



Gendered disinformation in Spanish-language fact-checking: origin, methodology, and perspectives


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ENG Abstract. The recent surge in disinformation targeting gender themes poses a substantial threat to women's equality in democratic systems. This study investigates the efforts of three fact-checking platforms prominent in Ibero-America (Maldita.es and Newtral in Spain and Chequeado in Argentina) in countering antifeminist fake news. Employing a dual methodology, we conducted a content analysis of pieces published on gender issues over one year and semi-structured interviews with representatives from these platforms. The findings unveil a consistent production of texts addressing contemporary feminist affairs. Disinformers target both the feminist movement and its historical grievances, including gender-based violence. Fact checks emerge as the primary format for combating these hoaxes, with explainers gaining against increasingly complex disinformation narratives. The verification methodology emphasizes consulting official sources and expert testimony. Interviewees acknowledge that there is still much progress to be made in gender-related fact-checking.

Keywords: Disinformation, social media, polarization, journalistic ethics, news quality.

ES La desinformación sobre género en el *fact-checking* hispanohablante: origen, metodología y perspectivas

Resumen. La desinformación sobre temas de género se ha agudizado en los últimos años hasta llegar a constituir una de las grandes amenazas para la igualdad dentro de los sistemas democráticos. El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar cómo tres de las principales plataformas en Latinoamérica (Maldita.es y Newtral en España y Chequeado en Argentina) combaten las noticias falsas antifeministas. Para ello, se empleó una metodología doble: un análisis de contenido de las piezas publicadas sobre temas de género durante un año y entrevistas semiestructuradas a los representantes de los *outlets* estudiados. Los resultados revelan una producción más o menos regular de textos, que guarda una correspondencia directa con la actualidad feminista, y que los desinformadores ponen en la diana tanto al feminismo como movimiento como a sus reivindicaciones históricas (por ejemplo, la violencia de género). Los chequeos son el formato más habitual para combatir estos bulos, aunque los textos explicativos están ganando terreno debido a la necesidad creciente de contrarrestar complejas narrativas desinformativas. La consulta de fuentes oficiales y el testimonio de expertos se mantienen como elementos esenciales en la metodología de verificación. Los representantes entrevistados coinciden en que la verificación sobre género tiene un largo recorrido por delante.

Palabras clave: Desinformación, redes sociales, polarización, ética, calidad periodística.

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1. Introduction

The 2016 electoral showdown between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton for the presidency of the United States, coupled with the impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, marked a pivotal moment in the creation and dissemination of fake news and hoaxes. It was also a time when the vulnerability of female politicians in public communication was revealed (Stabile *et al.*, 2019). Analyzing the media coverage of the Trump versus Clinton presidential election campaign, Stabile *et al.* concluded that “among the many concerning implications of the growing prevalence of fake news is the extent to which such stories might exacerbate existing gender disparities by promulgating stereotypes and biases against women in politics that influence the behavior of the electorate” (2019, p. 9). The Trump-Clinton and Rousseff-Bolsonaro pairings not only highlighted the gender bias in media coverage, especially for women in positions of social or political power but also led to a surge in anti-feminist fake news circulating on social media networks and even infiltrating the mainstream media. Terms like “gender disinformation” (Occeñola, 2018), “digital sexism” (Sobieraj, 2018), or “gendertrolling” (Mantilla, 2013) have been coined to describe online gender-based abuse (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020), posing a potential risk to women’s equality by transmitting a discourse contrary to progress (CAC, 2018).

The potentially harmful manipulation of information affecting women has exposed anti-feminist stances in each wave of feminism. Although not a new phenomenon, when distorted information circulates in cyberspace (Bonet-Martí, 2020; Delgado-Ontivero & Sánchez-Sicilia, 2023; Shiva & Khaezmi, 2019; Vieira-Junior & Pelúcio, 2020), it acquires unique significance. Not only can such content go viral, but there is also a shortage of counterarguments refuting false narratives (CAC, 2018).

The verification of misogynistic fake news has become crucial not only for ensuring the reliability of the information system but also for maintaining momentum for gender equality, especially in the digital sphere where false information spreads more quickly and extensively than accurate information (Fernández-García, 2017). In this context, with the denaturalization of journalistic intermediation by the rise of social media, the role of fact checkers has become particularly relevant (Rodríguez-Martínez *et al.*, 2021).

