Tagging feminism. Analysis of Ibero-American cybermedia

Etiquetar el feminismo. Análisis de los cibermedios iberoamericanos

Rotular feminismo. Análise da cibermedia ibero-americana

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ABSTRACT | In recent years, feminism has increased its social presence, which sparks interest in learning how the media discourses transmit their values and demands to society. This study analyzes the presence and characterization of feminism in ten of the main Ibero-American digital media by analyzing 2712 terms included in the tags corresponding to the keywords that appear in the information metadata. The analysis of the interrelation of terms allows us to know which concepts, topics and people are linked to feminism, and the way in which the media approaches information on the subject. The results show, on the one hand, an unequal treatment of the subject by the Ibero-American media, as well as an unstructured use of tags to organize the media discourse. The results also show the important association between feminism and the personalities of culture and entertainment, compared to a less direct impact of the campaigns conducted on social networks and by activists. The study also corroborates that despite the increase in the total number of news stories, the discourses of victimization of women continue to be dominant among the topics associated with feminism.

KEYWORDS: feminism; cybermedia; women; Internet; digital journalism; gender studies.

RESUMEN | *Durante los últimos años, el feminismo ha incrementado su presencia social, lo que provoca interés por conocer la transmisión que se realiza de sus valores y reivindicaciones a la sociedad a partir de los discursos mediáticos. Este estudio analiza la presencia y la caracterización del feminismo en diez de los principales cibermedios iberoamericanos mediante el análisis de 2712 términos incluidos en las etiquetas (tags) correspondientes a las palabras clave que figuran en los metadatos de las informaciones. Este análisis de la interrelación de términos permite conocer con qué términos, temáticas y personas se asocia al feminismo, y el modo en el que los medios de comunicación abordan la información sobre la materia. Los resultados muestran, por un lado, un tratamiento desigual de la materia por parte de los medios iberoamericanos, así como un uso poco estructurado de las etiquetas como recurso para organizar el discurso mediático. Los resultados muestran también la importante asociación que se produce entre el feminismo y las personalidades del mundo de la cultura y el espectáculo, frente a un menor impacto directo de las campañas desarrolladas en las redes sociales y por las activistas. El estudio permite corroborar, asimismo, que pese al aumento del número total de informaciones, entre las temáticas asociadas al feminismo los discursos de victimización de las mujeres siguen siendo dominantes.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *feminismo; cibermedios; mujeres; Internet; periodismo digital; estudios de género.*

RESUMO | Nos últimos anos, o feminismo aumentou sua presença social, o que desperta interesse em aprender sobre a transmissão feita pelos discursos da mídia sobre seus valores e demandas para a sociedade. Este estudo analisa a presença e caracterização do feminismo em dez das principais mídias digitais ibero-americanas, analisando 2712 termos incluídos nos rótulos (*tags*) correspondentes às palavras-chave que aparecem nos metadados da informação. A análise da inter-relação de termos permite conhecer a quais conceitos, temas e pessoas o feminismo está associado, e a maneira pela qual a mídia lida com informações sobre o assunto. Os resultados mostram um tratamento desigual do assunto pela mídia ibero-americana, bem como um uso pouco estruturado dos rótulos para organizar o discurso da mídia. Os resultados também mostram a importante associação que ocorre entre o feminismo e as personalidades da cultura e do entretenimento, comparada ao menor impacto direto das campanhas realizadas nas redes sociais e pelos ativistas. O estudo também corrobora que, apesar do aumento no número total de notícias, entre os temas associados ao feminismo, os discursos de vitimização das mulheres continuam dominantes.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: feminismo; mídias digitais; mulheres; Internet; jornalismo digital; estudos de gênero.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2017, the Merriam-Webster dictionary chose *feminism* as the word of the year; to establish this nomination, the editors assessed both the total number of queries the term had obtained in the online version of their dictionary and the more than 70% increase in searches from the previous year (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

In line with the two meanings that this dictionary gives it, feminism can be defined from a double perspective, either as a social doctrine or elaborate thinking system, or as a social movement that incorporates the collective expression of women in their aim to overcome situations of political, social and cultural discrimination (Nash, 2004).

