

NRA Women: From Victimization to Branded Content as a Strategy to Attract Female Audience to Gun Culture on Instagram

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Abstract. The National Rifle Association (NRA) has created accounts for women on different social networks to attract them into gun culture using innovative advocacy strategies aiming not only to influence their audience but also to build a positive image of the group. Here we analyze the ways of attracting the NRA female target on Instagram, considering types of women representations and roles depicted and how followers engaged during the American Midterm elections of November 8, 2022, as a key moment when public debate about gun culture increased. For this, a quantitative and qualitative study of the official Instagram account @NRAWomen has been conducted, which includes data analysis on publications, interactions, and reactions. Also, we have performed a qualitative content analysis on the most popular posts. The results show clear advertising and brand centered profitable actions as well as the systematic use of recruitment strategies based on sponsored entertainment.

Keywords: Gun culture; NRA Women; Instagram; Gender Studies; US Midterm Elections.

[es] Mujeres de la NRA: De la victimización al *branded content* como estrategia para atraer al público femenino a la cultura de las armas en Instagram

Resumen. La Asociación Nacional del Rifle (NRA, por sus siglas en inglés) tiene cuentas enfocadas a mujeres en diferentes redes sociales con el fin de atraerlas a la cultura de armas mediante estrategias de promoción innovadoras cuyos objetivos son influir y construir una imagen positiva del grupo. Aquí analizamos las formas de atraer ese público femenino de la NRA en Instagram, considerando los tipos de representaciones y roles representados y cómo los seguidores interactúan. El período elegido está enmarcado por las midterm elections del 8 de noviembre de 2022, como un momento clave en el que aumentaron los debates públicos sobre la cultura de armas. Para ello, se ha realizado un estudio cuantitativo y cualitativo de la cuenta oficial de Instagram @NRAWomen, que incluye análisis de datos sobre publicaciones, interacciones y reacciones. Asimismo, se ha realizado un análisis de contenido cualitativo sobre los posts más populares. Los resultados muestran claras acciones centradas en la publicidad y rentabilidad de las marcas, así como el uso sistemático de estrategias de captación basadas en el entretenimiento patrocinado.

Palabras clave: Cultura de armas; Mujeres NRA; Instagram; Estudios de género; Midterm Elections, Estados Unidos.

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1. Introduction

In the recent history of the United States, the issue of firearms in electoral processes has been a trend, also in the last midterm elections in 2022 and it will be key for the following years. Events such as the latest mass shootings mean that gun control is always present on the media and political agenda with much controversy in public opinion (Olzak, 2023).

How the institutions like the National Rifle Association (NRA) lobbies to continue keeping gun culture alive is little studied, especially if we consider that it has been segmenting minorities for the last few years to achieve more effectiveness in its strategies. This allows them to instrumentalize social movements in favor of pro-guns ideology, some of the most prominent are feminism, the racial question or the LGT-BIQ+ community (Filindra, 2023).

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For this study, gender is taken as a point of reference to understand how the promotion of gun culture targets female public, especially by the NRA, which has a specific division for women with magazines, channels, audiovisual productions, and social media accounts just for them.

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to assess the ways of attracting the female target by the NRA through social media, mainly Instagram, and reflect on their effectiveness. We will focus on analyzing what types of women are depicted and establish what representations are made of female roles on Instagram. To address this question, we need to know what types of social media accounts the NRA runs, who follows them and how interaction takes place. Collaborations with companies, brands and influential profiles and their impact on the audience will also be analyzed.

The period chosen is framed in the American Midterm elections of November 8, 2022, taking as a reference the pre-campaign, campaign, results, and post-campaign. In this event, the 435 positions of the United States House of Representatives were chosen, and 33 or 34 of the 100 of the United States Senate. In addition, in these elections, 34 of the 50 US states elected their governors for a four-year term.

We chose this event as a centralizer of the study to observe what changes may have occurred in the NRA's strategy directed at women during the electoral period because the issue of guns is once again very hot in public opinion after the mass shootings in Uvalde and Buffalo. These and other tragic events have made 2022 the year in which more children and young people died in shootings according to the NGO Gun Violence Archive (2023), which has collected this statistic since 2014. For this reason, the United States Congress approved a historic pact in June, which allows for increased control of firearms acquired by persons under 21 years of age.