This article studies three fact-checking platforms prominent in Ibero-America: Maldita, Chequeado, and Newtral, each of which has a specific section or subsection dedicated to verifying gender disinformation. While fact-checking platforms have gradually integrated content related to equality, gender-based violence, and the feminist movement, few have dedicated sections exclusively verifying it. Out of the 34 platforms signatories of the Code of Principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), only seven have a specific section for this purpose despite many engaging in fact checks or publishing explanatory articles on these themes. Existing research has focused primarily on verifying fake news concerning women and feminism (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020; López-Martín & Cordoba-Cabús, 2021;

Malquín-Robles & Gamir-Ríos, 2023; Mottola, 2023; Pérez-Bernal, 2022). However, with limited exploration of anti-feminist attacks and the responses provided by fact-checking platforms, we draw upon these previous approaches and highlight the primary verification characteristics of these platforms.

1.1. Fourth-wave feminism and the antifeminist backlash

Since the mid-2010s, a distinctive fourth wave of feminism has emerged, marked by a departure from previous postfeminist positions that perceived certain feminist goals as accomplished (Shiva & Khaezmi, 2019). This wave, particularly relevant in the communication sphere, has “utilized the internet and social media platforms to draw attention to what they believed is rampant sexism still experienced by women from all walks of life” (Ibid. 2019, p. 130). This feminism is characterized by indistinct boundaries with previous waves, technological mobilization, globalization-driven interconnectedness, and rapid, multi-vocal response to sexual violence (Parry *et al.*, 2018). The fourth wave’s embrace of technology is exemplified on social media, often referred to as “hashtag feminism” by authors like Dixon (2014), highlighting one of the primary mechanisms of digital activism. Following the globally-recognized #MeToo, created by activist Tanara Burke (Shiva & Khaezmi, 2019), many other hashtag slogans have circulated on social media. Some of these, such as #Slutwalk, #TimesUp, #viajosola, #YesAllWomen, #Niunamenos, or #unvioladorentucamino, have served as rallying cries for activist initiatives such as performances or protests and currently serve as a kind of archive for research. Despite the nascent nature of the subject, a relevant body of research has emerged on these hashtags, especially in connection with purely digital productions like memes (Brantner *et al.*, 2020; García-González & Bailey Guedes, 2020; Lawrence & Ringrose, 2018; Swee, 2019; Phillips & Milner, 2017; Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016; Rentschler & Thrift; 2015).

Social media has become a primary driver for the visibility of 21st-century feminist demands and a space of confrontation and harassment. This scenario of digital violence against women is being fueled by anti-feminist movements within the manosphere, which configures itself as “a conglomerate of heterogeneous virtual spaces hosting various masculinist movements that spread misogynistic and anti-feminist discourses” (García-Mingo *et al.*, 2022, p. 3). While ample studies exist on these spaces in the English-speaking sphere (Ging, 2019; Nagle, 2017), research in the Spanish sphere remains limited, underscoring the importance of understanding their specificity (Bonet-Martí, 2020; Delgado-Ontivero & Sánchez-Sicilia, 2023).

Anti-feminist movements have gained substantial momentum in recent years, operating in a coordinated manner and shaping “a digital culture of their own that holds a significant niche in the hegemony of the internet” (Martínez-Rolán & Piñeiro-Otero, 2023, p. 184) thanks to aggressive communication strategies and tactics focused on virality. Delgado-Ontivero and Sánchez-Sicilia describe anti-feminist activity on social media as

a combination of humor and political animosity and collaborates in reinforcing the agonistic definition of politics (“friend/foe”), fostering a sense of “us” versus “them” (the “enemy”) through ridicule, attack and insult, or fear often based on inaccurate or misleading information shared through memes. (2023, pp. 187-188)

According to Arencón-Beltrán *et al.* (2023), these movements engage in various “digital reactionary anti-feminist actions” (p.6), which can be categorized into five groups: misinformation and disinformation, doxing and harassment, hate speech and trolling, digital gate-keeping, and organized attacks and campaigns (Ibid., 2023, pp. 6-7). Bonet-Martí (2020) sees a direct link between anti-feminism and post-truth, with anti-feminist movements frequently employing post-truth to foster beliefs and opinions, subsequently amplifying them through mainstream media.