Thus, feminism refers to a reality that has changed over time and whose properties have been difficultly established due to its complexity and theoretical diversity. Sociological studies on the interdependence of social movements and the media (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Downing, Villarreal, Gil, & Stein, 2001; Fentress & Wickman, 2003) admit that the interpretation of phenomena such as feminism is directly related to how media discourses transmit them to society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditionally, there has been a considerable degree of consistency in the images that claim to represent the feminist movement and its members, and these have had a lot to do with the impact of this movement on the social imaginary. Frames have been a very useful tool for the study of their presence in the media, allowing to identify the issues and perspectives associated to this movement (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997; Ashley & Olson, 1998; Lind & Salo, 2002; De Miguel, 2005; Carballido, 2010).

Thus, communication continues to be a strategic element of the first order for the feminist cause. In fact, this movement has historically endeavored to seek expressive channels of its own, away from the influence of the large mass media (Romano, 1993), given the difficulties in achieving visibility in them, except at specific moments or periods of special dynamism and activity on the streets.

In the 1960s, the Women's Liberation Movement –or second feminist wave– was one of the most significant achievements regarding the participation of women in the public sphere. In addition to working to assert its own legitimacy, the Women's Liberation Movement dynamized the agendas of political organizations, including their demands on them: labor rights (equal pay, equal opportunities, regulation of domestic work, etc.), sexual rights (right to sexual education, free contraceptives, legalization of abortion, etc.), and legislative reforms (divorce law, end of the

crime of adultery, etc.). Unlike what happened in the United States and the rest of Europe, this revolutionary movement was late in the Iberian Peninsula, and its full permeability was not possible until the 1970s, once their respective dictatorships ended (April & Miranda, 1978; Folguera, 1988; Agustín, 2003; Larumbe, 2004; Martínez, González, & Gutiérrez, 2009; Monteiro & Ferreira, 2016; Melo, 2017). On the other hand, Latin American countries, traditionally considered as recipients of ideas generated in other contexts (Valdivieso et al., 2016), developed specific concerns and themes (Caulfield, 2001; Femenías, 2007; Millán, 2016).

In all contexts, the feminist movement gave great importance to its visibility and strove to spread its message to sensitize society. This effort ended up involving the media, although the relationship of feminism with them, even with those considered more open-minded and aware, has been described as a very arduous battle (Roig, 1989; Escario, Alberdi, & López-Accotto, 1996).

Studies of the presence of feminism in the media (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012) indicate that, in general terms, feminism receives little media attention. And although it is unquestionable that the media have been intimately linked to the dissemination and understanding of the feminist message, they have also limited its representation to what they consider to be news, which has favored the appearance of stereotyped images (Bradley, 2003).

Despite the fact that, in recent years, the media have abandoned some of the most negative frames with which they approached this matter, in general they continue to offer a distorted image of the feminist movement (Bronstein, 2005), which they sometimes present in a way that even weakens it, sweetening its vindictive content in favor of less disruptive issues (Dean, 2010; Mendes, 2012). Thus, as summarized by Gill (2016), the debate about the visibility of feminism in the media inevitably entails tensions and contradictions about the way it is represented.

In this regard, the media have contributed both to making the feminist movement visible and invisible, a type of treatment that has many points in common with what happened in other geographical contexts (Cancian & Ross, 1981; van Zoonen, 1992 ; Mendes, 2011).

Until its recent revival, the feminist movement had evidenced a progressive loss of effervescence, an impasse that has been accompanied by a lack of interest on the part of the traditional media (Larrondo, 2009).