In addition, data from The Violence Project (2023) show a gender disparity among the per-petrators of mass shootings: of the 172 studied since 1966 by that organization, only four were carried out by women. This data is important because when it comes to doing politics, pro-gun movements place women as victims who need to be trained in the use of weapons to protect themselves.

In recent years, Republican political campaigns have focused on highlighting independence of women as self-protectors (Wineinger, 2022). Dana Loesch, a former NRA spokeswoman, actively campaigned on the argument that women with firearms were less at risk of being mugged or as-saulted (Loesch, 2016). According to a survey carried out by the organizations All in Together and Echelon Insights (2023), guns are the first concern regarding the decision to vote among women. However contrary to Loesch's earlier position, this same study shows that Republican women's views on gun control are markedly different from Republican men and more like Dem-

ocratic women (Loesch, 2016). Specifically, there is a large 20-point difference between Republican men (41 percent) and women (61 percent) on the issue of restricting the ability to purchase certain types of firearms. Therefore, All in Together and Echelon Insights (2023) study could confirm that concerns about gun violence are helping to bring common ground between liberal and conservative women because a significant number of Republican women agree with Democratic proposals of possible legislative solutions. This same survey shows key data on young women who especially fear that gun violence affects their lives. Therefore, these two periods are interesting for studying the new strategies for attracting young women through Instagram.

According to NRA (2023), one of the largest increases in gun ownership by women took place in the mid-1990s, from 12 to 20 million women with guns. But the domestic use of firearms in the United States has been consolidated as a culture rooted in traditions. American society based this culture on the Second Amendment ratified in 1791 along with nine other articles of the Bill of Rights. What was born as a need for personal defense, lives as an inherent part of a culture thanks to the key action of a lobby group, the National Rifle Association (NRA). For decades, this organization has focused on a very specific audience, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2017) the overall demographic profile of who owns guns was well established: white, male, politically conservative, middle class, middle-aged, and living in rural areas. However, in the last decades many social movements have influenced the currents of public opinion through the influence of social media. More specifically, the female audience, traditionally dragged by family values of protection by the father figure, has experienced in recent years a movement for independence and self-protection. Mencken and Froese established that American gun owners vary widely in the symbolic meaning they find in firearms; some associate gun ownership with moral and emotional empowerment and others do not (Mencken & Froese, 2019). In fact, the NRA is changing the strategy to disassociate gun owners from white power and militia movements (Dawson, 2019; Melzer, 2009). They recognize that if the Second Amendment is to survive, they need to expand their base of supporters and bring women into the fold (Schwartz, 2019).

NRA Women is presented as the division that gives a voice to female Second Amendment advocates across the country. The association always devoted more attention to its male public, but after realizing that 40% of the gun sales are for women, the NRA directed its marketing resources to reinforce this target. In fact, the National Firearms Survey, designed by Deborah Azrael of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Matthew Miller of Northeastern University, estimates 3.5 million women became new gun owners from January 2019

through April of 2021. This survey also found that new gun owners were more diverse than the general population: among new women gun owners, 28% were Black (Miller & Azrael, 2022).

On the other hand, in 2012, according to the Pew Research Center, 40 percent of women agreed that owning a gun is more likely to protect someone from crime than to put their safety at risk. By 2014 that number was 51 percent. In addition, in 2017, also the Pew Research Center reported that male and female gun owners are about equally likely to cite protection as a reason why they own guns. But far larger shares of women than men who own guns say protection is the only reason they own a gun: About a quarter of women who own guns (27%) are in this category, compared with just 8% of men (Pew Research Center, 2017).

In this regard, the latter could be connected to why NRA's communication policy impacts its NRA Women's division from the perspective of protection against male-on-female violence, and why social media contents of the NRA Women's division are conceived from the perspective of protecting women. In any case, women and guns are well connected these days especially after 9/11 attacks (Mason, 2013) in an effort of gender washing by the NRA as part of the culture wars that takes place in contemporary public sphere in the digital space. Understanding how institutions such as the NRA adapts to ideological debates in culture wars, especially about gender, will shed light on how political lobbying and corporate communication are being shaped by gender issues nowadays and vice versa.