Fake news serves as a weapon to undermine feminist achievements, often “in the form of parody, disinformation, or manipulation narratives. Exaggerated and surprising claims are made about the relationship between men and women that are falsely attributed to feminist groups or women representing them” (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020, p.209), sparking a backlash that seeks to polarize and destabilize the public sphere (Malquín-Robles & Gamir-Ríos, 2023). Moreover, the spread of anti-feminist fake news is often driven by the emotional reactions it provokes in the recipient (Ibid., 2023). As Ahmed (2004) explains, “emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity but is produced as an effect of its circulation” so that “the more the signs circulate, the more affective they become” (Ibid. 2014, p. 45).

Just as the affective turn serves to elucidate how hate messages, encapsulated in anti-feminist hoaxes, spread, it also proves helpful in “explaining the political significance of some recent form of feminist activism” (Alonso-Álvarez & Lois-González, 2022, p. 30). Among these actions, which aim to counter the destructive potential of online misogyny, is fact-checking activism, characterized as a “mosaic of activist counter-movements seeking to identify and expose hoaxes and misleading information related to feminism or any other social or political topic” (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020, p. 197).

2. Fact checking as a strategy against the anti-feminist wave

The study of anti-feminist hysteria has been approached from a variety of perspectives even since the phenomenon first emerged. Research has been conducted using discourse analysis (Bonet-Martí, 2020; Medeiros & Noronha, 2019; Mottola, 2023), in the field of psychology (Cabruja i Ubach, 2023; Murphy *et al.*, 2021), and activism (Fernandes *et al.*, 2020; Medeiros-Teixeira & Ribeiro-Couto, 2021). Another crucial aspect of academic scrutiny lies in the responses of the media and fact-checking activism to countering fake news against women and the feminist movement. These efforts have contributed to media oversight by monitoring “traditional media publications and political speeches with the aim of detecting and reporting on the veracity of facts” (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020, p. 197).

Research on fact checking gender-related content in the Ibero-American context is still in its infancy but has yielded results comparable with those of the present study (Herrero-Diz, 2020; Malquín-Robles & Gamir-Ríos, 2023; Mottola, 2023; Pérez-Bernal, 2022). Some of these studies have merely brought together examples of fake news and their verifications on fact-checking platforms, while others present systematic comparative analyses of response strategies, from fact checking to countering gender-based disinformation (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020; Malquín-Robles & Gamir-Ríos, 2023).

These early explorations into the topic reveal numerous commonalities, not so much in methodology as in results, particularly regarding the most frequently addressed themes of fake news and their verifications. Research has shown that feminism as a movement is the main topic of disseminated hoaxes. In these hoaxes, feminism is understood as “a powerful, violent, and social-benefits-grabbing lobby, causing serious damage to the family and an enemy of both non-feminist women and men” (Pérez-Bernal, 2022, p. 156). In this regard, the policies developed by the Spanish government, particularly those spearheaded by the former Minister of Equality, Irene Montero, have been the focus of many instances of fake news. These hoaxes highlight the cumulative effect of disseminated disinformation aimed at discrediting Montero’s work, a phenomenon apparent even before she was appointed minister (Arencón-Beltrán *et al.*, 2023). Events on the feminist agenda have also been the subject of disinformation. One of the most evident examples of this strategy was the direct association made between the International Women’s Day celebrations on March 8, 2020, and the COVID-19 outbreak (Bonet-Martí, 2020), thus seeking to link feminism with another topic that has fueled the most fake news in recent years. Another favored topic for fake news and, consequently, a focus of the verification efforts of the three studied platforms is gender-based violence. In this regard, one of the most common strategies of disinformation involves the use of false data to try to demonstrate, on the one hand, the low credibility of the denunciations (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020) and, on the other, that men are also victims of violence (Mottola, 2023).

These strategies targeting women, and particularly feminism, are effective as they appeal to primary emotions to polarize and cause social unrest (Arencón-Beltrán *et al.*, 2023). In this context, Pérez-Bernal (2022) speaks of “emotive lies” (p. 157) to refer to fake news that serves to shape public opinion. The use of emotions, alongside the perpetuation of echo chambers, another of the purposes of digital fascism (Arencón-Beltrán *et al.*, 2023), serves political ends. It “seeks to rally public opinion or discredit feminism” (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020, p. 210). Thus, fact-checking to combat gender disinformation is also a political endeavor. Besides being a preventive tool, it is an ideal educational instrument “to promote fairer and more egalitarian societies” (Martínez-Rolán & Piñeiro-Otero, 2023, p. 157) and it seeks to “educate society, raise awareness among individuals of the dangers of disinformation and foster a critical and reflective attitude” (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020, p. 211).