This kind of *latency phase*, characterized by loss of attention and fear of passivity or inaction (Melucci, 1994), has been clearly overcome thanks to the Internet. The development of this platform in the early nineties allowed the movement to conquer new communication spaces, far from the traditional monopoly of mainstream

media, and enter a new phase of visibility. These new ways of dissemination led feminism to transfer its classic arguments to cyberspace, where there could be a debate, under the protection of a new critical current called *cyberfeminism* (Plant, 1998). In these circumstances, it is possible to think that the advantages attributed to social media and Web 2.0 regarding social and political movements –opening, expansion, public resonance, interaction with society, etc. (Rohr, 2014)– could be particularly significant in the case of the feminist movement. This includes the use of computers and the Internet to spread the feminist struggle, as well as the development of networked communities, in which women can find themselves and rebuild their identity outside the influence of the patriarchal mentality.

Undoubtedly, its potential has been realized in campaigns that have used the Internet and social networks to enhance the dissemination of traditional claims of the feminist movement through viral campaigns (Clark, 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018). But the analysis of the communication conducted by cyberfeminism indicates that, to a large extent, these online practices are conceived as a mere complement to the offline activities that were already being carried out (Fernández Romero, Corredor Lanas, & Santín Durán, 2011).

There are also critical voices that warn that the use of social networks can hinder the development of stable alliances between feminist movements, since they emphasize differences and enhance their expression as a strategy for meeting with equals and building groups (Caro Castaño , 2015).

In this context, this research's main objective is to analyze the treatment of the feminist movement in the main Ibero-American digital media, based on the analysis of the tags with which the media identify the information in their metadata.

METHODOLOGY

The sample used to conduct the study was composed of the leading general information online media in ten Ibero-American countries. To identify them, we used Alexa's (https://www.alexa.com/topsites) and SimilarWeb's (https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites) web traffic data.

The analyzed media, classified in order of highest to lowest number of Internet visitors, were: *El País* (Spain), *Clarín* (Argentina), *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brazil), *El Tiempo* (Colombia), *El Universal* (Mexico), *El Comercio* (Peru), *La Tercera* (Chile), *El Nacional* (Venezuela), *El Comercio* (Ecuador) and *Público* (Portugal). Overall, the analyzed online media exceed 460 million monthly visits, underscoring their potential influence on public opinion.

To carry out the study, and using the content analysis technique, we analyzed all journalistic texts that include the term feminism within the metadata field of keywords (tag) (Baños- Moreno, Felipe, Pastor-Sánchez, Lima, & Martínez-Bejar, 2017).

As part of the HTML and XML language, which uses its own syntax to offer information about web documents, tags identify their properties and assign values to them, which facilitates their indexing by search engines[1] (Jiménez, Fuentes, & González , 2004). Thus, tags not only allow optimizing the texts' indexing, but also make it possible for the media to structure their own sections or relate the news to each other.

Conversely, we excluded mentions of the word feminism among the metadata from other fields (headlines, description, body, etc.). Tags automatically generated by CMS or other applications based on the content of the headlines have also been excluded, and we have considered exclusively those expressly incorporated by the people who have produced the texts.

The analyzed period comprised four months, between September 1 and December 31, 2017, in which various feminist movements such as #metoo achieved great international projection.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The research results can be grouped into three main sections. On the one hand, the way in which the analyzed digital media (cybermedia) use the tags as a resource; on the other, the protagonists of the journalistic texts on feminism, and, finally, the frameworks in which the topics with which the term is associated can be located.

An unequal and unstructured treatment

The analysis of the news tagged with the term feminism in the main Ibero-American media offers as first data a very unequal treatment on this topic. *El País*, well above the rest of the publications that constitute the sample, accumulates 82.11% of the total number of tags analyzed, followed by *Público*, *Folha de Sao Paulo* and, to a lesser extent, *Clarín*. Apart from these four newspapers, which give greater specific attention to feminism, which also materializes sometimes in the existence

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1. Although Google stopped considering the tag *keyword* in its indexing, its Google News service does use the *news_keywords* meta tag, which makes it easier to identify the content of the information without the need for the data to appear in the headline or the body of the information (Giomelakis & Veglis, 2015).

of specific sections, the presence in the rest of the media can be considered almost residual, with an average of less than one information tagged every four days. The 158 texts published by *El País* during the period analyzed show an average of just over 1.3 a day, well ahead of *Folha de Sao Paulo, Clarín* and *Público,* which range between 0.24 and 0.16 daily, respectively. In the rest of the cyber media, the number of publications is testimonial.