2. Literature review

The relationship between women and guns was studied relatively little until the last decade when feminist social movements gained special relevance in social networks. We began to find references in 1995, when researchers Tom and Robert J. Smith evaluated changes in gun ownership among women between 1980 and 1994. The authors studied reports from pro-gun groups and mass media about firearm ownership by women concluding that all of them exaggerated the rate with the intention of encouraging this female audience to buy guns (Smith & Smith, 1995). Also in that same year, the researchers M. Elizabeth Blair and Eva M. Hyatt, examined factors that influenced women's attitudes toward guns (Blair & Hyatt, 1995).

In 2000, two scholars, Mary Zeiss Stange and Carol K. Oyster, self-defined "gun women", launched a book relating feminism to the right of women as citizens to bear arms and the positive impact that gun ownership has on their lives. According to the authors, most of the feminist literature on firearms, positioned them as something destructive and they wanted with their work to open the debate towards

other points of view, recognizing the need for some control but without opposing the citizens' right under the second amendment (Stange & Oyster, 2000).

Laura Browder (2009) explained in her book several points of fascination that American women can experience with firearms. Browder made a complete review of the different representations of armed women and their roles. In addition, the author exposes how for two centuries, women who pick up guns have disrupted the popular association of guns and masculinity, establishing the question of arms as a right to obtain their capacity for full citizenship. On the other hand, Deborah Homsher (2015), focused on contemporary American women ideologies trying to explain the fascination that they have for firearms based on personal experiences and their responses to the national public debates.

In 2017, a study on the influence of pro-gun rights groups on women who support firearms control law, concluded that the persuasion strategies used by these groups do not have a great impact (Goss, 2017). Regarding gun control, in 2019 it was stated that women are more likely to support firearms regulation measures than men (Miller, 2019). In addition, in that same year, a study was developed, based on data from the Pew Research Center (2017) that conclude that "gun-owning women exhibit levels of political participation about gun policy and a greater willingness to engage in political discussions about gun control than non-owning women" (Middlewood *et al.*, 2019).

Already in 2020, researchers Wolfson, Azrael and Miller developed a study based on a 2015 survey answered by 3949 adults with interesting conclusions: "Male and female gun owners in the USA are demographically similar, cite similar reasons for owning guns and, despite males owning more guns, are equally likely to store at least one gun loaded and unlocked" (Wolfson *et al.*, 2020). In 2021, Noah S. Schwartz developed research analyzing three NRATV programs and the "narratives that frame participation in the gun culture as both enjoyable and empowering for women in order to overcome barriers posed by masculinist norms" (Schwartz, 2021).

2.1. Lobbying and social media

The associations created within civil society are key to maintaining citizen pressure on issues of interest. This concept defined and studied by Habermas places the focus of the action in cooperation between subjects: "civil society is made up of those associations, organizations and movements that emerged more or less spontaneously that collect the resonance of the spheres of private life, condense it and transmit it to the space of political public opinion" (Habermas *et al.*, 1981). Some of these associations have evolved into what we know today as a lobby. According to the Center for Effective Government (CEG) the origin of the term comes from the lobbying in England in the

eighteenth century by groups of people who crowded at the entrance of the British Parliament to make their demands on politicians (in Oliver González, 2018). Authors such as Francés (2013) define the concept of lobby as the defense of particular interests against the different powers established, carried out directly by companies or organizations affected, or through intermediaries. In this regard, the professionalization of lobbyist associations has been defined as an organized defense of interests against public authorities that can include the paid intervention of professionals, specialized or communication agencies, as well as lawyers and consultants (Hernández, 2019). Lobby and advocacy are directly related terms since the function of pressure groups is to make statements about public opinion. In fact, authors like Van Wessel and others maintain that “governments commonly recognize the advocacy role of civil society organizations in development on the basis of civil society having an independent part to play, advocating for the perspectives and interests of social groupings” (Van Wessel et al, 2019). Therefore, the NRA is within those lobbies paid by its associates with a large business structure to cover all the political and social pressures for their cause. In these organizations, the role of communication management is key, and it is necessary to adapt to the evolution of the channels.