3. Objectives and methodology

This study aims to analyze the verification processes of gender-related disinformation by three Spanish-language fact checkers: the Spanish platform Maldita.es and Newtral, and the Argentinean outlet Chequeado, all of which adhere to the code of principles of the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN). These three organizations were chosen for analysis because each features a specific section or subsection dedicated to this topic while other outlets do not have it –making it difficult to trace these topics and their coverage. Maldita.es, for instance, covers content related to feminism and the LGTBI community in an exclusive section named “Maldito Feminismo” [Damned Feminism], while Newtral addresses these topics in its “Igualdad” [Equality] section. Chequeado, while lacking a dedicated section, publishes them under the tag “Equidad” [Equity].

Six research questions guided the study:

RQ1. How frequently and in what volume do fact-checking platforms publish pieces on gender and LGTBI rights?

RQ2. What are the characteristics of the texts regarding the section in which they are published, their typology, and the inclusion or absence of a journalist byline?

RQ3. Which topics are most frequently repeated?

RQ4. Where does fact checking on gender topics originate?

RQ5. What are the defining features and working methodologies?

RQ6. How does audience engagement occur, and through which channels does this occur?

RQ7. What is the future of gender-related content within fact checking?

3.1. Methodological design

These questions were addressed through a dual methodology, primarily qualitative, which combined a content analysis of all gender-related texts published by the three fact-checking platforms between March 2022 (coinciding with the enactment of the so-called “Trans Law”) and March 2023, with semi-structured interviews with those responsible for the sections where these verifications were published.

Thus, the results of content analysis were complemented by insights from the interviews, ensuring their verification and, if necessary, potential corroboration through triangulation (Clark *et al.*, 2021). These two qualitative approaches allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the subject under study.

In-depth interviews have become a common format in the study of Spanish-speaking (López-Pan & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2020; Palomo & Sedano, 2018) and Ibero-American (Moreno-Gil *et al.*, 2021) fact-checking methodology. In this research, the interviews with heads of the equality-themed sections were conducted online between August and September 2023, with an average duration of one hour each. The interviewees were Pablo Hernández, academic research coordinator at Maldita.es; Noemí Trujillo, a journalist specializing in feminism and gender and writer for Newtral; and Matías di Santi, media director at Chequeado.

4. Results

Based on content analysis and semi-structured interviews, the research results are presented below, structured around the six research questions outlined in the previous section (RQ1-RQ7).

4.1. Characteristics of the articles (RQ1, RQ2 y RQ3)

Between March 2022 and March 2023, “Maldita Feminismo” published 97 pieces, categorized under two subsections: “Bulos” [Hoaxes] (71 pieces) and “Artículos” [Articles] (26 pieces). This translates into an average of 7.5 works per month, roughly two pieces (1.86) per week (Table 1). Notably, there were two periods of peak production, both in the months of March, with 12 verifications in March 2022, and 19 in March 2023. The topics that received the most attention included false information about the LGTBQ movement (26 pieces), denunciation of trolls or false identities (11 pieces), content related to official sources (11 pieces), and gender-based violence (12 pieces). Additionally, there were pieces on false public investments (9), “trans” identities (9), and the “Only Yes is Yes” legislation (8). Parity-related topics accounted for 7 texts, while 4 addressed themes related to abortion. The pieces were organized into two subsections: “Artículos,” which were extensive and clarifying in tone (26 texts), and “Bulos,” consisting of 71 verification pieces. None of these pieces was signed in the “Bulos” subsection.

The analysis revealed that from the 97 pieces analyzed, 72 were verifications –the 71 pieces in “Bulos” plus one “Artículos”. Thus, complemented by 15 explanatory texts, also known as explainer, Maldita’s work verifying false information is exemplary. Additionally, 8 news pieces were identified as informative texts without significant didactic content –one of a historical nature, another analyzing an opinion piece from TikTok, and two difficult to classify. This slight deviation from the established sections suggests a potential trend toward content diversification, with up to 10 pieces not fitting precisely into the predefined categories.

Table 1. Summary of the analysis results of the articles published by Maldita.es in the selected period.