Obviously, this distribution of results does not necessarily indicate the absence of many of these contents in the pages of the rest of the newspapers, but rather shows the lack of an editorial treatment of its own or of specific sections for these journalistic texts, which in turn entails the absence of identifying tags. It should be emphasized that tags not only serve to provide useful metadata for the indexing of content in search engines, but also help to structure the informative content of newspapers and to make the topics covered visible.

The distribution of the tags is also characterized by an enormous dispersion, which results in the idea of a poorly planned use of this resource in Ibero-American digital media. The 2,712 items analyzed are distributed in 805 different tags, indicating a very low repetition of many of the terms analyzed. Thus, due to its heterogeneity and content, it could be said that the use of tags by Ibero-American digital media corresponds to a rudimentary and poorly structured documentary language, which has not contributed to a standardized model of description (Jiménez et al., 2004) . Likewise, the diligence with which the tags are used also suggests the existence of very different use policies. While *El País* includes an average of 14.1 tags in each information, the rest of the cybermedia analyzed ranges from 2.6 incorporated by *Clarín* to 6.2 by the Portuguese *Folha de S. Paulo.*

On the contrary, if we analyze the types of existing tags, we can see, at least tentatively, a planned use of them. Starting from the data of the total number of journalistic texts analyzed, among the tags that these include we find a very similar number of terms that can be grouped in the categories of people (235 tags, 8% of the total), places (203, 7%) and sections of the digital media (304, 11%). Therefore, we can establish that its first function responds to identifying, in line with the classic journalistic 5W, who is the protagonist of the action and the place where the events have occurred. The sections of the cybermedia, on the other hand, help to organize the product and facilitate the results' classification and search. Beyond this basic identification work carried out by one out of four tags analyzed, the rest are distributed, with more or less balance, between aspects directly related to feminism (1,205 tags, 42% of the total), and the rest of the general issues also covered by the texts (894, 32%).

Cybermedia	Country	No. texts	No. tags	No. visits (millions)
El País	Spain	158	2,227	136.8
Clarín	Argentina	20	51	73.82
Folha de S.Paulo	Brazil	29	172	55.82
El Tiempo	Colombia	6	25	45.34
El Universal	Mexico	4	21	44.13
El Comercio	Peru	3	12	37.49
La Tercera	Chile	1	5	25.79
El Nacional	Venezuela	0	0	19.32
El Comercio	Ecuador	7	37	11.37
Público	Portugal	26	162	10.93
TOTAL		254	2,712	460.81