The rise of social media as an expression for civil society has made an important difference in the interaction with users. In the first place, it seeks to define what social media are and their key role in the evolution of marketing focused on content creation. In fact, content marketing is focused on attracting and retaining customers through the constant creation of relevant and valuable content for people (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009). Digital revolution has transformed the relationship between supply and demand. Users now control the entire process of information. In addition, companies have adopted the Internet as a new means of communication, platforms that allow you to personalize your message and interact more individually with each user (Oviedo *et al.*, 2015). According to Barreto (2012), social network sites have three main functions: personal, social and infomercial. They have encouraged the creation of common interest groups, virtual communities that share a common project between people who are not close physically (Shea & Bidjerano, 2009).

However, the way to communicate the messages must be clearly established. There are companies that put their content on social media without considering the difference that exists between both communicative methods: advertising is the message that the brand wants to convey and content marketing is information that users demand to achieve their own goals (Kotler *et al.*, 2017).

Social media can be grouped by generalists, professionals or specialized (Celaya, 2008), but currently there are other criteria to catalog them: horizontal or without a defined theme, aimed at all types of

users, or vertical, where users gather around a specific theme, activity, or content (Martínez-Guerrero, 2018). The classic horizontal social networks are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or WhatsApp. On the contrary, LinkedIn, Spotify or Tinder are perfect examples of vertical networks. Although we can find specialized influential profiles on all social networks, the most famous influencers usually move on horizontal social networks, especially Instagram.

Social media celebrities refer to individuals who became famous via their social media presence, as opposed to traditional celebrities who are famous from film, music, and TV shows (Khamis *et al.*, 2017). In addition, influencers are defined as “people who built a large network of followers and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches” (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017). Instagram has positioned itself as the social network with the most presence of influential profiles in the fashion, lifestyle, travel, and beauty sectors. These influencers can be considered micro-celebrities because they have relatively high recognizability, and they use it for social influence and monetization. Social media influencers enjoy this unique identity of both being famous and ordinary person (Jin *et al.*, 2019).

Delving deeper into the case of firearms and their culture perpetuated over the years, we also found a strong social media presence from the NRA, gun manufacturing companies, and influential figures using their digital media leadership to promote the domestic use of guns. That type of content that they post on social media can be understood from the mentioned perspective of Mencken and Froese (2019) about the relationship of gun ownership with moral and emotional empowerment which establishes the need to connect directly with emotions. According to Guo and Saxton, new organizational practices and forms of communication emerged thanks to the use of social media to engage in advocacy work (Guo & Saxton, 2014). Seelig and colleagues also conducted their study about the new culture of advocacy through digital media and they state that “in this participatory, co-operative media culture, people were actively engaged and shared digital content that inspired others to care about important issues” (Seelig *et al.*, 2018).

3. Methodology

The study has been divided into three phases: a review of the literature, an exploratory part to obtain all data from Instagram public content and a more reflective part to address the topic in a critical perspective to obtain conclusive results on the recruitment trends of women to gun culture. We have used both quantitative and qualitative methods. This mixed approach is typical in modern social research as addressed by authors like Hernández Sampieri (2018) or Ramirez and Lugo (2020) with their systematic review about mixed methods used in educational research and so-

cial sciences during the 2010-2020 decade (Ramirez & Lugo, 2020).

We decided to set Instagram as the object of study for a quantitative and qualitative analysis of NRA main account on this platform: NRA Women (@NRAWomen) that counts on 46,600 followers. Currently this female division also has accounts on Facebook, X (previously Twitter) and YouTube, which have been discarded from this study for different reasons: In the case of Facebook, NRA Women has a community of almost 100,000 followers and they have an active posting level, but their main activity is not based on the mention of other profiles and gun brands to analyze the use of influencer marketing. Regarding X, they have almost 30,000 followers but they base their actions on retweeting content from other accounts, mostly the main NRA account (@NRA) and do not prioritize their own content creation directly to the account's target. This is just the opposite of the case of Youtube, where they have 2,560 subscribers, but have produced audiovisual content such as fictional series: Love at First Shot and Armed & Fabulous, both with many seasons. However, in the last three years that channel has remained without new content, only functioning as a repository.