No. articles	97
Frequency	1-2 per week (1.9)
Topics	Trolling (11); gender-based violence (12); false information about the LGBTQ community (26), public resources (9); official sources (11), transgender (9), abortion/ health (4), “Only Yes is Yes” law (8), gender parity (7).
Section	Maldito Feminismo”: “Bulos” (71), “Artículos” (26)
Typology	Explainers (15), verifications (72), others (10, of which 8 were news)
Journalist byline	None

Source: Own production.

During the examined period, Newtral published 154 pieces, establishing it as the outlet with the highest number of verifications and articles on gender. Despite production peaking around significant dates on the feminist calendar, particularly March 8 and November 25, the average periodicity stood at 10 articles per month (Table 2).

The prevailing themes addressed in these texts encompassed gender-based violence (24 pieces) and disinformation about the government, particularly the Ministry of Equality (24 pieces). In third position, there were 19 articles on transgender topics, notably related to the approval of the “Trans Law”. Other themes covered included sexism, reproductive rights, sexual violence, and gender parity, among others.

The section titled “Te lo explicamos” [We explain it to you] featured 60 explainers. This format, which of-fers clarification or information on complex situations, was most frequently used by Newtral. Other sections, such as “Reportajes” [Reports], “Nos preguntáis por” [You ask us about], “Fact-Fiction”, or “Cámara Baja” [Lower Chamber] contained an additional 51 explain-ers, some of which were reader-requested or pieces falling strictly under explainer or verification typolo-gies. Concerning the latter, 43 articles were grouped under “Fact checks” and “Fakes”. Notably, as shown in Table 2, equality-related content was distribut-ed across all sections of Newtral, including “Newtral data”, which is dedicated to data journalism.

Table 2. Summary of the analysis results of the articles published by Newtral in the selected period.

No. articles	154
Frequency	10 per month
Topics	Gender-based violence (24), political hoaxes (24), transgender (19), sexism (8), media representation/communication (8), international (7), institutions and representation/parity (7); sexual violence (6), feminism (6), employment rights (6), sports (4), abortion (4), “Only Yes is Yes” law (4), maternity (3), rural (2), trafficking/prostitution (2), online culture (2), harassment (1), education (1), politics (1), pornography (1).
Section	Parlamentaria (2), fact checks (11), fakes (32), Te lo explicamos (60), Nos preguntáis por (8), Reportajes (17), Fact-Fiction (4), Cámara Baja (1), What the Fake (1) Actualidad (4) Newtral Data (8) Algoritmia (1), Transparentia (4), without section (1).
Typology	Explainers (60), verifications (43), others (51).
Journalist byline	Noemí Trujillo (44), Lucía Díaz Moreno (21), Andrea Real (13), other journalists (69), Newtral (5), Newtral and Verificat (2).

Source: Own production.

Most explainers and verifications featured bylines. Noemí Trujillo, a journalist specializing in feminism and gender and one of the sources of this research,

signed 39 pieces, while 28 other journalists, 9 men and 19 women, signed the remaining articles. Seven pieces were published without a journalist byline: five were attributed to Newtral, and two to Newtral and Verificat, a Catalan fact-checker with whom the plat-form occasionally collaborates. Additionally, 14 piec-es had a dual byline, indicating collaborative efforts in the editorial process.

Chequeado published 17 articles related to gender and LGTBI themes. The publication frequency varied, with some months featuring only one piece (March 2022 and February 2023) or none at all (September and November 2022 and January and March 2023), while other months saw the publication of up to three articles (May and October 2023). Consequently, the average number of pieces per month stood at 1.4 pieces (Table 3).

Recurring sub-themes, in descending order, were gender parity in national politics (4 pieces), false in-formation about the LGTBI community (3), women’s workplace inequality (3), male violence (2), parent-
al leave (2), information related to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (2), and the Gender Identity Law (2).

These themes were featured mainly in the sec-tions “El Explicador” [The explainer] and “Hilando fino” [Splitting hairs]. Specifically, eight articles ap-peared in “El Explicador” under the tag “Equidad” [Equity], while six of them were published in “Hilando fino” –which is also associated with the subcate-gory “Equidad.” The remaining pieces were distrib-uted across other sections or linked to categories such as “Viral”, “Frases” [Phrases], “Verificaciones” [Verifications].