Table 1. Cybermedia analyzed by number of visits, texts and tags
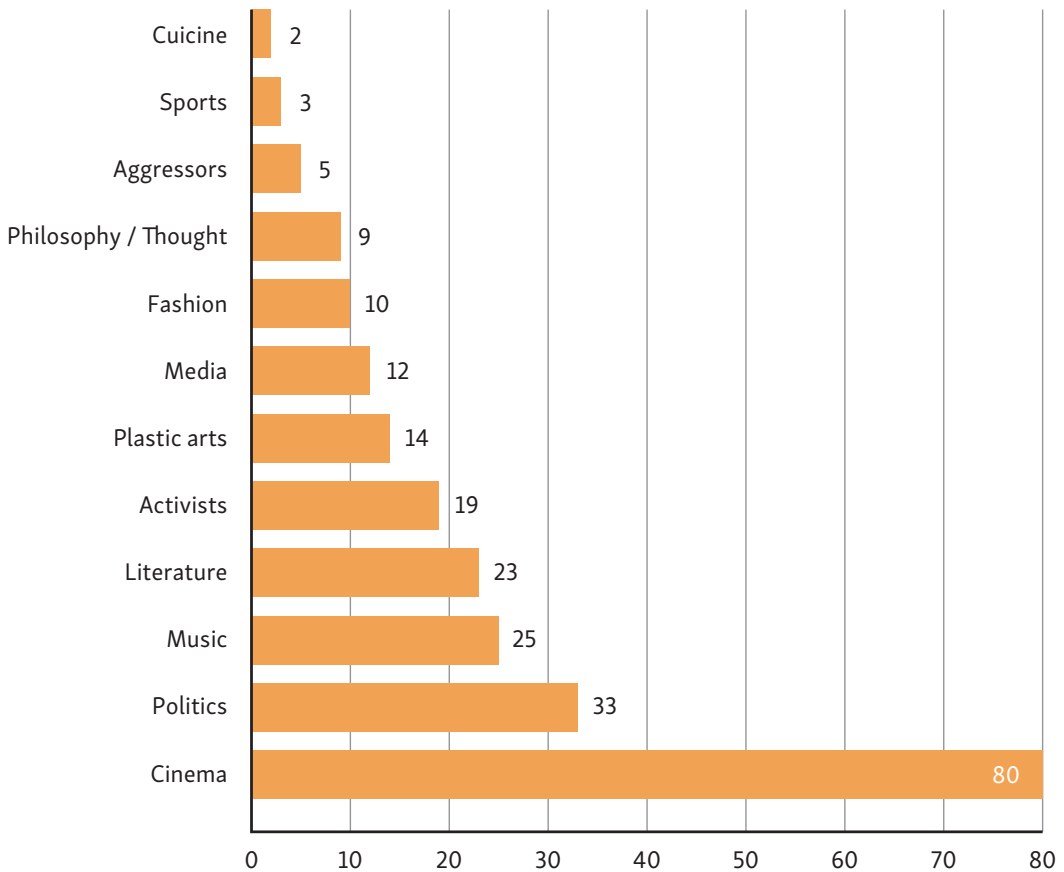
Source: Own elaboration.

Culture and entertainment, focus of visibility

The identifying work of the protagonists of the information offered by the metadata allows us to meet the people who promote the presence of feminism in Ibero-American cybermedia. And the data is eloquent.

One in three protagonists (34%) come from the world of cinema, followed at a certain distance by politics (14%), music (10.6%) and literature (9.8%). If we add up the data from the different areas of culture, we find that 68.5% of the tags belong to this area, compared to the 8.1% obtained by the activists. From the perspective of the analyzed media, therefore, feminism as a social movement is reflected in the society pages, but it is led by people from the field of culture and entertainment, who take advantage of their projection and visibility in the media to share their claims. The impact of activism and campaigns conducted through social networks –particularly the #metoo campaign during the period analyzed– is not seen directly, since it has a limited presence, but it is mostly seen through the appropriation by some celebrities of the claims and campaigns promoted by these movements.

This reality, undoubted in terms of quantitative analysis regarding how terms are related, causes some authors to underline the paradox that supposes that the claims come in part from people who in turn lend their image to hypersexualized representations of female bodies (Fernández- Hernández, 2017). Thus, the media

Figure 1. Protagonists of the information by areas

Source: Own elaboration.

would contribute to denounce, but at the same time to maintain, situations of inequality. In any case, there is no doubt that celebrity feminism can offer a powerful projection to the demands of the movement and contributes to generate greater visibility and dissemination among public opinion.

If celebrity feminism could, at least in part, be linked to Tuchman's (2000) claim that the so-called symbolic annihilation of women in the media occurs through their association with content of a trivial nature, their absence as protagonists of the information constitutes the evident key element in their invisibility.