The content selected from Instagram accounts are only from the NRA Women profile, which is public and open, including all graphic material. No image has been analyzed from any personal account, all have been published by @NRAWomen that are accessible to all people, even if they are not registered on this social network. Therefore, it has not been necessary to obtain permission from public subjects because they are taken from a public platform and correctly cited and treated pre-serving private data.

The quantitative analysis will be carried out from the Instagram platform studying how NRA uses influence marketing and how they relate it to promoting brands. For this purpose, its activity of the last quarter of 2022 and the first of 2023 has been analyzed acquiring data such as: number of publications, medium reach per-post, number of interactions per publication, engagement rate of each publication, number of mentioned profiles, differentiating between personal or corporate accounts, average number of followers of those mentioned accounts and probability of exponential reach.

We have considered as publication, the discourse where we post the photographs, videos, or designs to share them with our community permanently unless it is deleted by our own decision or in violation of the rules from the platform. Interactions on Instagram are the actions that the user does with your content, such as commenting, liking, sharing the post, saving it, going to your profile, or clicking your link. The reach is the people who view that content, and the en-

agement rate is the equation that comes out between the number of people who see the content and those who interact with it.

Two periods of similar duration have been chosen in two different but consecutive years to see the evolution of the digital strategy and the results obtained in quantitative terms, the last quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. These two periods of equal duration -4 months- were framed in the American Midterm elections of November 8, 2022, taking as a reference the pre-campaign, campaign, results, and post-campaign. For this stage, we have used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to facilitate the assessment.

To give more context and reflective insight to the research, we added a qualitative analysis about the discourses that have generated more interactions on the 5 images with the greatest impact on interactions from the @NRAWomen account. We decided to use Halliday's model from 2004 to identify in photographic and/or audiovisual content the different modal structures that encode the basic illocutionary forces: Declarative, Imperative and Interrogative/Reflexive. This allows us to make content classifications based on whether they address the audience in an aseptic, imperative, interrogative, or reflective way (Halliday, 2004). In addition, we also include the multimodalities of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) that seek relationships in audiovisual elements, producers, receivers, and subjects represented. The authors point out different elements that can interact with receptors, such as the image, distance, and different angles (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Finally, we analyze the message and the elements of each post to identify the persuasion principles described by Cialdini and Goldstein (2002) and Witkowski (2023) and their use in re-recruiting women through advertising techniques. According to the authors, we can classify persuasion techniques within 6 basic principles: authority, reciprocity, scarcity, liking, commitment and consistency, and social approval or consensus.

4. Results

Regarding the quantitative part, the first is to know the number of publications that have been made in one period and in another. In the last quarter of 2022, we found 35 publications compared to 17 in the first quarter of 2023. However, in the last quarter of 2022, 37 accounts were mentioned in the publications, which makes an average of 1.05 per publication compared to the 24 accounts mentioned in the 17 Q1 2023 posts, an average of 1.4 per post.

Table 1. Sample of data extracted from the @NRAWomen account in the selected periods, the last quarter of 2022 and the first of 2023.

	Q4 2022	Q1 2023
Publications	35	17
Accounts mentioned	37	24
Brands mentioned	26	20
Personal accounts mentioned (influencers)	11	4
Generated interactions	8792	8529

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Of the accounts mentioned, in the last quarter of 2022, 26 are brands of weapons or accessories to carry them and 11 would correspond to influencers. A similar proportion in the first quarter of 2023, with 20 brand accounts and 4 influencers. If we talk about interactions generated, in the last quarter of 2022 the publications had 8,529 likes and 263 comments, making a total of 8,792 reactions. Regarding the first quarter of 2023, we found 8,267 likes and 316 comments, a total of 8,583 interactions. However, to make a fair comparison, we must take the average number of interactions per publication in both periods, where in the last quarter of 2022 we found 251 per publication while in the first quarter of 2023 we found an average of 504, more than double.

Regarding the topics addressed, we found in both periods analyzed most publications based on adver-

tising new models of weapons or accessories for concealed carry. In the last quarter of 2022, the new models of firearms were mentioned in 12 publications and accessories for concealed carry in 10. In the first quarter of 2023 we found 8 and 6 publications on each of those topics respectively. Other topics that we have been able to classify but with much less representation are hunting or shooting sports. Another fact that stands out is that in the last quarter of 2022 self-defense is mentioned in 11 publications, while in the first quarter of 2023 no mention is made of said topic.

