking intersectionality into account, and we do not want to reinforce its image or messages” (Interviewee, Aragon’s committee, December 3, 2019). These red lines have been redefined and further discussed as these committees have stabilized and reached consensus not only at the annual meeting of 8M but also during the rest of the year.

Looking into the content posted by the committees analysed on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, the results of the content analysis (Figure 1), are presented in a unified manner since the content posted has not changed significantly in the two years of the sample, 2019 and 2021. The only aspect to be highlighted is the health pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus in 2021.

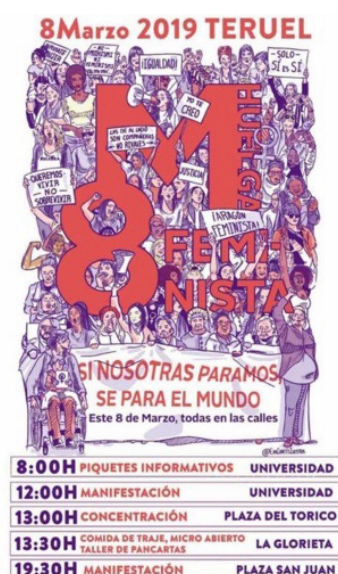


**Figure 1.** Topics of posts published on social media by 8M committees (March 2019 and March 2021).

While the peak of the pandemic had already passed by March 2021 in Spain, there were still public health concerns and limitations. Thus, some posts referred to the pandemic and the considerations to be taken while participating in the activities of the 8M of that year. For example, even in places like Madrid, the capital of Spain, the regional government forbid public gatherings and demonstrations during March 8, 2021, and the committees of those locations posted about the cancellation of activities.

The main reason why the profiles were created, as mentioned by most of the interviewees, is to inform and

disseminate offline actions and activities organized by these committees. They use social media to enlarge their offline collective actions. As can be seen in Figure 1, information on the committees’ activities is one of the main topics published on the accounts, with a similar percentage across the three networks analysed. A clear example of this is the tweet posted by the Asturias8M profile: “Tomorrow at 6 p.m. talk about gender inequality and violence against women, given by Ángeles Martínez” (Asturies Feminista 8M, 2019) or the Instagram post by the state account commenting on the activities of a regional committee (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Example of an Instagram post disseminating offline actions. Notes: text in English—“The poster with all the activities organized since the 8M assembly in Teruel. This March 8 we fill the streets again. We are back to stop the world. Share and spread!” Source: 8mhuelfeminista (2019).

Another important topic found in the accounts is knowledge dissemination to fill in the information gaps in society on the role or situation of women, past, present, or future. For example, some commissions create campaigns on social networks using hashtags such as “#Somohistóricasnohistéricas” (#Wearehistoricalnothistorical) used by the Segovia’s committee. These hashtags focus on specific topics such as claiming relevant women in science or important women from the territory in which the commissions operate, with the situation of rural women being a prominent issue in the commissions of the most closely linked territories to the primary sector. As can be seen in Figure 1, around 25% of the publications on Facebook and Twitter had this objective, dealing with issues such as violence against women, ecofeminism, gender discrimination in the workplace, or the situation of transsexual women.

The posts highlighting the schedule, useful information, and general considerations about the demonstrations and events of the feminist strike are found on all social network posts but especially on Instagram, with 45% of the content published acting as a noticeboard. However, according to the women in charge of the profiles, the presence of pertinent and quality images for the events is important in deciding if the content is posted on this network.

Linked to this topic, the publications relating to media coverage also stand out, at an average of 19% of the publications. This total is of all the posts related to the online broadcast of the 8M mobilizations, whether through images, text, or video, and also includes all content related to the day published by other media, mainly the digital formats of newspapers and radio stations, and is shared on the profile of the committees. An example of this kind of post is the tweet “Do not miss this article ‘8M, the refuge for all women’ by @MariahPerezS after another unforgettable #8M despite all the difficulties #8M2021” (Huelga Feminista, 2021).

On the other hand, we find fewer posts described as rallying cries, with an average of 2.6% of the content published on the social network profiles. These refer to all those publications that are based on slogans and rallying cries to encourage offline actions (Figure 3), such as “we are unstoppable!,” “if we stop, the world stops!,” or “fists up comrade!”

The women in charge of the social networks are aware of the differences between each platform, filtering the content published on each of them. This knowledge has been acquired with the use of social media since none of them has professional experience or studies related to social media or digital communications.

The structure of Twitter’s information and the ease of sharing links and videos make it the platform where topics are discussed in greater depth and variety of sources. This has been the most used by activism to generate online actions such as #metoo or #niunamenos. For example, in 2019, the Lleida assembly posted a series

of videos where different women spoke of their reasons for going on strike, using a trans woman as one of the examples.



**Figure 3.** Example of a Facebook post with a rallying cry. Notes: text in English—“For those who are here, for those who are not here, for those who are in danger, every day is March 8. Tomorrow #Thefightcontinues”. Source: Asturies Feminista 8M (2020).