Even in the case of journalistic texts linked to feminism, although by a narrow margin, men are also the majority in the tags analyzed (51.9%). The three people most frequently cited in association with the term feminism during the period analyzed also compose an eloquent portrait of information dynamics and their character: Harvey Weinstein leads the ranking with 26 citations, followed by Donald Trump with 11, and Hugh Hefner with 4 , while the first women are Frida

Kahlo and Reese Witherspoon, with three mentions each. If we look at the total number of people cited, and not at the frequency with which they are mentioned, the number of women is higher, although by a narrow margin (52.6%).

This perhaps surprising aspect does not contradict –but rather improves substantially – the most recent data on the underrepresentation of women in media reports (Macharia, Ndangam, Saboor, Franke, Parr, & Opoku, 2015; Jia, Landsall-Welfare, Sudhahar, Carter, & Cristianini, 2016; Matud, Rodríguez-Wangüemert, & Espinosa, 2017). Despite the slight gradual progress that has occurred in this matter (Ross & Carter, 2011), this imbalance continues to hinder the visibility of the increasing number of women in all occupations and professions (Shor, van de Rijt, Miltsov, Kulkarni, & Skiena, 2015).

Meanwhile, the analysis of the tags that locate the events helps us understand that the Ibero-American media conceives feminism as a global movement with an impact on each of their own societies. To analyze this distribution, we have considered Ibero-America as a whole as the broadcasting area for all the cybermedia analyzed, and not each of the countries in which the newspapers are published. This is due to the increasing internationalization of all media, particularly in common linguistic areas, which contributes to the creation of new global media from pre-existing national media (Peña, Lazkano, & García, 2016). Thus, *El País* only receives 57.2% of its readers from Spain, while it gets almost 10 million monthly visitors from Mexico and Brazil, and slightly more than three million from Argentina or Colombia, according to the 2018 data from Similarweb. The fact that 9.77% of the readers of the Portuguese public newspaper come from Brazil or that 44% of the readers of *El Comercio* (Peru) are from other countries reflect the ties between Ibero-American countries.

This expanded conception of what is considered the area of dissemination of digital media only highlights the global nature of information on the feminist movement. If approximately one in three information (70 texts, 35% of the total) is located in the Ibero-American sphere, one in four has its origin in the United States (and to a lesser extent, in Canada) (50 texts, 25%), one in five in the rest of European countries (41 texts, 20%), while news from Asia rises to an outstanding 15% (31 texts). Much less presence would have the news on Africa (9 texts, 4%) and Oceania (2 texts, 1%).

These data indicate the commitment of Ibero-American cybermedia to place the feminist movement as an international issue, and that local mobilizations have a more limited impact on digital media than those promoted by personalities of culture and entertainment in many parts of the world, that use digital media, along with social networks, as their showcase.

Tag	N
Feminism	254
Women	174
Society	154
Social movements	148
#metoo	54
Gender relationships	50
Women rights	45
Crimes	42
Sexual harassment	42
Machismo	38
Culture	38
Sexual crimes	38
Social problems	35
Prejudices	33
Sexism	32

Table 2. Frequency of most recurring tags

Source: Own elaboration.

Topic	Frequency	%
Rapes, sexual crimes	101	15.7
Inequality, discrimination, sexism	98	15.3
Campaigns, activism	76	11.8
Violence against women	68	10.6
Women rights	47	7.3
Harassment	47	7.3
Social problems	38	5.9
Prejudices	35	5.5
Equality	23	3.6
Sexuality	20	3.1
Health	16	2.5
World days	15	2.3
Couple relationships	13	2.0
Abortion, reproductive rights	11	1.7
Maternity	7	1.1
Childhood, youth	7	1.1
Wage gap	6	0.9
Murders, femicides	6	0.9
Language	4	0.6
Beauty	4	0.6
TOTAL	642	100%

Table 3. Topics associated with feminism

Source: Own elaboration.

The victimized image of feminism

Once the references to other spheres and areas are excluded, the analysis of the metadata of the 1,205 tags directly linked to feminism and its claims shows a high preference for associating feminism with analogous terms such as women (always plural, except very rare exceptions), social movements and, to a lesser extent, gender relations.