For the qualitative analysis we have selected the 5 images with the greatest impact on interactions from the @NRAWomen account to analyze the different variables and compare the content of the image, the message, and the followers' comments.

Table 2. Sample of the 5 posts with the most interactions from the @NRAWomen account.

	Description of the post	Interactions
1	NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2023, January 13) @sigsauerusa's new brand for women is more than a gun (although it is that, too). [Picture]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CnXDdh2O3Ip/	3366
2	NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2023, March 30). New for 2023: If you have difficulty operating a semi-automatic pistol, EAA's .380-cal. Girsan MC 14 T's Tip-Up design eliminates the need to rack the slide altogether. @eaacorp #concealedcarry. [Picture]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cqa_PnKObKu/	1200
3	NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2022, Dec 15). Unlike many micro-compact .380 pistols, the new #Ruger Security-380 Lite Rack will accommodate a full capacity, 10-round flush-fit magazine [Picture]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CmNTJfcblLI/	1129
4	NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2022, Dec 12). If you plan to carry concealed, participating in practical shooting competitions will teach you much more about shooting and gun safety than just standing in an indoor shooting lane. #concealedcarry #CCW [Video]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CmEy3QmAUP6/	794
5	NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2023, Jan 10). @mossbergcorp offers a variety of managed-recoil options for small-frame home defenders—and those who just don't want to get beat up by their shotguns. [Picture]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CnPXWQDuSWc/	381

Based on Haliday's model, we can sustain that the 5 publications are declarative, because they are reduced to presenting the pistol models with a clearly advertising function but without using the imperative. Only in the second and fourth post we can see a lit-

tle more reflective intention, on the one hand, through recommendations to select a specific advertised model for women regarding the difficulties that they can experience and on the other hand, they recommend preparatory courses, but without using the imperative

as a demand for an action. Analyzing the publications in depth according to the variables studied by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) we observe that the entire selection has several in common. Of the 5 published images, the first 3 have a very considerable difference with the other 2, for example, the first photo has 10

times more interactions than the last. What do those 3 images have in common? The design and production of the images are identical - the presentation of a gun on a white background, in close-up to observe all the details.

Image 1. Comparison of the first three images ordered from largest to smallest by interaction.



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnXDdh2O3Ip/>
https://www.instagram.com/p/Cqa_PnKObKu/
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CmNTJfcplLI/>

Evaluating the 3 images, a close-up photograph is observed that, according to the author, conveys closeness and complicity with the viewer. The meaning could even be interpreted as accessibility to the product, more specifically, an invitation to use the gun. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, the horizontal angle determines emotional involvement but if a frontal angle is used, direct contact is intended with the public, while if you opt for a profile angle, you establish oblique contact. Therefore, in this case, this emotional involvement of the subjects is established but the angle is presented in profile because if it were frontal, the emotional appeal could be interpreted as an attack. The authors also talk about the position of the object in the image, high angle expresses control relationship and subjugation; the normal angle,

at eye level, indicates relationship of closeness and equality; and the low angle, manifests a relationship of dependency and submission. In this case, the three are placed at eye level, although the last one would be at a slightly low angle, potentially appealing to the viewer's dependence on the pistol.

Regarding the fourth publication, the shots of the video are mostly lateral, or the camera is placed behind the female shooter's back. Furthermore, the shots in this case are not so close, the social distance is a little greater, although not much, so the close relationship would be maintained although with more intimacy. It is really an appealing resource for women to join these concealed carry training courses, it is about transmitting accessibility and a direct team message: any woman can join.

⁴ NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2023, January 13) @sigsauerusa's new brand for women is more than a gun (although it is that, too).
⁵ NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2023, March 30). New for 2023: If you have difficulty operating a semi-automatic pistol, EAA's .380-cal. Girsan MC 14 T's Tip-Up design eliminates the need to rack the slide altogether. @eaacorp #concealedcarry.
⁶ NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2022, Dec 15). Unlike many micro-compact .380 pistols, the new #Ruger Security-380 Lite Rack will accommodate a full capacity, 10-round flush-fit magazine.