Instagram is for posts when the commissions have an original photograph taken by a woman from the group or for infographics. For example, one of the actions of the state committee has been to create unified posters and design guidelines, such as colours and fonts, to be used by the other committees. Some committees also decided from the first year to create their own posters and images, especially when there is a woman on the committee who works professionally in the field of graphic design. However, as mentioned previously, the use of Instagram by each group is conditioned by the presence of young women who publish on this platform. In contrast, Facebook is used to reach an older audience and to post content to disseminate knowledge, due to its multimedia approach that allows users to easily post links, images, and videos.

The committees are also aware of the importance of hashtags and try to be aware of those used by the other committees. Hashtags play a crucial role in what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) define as “connective action” to describe how the conversation is organized and interpreted. Within the Spanish 8M committees, hashtags have also been used to raise awareness of the necessity and the reasons for the strike. For example,



the hashtags #Razonespor (#reasonsto) or #1000motivos (#1000reasons) draw attention to the individual reasons to join or support the strike, creating a collective action. Some large commissions, such as Catalonia or Valencia, being multi-lingual territories, have created specific hashtags since they also try to generate and disseminate messages in their own language.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Activism today cannot be understood without the activity and role of social media (Cammaerts, 2015; Tufekci, 2014). However, the dynamics and structures of these networks condition how activist groups organize their online presence with some challenges that contradict the essence of grassroots activism, which follows the logics of centre-organized collective actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This study has focused on how new Spanish feminist committees are managing their collective profiles as a suitable example of the challenges when adapting the individualistic nature of social media (Wellman, 2002) to a collective action.

The success of the large feminist mobilizations and offline demonstrations in Spain in recent years is mainly due to a large number of messages and interactions on social media. These networks were used by people to self-express their opinions on the general goal of the action and gender equality through their individual identity, mostly with no affiliation to any political or activist organization. Despite the rise of slacktivism present on social media, with people merely posting content of a mobilization or cause to create their personal image (Christensen, 2011; Rotman et al., 2011), these connective actions have been able to set an agenda in the country, particularly around International Women's Day.

However, some women found the need to engage in the political movement through the creation of formal organizations, which were key in the success of feminist mobilizations mainly due to their online calls to action to participate in offline activities. All these committees consider social media profiles essential in order to be part of the public digital sphere. This duality creates several organizational difficulties for the activist committees due to the different logics of offline collective actions which are highly centralized compared to online dynamics, based on self-expression and decentralization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; van Dijck & Poell, 2013). The lack of correlation mechanisms between these two spheres generates a problematic hybridization for feminist organizations, sometimes even lacking continuity between offline and online messages.

Despite the importance given to social media, approving and discussing the protocols, guidelines, and organizational process to publish on the accounts of these committees has been relegated to the background, creating confusion for the women in charge of updating the profiles. This has not been made a priority within the face-to-face meetings with no clear organized steps

or consensus on how to post content within each committee. It has also created difficulties in working collaboratively, usually with the responsibility for the type of content, topics, and formats falling on a small number of volunteers, even just one on some occasions. However, a broader consensus is requested for the most problematic subjects. The most collective digital platforms used are WhatsApp and Telegram but they remain internal to each commission.

The main obstacle for a collective profile is the rapid pace of social media, since accounts need to publish frequently and to react quickly, so messages have greater visibility and impact, sometimes making it impossible to discuss them with anyone else. Among the three most dominant social networks, Twitter is the most used platform and the one with the highest pace, especially on the day of the strike due to its immediacy and its ability to share information from a greater diversity of sources.

Two types of women of different ages are in charge of social media; the younger ones have higher digital media literacy which leads to publishing in a broader format, such as stories on Instagram, and a higher level of coordination among them since their flow of communication is faster. The older ones publish more frequently, and they volunteer because social media is necessary, even if they do not have strong technological and social media knowledge.

Looking into the type of content published on the social network profiles, we witness that despite the lack of common agreements regarding the topics published on social media, there are some common practices and strategies, presenting a unified discourse on the different platforms. The dissemination of offline actions, followed by International Women's Day strike information, knowledge dissemination, and related media coverage are the main axis of their social media activity, becoming a safe space for women to communicate.

To conclude, the speed-driven nature and preference-driven algorithmic architecture of social media platforms, which require constant and varied activity, presence, and interaction (O'Meara, 2019), have direct consequences on the lifespan and visibility of the posts. Social media content has become more ephemeral, commercialized, and tabloid (Şener, 2021), becoming a challenge and an obstacle for feminist organizations. Thus, social networks have become a double-edged sword, being a complex terrain where it is difficult for feminist organizations to operate on digital platforms while maintaining their desired sense of united identity.

The study method has several limitations, in which the sample selection itself and temporal delimitation are the main ones. The sample, despite being timely, includes a significant period during the pandemic, which had its own organizational restrictions and led to new communication methods differing from standard years. With this in mind, current findings could be complemented with future studies built upon the model proposed. This could include the comparison with

organisational processes within committees from other countries or regions and how their presence on social media meshes with the nurturing of collective actions and their power of mobilizations over time.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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