If, on the contrary, we focus on specific issues, the media offer a victimized image of women (Lind & Salo, 2002), associating them with situations of weakness, vulnerability or crime. Thus, in the sample analyzed we find that 62.1% of the tags directly related to feminism and its claims offer a victimized image of women (sexual crimes, inequality, violence against women, harassment, prejudice, etc.), compared to 26.7 % that can be considered positive (activism, rights, equality, etc.) and 11.1% that can be considered neutral (sexuality, health, etc.).

It is particularly noteworthy that the 254 journalistic texts linked to feminism add 222 tags related to some type of violence against women, from murders, rapes and sexual crimes to harassment. This visibility exceeds that obtained by campaigns, activists (#metoo, *Ni una menos*, *Femen*, etc.) or the different international days (women's day, day against gender violence), which only reach 14.1% of the terms analyzed. As De los Ríos and Martínez (1999, pp. 98-99) point out, the great paradox is that women continue to be news mainly as a negative subject, whether physical, sexual, psychological, political, or related to the world of law.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the 2,712 keywords tagged in 254 journalistic texts published over four months by ten of the main Ibero-American media allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

1. The two extremes that have characterized the relationship between feminism and the media can be found among the analyzed media. While a minority of them are committed to a strong visibility of the issue through their tags –especially in the case of *El País* and, to a lesser extent, *Folha de S.Paulo*, *Público* and *Clarín*–the presence of the term in the metadata of the rest of the newspapers that constitute the sample can be considered practically residual. Although the Internet has provided new communication tools and visibility opportunities for the feminist movement, for example through texts' taxonomy, the terminological connections present in Ibero-American cybermedia show that many of them are still in a latency phase, characterized by a certain invisibility of the movement. In line with what Dean (2010) and Gill (2016)

pointed out, in any case, a greater presence of feminism in the media does not imply a greater presence of the most demanding issues.

2. Regarding the use of tags, the dispersion of the terms –805 different keywords in the 2,712 analyzed tags– indicates a poorly structured use, which makes it difficult to identify a standard model of description. On the contrary, if we order the tags by types of terms, we can see, on the first place, a contextualizing function –the what and who of the information and where to find it–, which manifests in a balanced reference to people, places and sections. Together they add up to 26% of the tags. On the other hand, the rest of the terms are distributed in a relatively proportionate way between specific topics of feminism (42%) and topics of a general nature (32%).

3. In terms of visibility in digital media, media feminism proves to a large extent to be also a celebrity feminism, which finds its best spokespersons in the personalities of culture and entertainment. Together, all of them accumulate 68.5% of the tags referring to people, a figure that contrasts with the 8.1% reached by activists or the 11.8% reached by campaigns. The success of the mobilization and denunciation through social networks –with the #metoo movement as the most outstanding initiative during the period analyzed– can therefore be measured indirectly through its exposure by these personalities, who do manage to locate these claims in the cybermedia discourse. On the contrary, the low presence of activists (Lind & Salo, 2002) against a large number of protagonists from the world of culture and arts, has as its counterpart the delimitation of feminism to a less generalized, and more selective and elitist, social environment (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012). 4. In this regard, although it is paradoxical, the majority of the tags referring to people correspond to men (51.9%), a figure that is in line with the existing evidence on the underrepresentation of women in the media information.

4. Finally, the analysis of the terms directly linked to the feminism tag clearly indicates a victimized image of women, which reaches 62.1% of the analyzed tags. In over half of these cases –34.5% of the total terms of the specific topics– the journalistic texts address issues related to the different forms of violence against women, issue that has a strong presence in the news agenda of Ibero-American media (Fernández Hasán, 2016), which clearly characterizes the approach with which information related to feminism is processed. These results corroborate what has already been collected by Bradley (2003) in his analysis of the American media because, paradoxically, a greater presence of feminism seems to result in a greater abundance of negative content about this movement, associated with the interests of the agendas from the media themselves and their focus on unusual, spectacular or dramatic contents.

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