Image 2. Two sequences of shots from the fourth publication analyzed by interaction.

(1)⁷(2)⁸Source: NRA Women [@NRAWomen]: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CmEy3QmAUP6/> 9

Finally, in the fifth post a woman is also included, with a semi lateral angle, once again avoiding a frontal perspective that could be interpreted as an attack. As in the first three images analyzed, the shot is very close, alluding to intimacy and closeness with the audience. In that close and detailed shot, the firearm model with all the specifications is perfectly observed.



nrawomen @mossbergcorp offers a variety of managed-recoil options for small-frame home defenders—and those who just don't want to get beat up by their shotguns. Read full story in link in bio! #mossberg #homedefense

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CnPXWQDuSwc/>¹⁰

We also find patriotic elements such as the American flag on the cap, representing a very specific role of a woman, white, blonde, young, and patriotic. As in the rest of the compilation, the image is at eye level to express closeness, sympathy to appeal aspirationality.

Of the 5 publications analyzed for being the ones that have had the most interaction and therefore can

be considered the most successful we can easily identify the six principles of persuasion (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002) taken as a reference to theoretically analyze the audience acquisition on this Instagram account. If we start with reciprocity, we must mention the channel used, which is Instagram, so all social networks imply a bidirectional relationship with interaction. However, that same reciprocity is sensed through the images, the elements and the discourse used, which constantly encourages participation, especially those that include appeal to testing models or taking courses, they want a reciprocal relationship based on the creation of a comfort zone where the audience gets involved.

However, scarcity understood as exclusivity also plays a key role in these five publications. In this account based on branded content, they present certain brands with exclusive models for women that especially take care of that audience and differentiate themselves from the rest of the manufacturers. And with the use of influential profiles presented as a claim, they are differentiated personalities to create that aspirational feeling. That close relationship is worked with the elements used, but it is always based on membership in an exclusive club.

Another of the principles clearly stated is authority. According to authors, people put more trust in expert and reputable figures. In this case, this account is based on the mention of other profiles specialized in this field. Four of the referenced accounts include mentions of specific brands of firearms and two of them also mention two influential women in the sector, specifically athletes and shooting champions.

⁷ Lateral plane captured at 6^h30^m of the video.

⁸ Dorsal plane captured at second 18^h30^m of the video.

⁹ NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2022, Dec 12). If you plan to carry concealed, participating in practical shooting competitions will teach you much more about shooting and gun safety than just standing in an indoor shooting lane. #concealedcarry #CCW [Video]. Instagram.

¹⁰ NRA Women [@NRAWomen]. (2023, Jan 10). @mossbergcorp offers a variety of managed-recoil options for small-frame home defenders—and those who just don't want to get beat up by their shotguns.

So, we can establish that it is an account based on specialization whose content is based on premises perceived reliably by the audience. This perception of authority links directly to the principle of liking because this content is created for female fans within gun culture and these 5 publications are based on the use of marketing on stereotypical tastes. The clearest example is the first publication that has a very notable difference in interaction and likes with respect to the previous ones. This model is sold exclusively for women and includes pink, gold and flowery elements specially designed to appeal to the female audience and stereotypical classic tastes. That previously analyzed presentation of the elements showing detailed photographic shots responds to content created for people very interested in that product.

We can also relate the last two principles because they are commitment and social approval. Firearms represent a danger and have been causing a lot of controversy among public opinion. Many people have expressed their aversion to weapons and reject domestic use. However, the communication strategies of these advocacy groups like the NRA have consisted of turning that concept upside down, positioning themselves as an organization that fights for the rights of American society and ensures security. In these five publications it is true that we do not find a victimizing use of women as objects of protection, but we do observe a commitment to the female sector of equality and empowerment regarding the recreational use of guns. The best example of this commitment in the sample analyzed is the video that encourages women to take the concealed carry course to guarantee correct and safe use of weapons.

Based on the comments received in these publications to assess the quality of the interaction, we can establish great involvement from participants. Many successful social media posts have very brief comments, with only icons that simply represent approval of the content, however, on the NRA Women account, we find several examples of women involved with that content and who value the objects presented, especially the first three posts with new pistol models. In fact, in the second publication mentioned in Table 2 that shows a model that is easier to use for women we can find comments like these examples: "That is great especially for us without the strength to rack the slide" or "this is perfect it's gonna [sic] reduce the stress of racking". Which demonstrates knowledge of the topic and the involvement of the audience.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We can observe how the same digital marketing strategies work with the NRA Women account as in other sectors and the use of influential accounts with good numbers to improve notoriety. There are three types of media in the digital environment: owned, paid, and earned. The first correspond to the tools used for the

diffusion owned by the brand or company (website, social media accounts or publications), the second are those that we pay to appear in advertising on different platforms and the last are those that we get thanks to the mentions of the other agents. Here we find examples of all three types: first, the NRA's own account as the main broadcaster, second, paid media are the commercial agreements between brands and the NRA to appear on the account, since this association is a means of authority for its members, and finally, when the NRA takes out an influential brand or account in its publications it gets extra mentions from that brand, which corresponds to earned media. In fact, the promoted accounts have a large number of followers and by reposting the content, the NRA gains diffusion and interaction thanks to this, which benefits it on two sides, on the one hand it is a paid media for the brand announced and gives economic benefit to the NRA and on the other hand it serves as earned media when the brand shares that it has appeared on the official account of the NRA, thus making this strategy a win-win both ways: money and diffusion.

Focusing on the quantitative data, several trends can be established. The publications have been reduced but their effectiveness has increased mentioning more accounts to increase dissemination with less activity. In fact, in the first quarter of 2023 the publications have had more than double the interactions on average than in the third of 2022. The promotion of models of firearms and their accessories have been the most used themes for Instagram by the NRA in both periods. There is a content trend among the most successful publications - the exposure of new models mentioning brands. These models are designed for the female public with some differentiating stereotyped elements, nothing too out of the ordinary for a gun, but just enough to set it apart and make women feel it for themselves.

However, posts about hunting or shooting sports have continued but posts about self-defense have completely disappeared in the first quarter of 2023. If we analyze the content more carefully of the 5 publications with the highest interaction, we found little remains of the strategy of using personal defense and fear as a claim for women. For example, three posts from February 4, April 29, and September, 26 of 2022 respectively mention the NRA magazine *Armed Citizen* and give examples of women defending themselves against attacks by men (including their own husbands) by using their firearm for protection. Another post from November 14, 2022, mentions a simulation of a dangerous situation in a parking lot at dawn and asks if we would be able to defend ourselves. However, when looking for their most visible publications, we did not find any of these appealing to fear. This could connect us directly with what Laura Browder exposed in her book where she relates that many American women are also fascinated by weapons, by the models and usability of each

one, the interest of women should not necessarily be related to the need for defense, but rather to empowerment and the desire for knowledge about firearms. This same theory also coincides with the results of the survey developed by Wolfson and Azrael (2020) in their study that reveals similar interests between women and men when it comes to wanting to have weapons. We can make direct connections to those previous studies whose conclusions equalize men and women in their decision to carry firearms. This brings us to the question of whether it is effective to continue to disassociate content between men and women on NRA social media.

In addition, considering the detailed analysis of the communicative elements of the publications according to the variables presented by authors such as Haliday (2004) or Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) we can observe several common approaches that confirm the Instagram account's tendency towards branded content. The declarative nature of the messages, angles and resources are used to create closeness, trust, and accessibility. They spread very specialized content for gun culture fans and the most successful publications exhaustively detail the gun models and

receive comments from women who value those details, so they are fans.

If we study again the 2023 Annual Report of We Are Social, we observe that the formats with the greatest engagement on Instagram are photo carousels followed by reels, short videos with ambient sound or added music that combine micro videos or photographs to give dynamism. However, @NRAWomen does not have any carousel of several photographs in its collection, although they have a video post but only one published in 2022 and the previous one was from March 2020. This shows very little optimization of the usability that Instagram offers its users. But if we compare it with the official account of the association (@NRA) the situation is absolutely the opposite. In this main account, every day they put volatile content in stories and combine video and photo posts. This notable difference in dedication and resources between its general account and the women's division may be due to visibility and impact. While @NRA has 2.3 million followers, @NRAWomen has only 46,600 which marks a significant differentiation. That can be understood as a lack of dedication and importance with female audience.

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