Up to 8 pieces were explainers, four were verifi-cations, and four were journalistic articles that do not fall into the abovementioned categories.

Most texts feature a journalist’s byline, with only five lacking one.

Table 3. Summary of results from the analysis of articles published by Chequeado during the selected period.

No. articles	17
Frequency	1-2 per month (1,4)
Topics	Gender parity in national politics (4), false information about the LGTBI community (3), gender inequality in the workplace (3), male violence (2), parental leave (2), Ministry of Women (2), gender identity law (1).
Section	El Explicador (8), Hilando fino (6), others (3).
Typology	Explainers (9), verifications (4), articles (4).
Journalist byline	Lucía Martínez (6), without byline (5), others (3), Ignacio Ferreira (2), Chequeado (1).

Source: Own production.

4.2. Gender Fact Checking: Origins, Characteristics, and Methodologies

In the semi-structured interviews, we explored the origin and causes of the phenomenon, as well as

publication frequency, recurring topics, article typology, fact-checking team methodologies, audience engagement, and the anticipated trajectory for processing these contents.

4.2.1. Origin and causes of the phenomenon (RQ4)

The “Maldito Feminismo” section was launched on March 7, 2019, a day before International Women’s Day. During this period, Spain was immersed in a public debate on feminism, which, as noted by Pablo Hernández, the academic research coordinator at Maldita.es, was exploited to “spread more disinformation”.

“Maldito Feminismo” evolved into what the team terms a “vertical” on the website. According to Hernández, a “vertical” occurs when specific issues susceptible to disinformation are identified as “dangerous”, prompting the platform to secure funding to make an “extra effort” in the form of a monographic section with writers exclusively focused on that topic.

According to Noemí Trujillo (Newtral), the initiative to fact check gender-related content originated from the platform’s founder, journalist Ana Pastor, a prominent feminist. Her interest in feminist content was further motivated by the establishment of Spain’s first Ministry of Equality at the time.

Trujillo joined Newtral in July 2019, coinciding with the platform’s launch, during which there was no section dedicated to feminism. She defines her work as a “journalistic conversation” with other female journalists covering gender topics who inspired her.

Trujillo identifies two pivotal moments prompting fact-checking organizations to engage with feminist content: the passage of the “Trans Law” and the implementation of the “Only Yes is Yes” legislation. In her opinion, the first case was used to “muddy the waters of women’s rights”, and “the conversation became so confusing that it was necessary to explain”.

Matías Di Santi, media director at Chequeado, believes that the growing interest in such content is conditioned by the fact that disinformation spreaders appeal to “prejudices and discriminatory messages” at a time when progressive governments have focused “their agendas on this type of struggle and conquest of such rights.” In his opinion, disinformation discourses seek to convey that the feminist agenda is inconsequential, and they link it to the waste of public resources. When addressing these themes, Chequeado is inspired by, among other organizations, ELA (Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género), Economía Feminista, and Agencia Presentes. However, Di Santi emphasizes that Chequeado does not advocate for gender rights: “Our mission is to debunk disinformation.”

4.2.2. Frequency of publication (RQ5)

In terms of the publication frequency of articles, Maldita.es recognizes a direct correlation between feminist calendar dates and current events. This correlation is evident in the peak in content output as International Women’s Day approaches or when certain topics gain significant traction in public discourse, such as the “Only Yes is Yes” legislation.

Newtral publishes a minimum of three articles per week, with the frequency subject to variation

depending on current events. Production intensifies around significant dates on the feminist calendar, but Trujillo must adjust to those three weekly topics as much as possible.

Chequeado acknowledges that it does not follow a rigid publication frequency but estimates delving into these topics in one or two pieces a month. Regarding the correlation between the number of topics and the Argentinian feminist agenda, Di Santi recalls the case of Thelma Fardín, which marked the beginning of the “Ni una más” (Not one more) movement in that country, equivalent to the American “Me too” movement. He highlights how disinformation intensified when the justice system ruled on the case.

4.2.3. Themes (RQ5)

Some of the recurring gender-related topics that Maldita.es typically addresses involve the derision of the feminist movement and the false connection between homosexuals and pedophilia.

According to Hernández, disinformation narratives are becoming increasingly complex and difficult for fact-checkers to counter, as they often rely on insulting groups or outlining potential future consequences, both of which are unverifiable. For these reasons, the Maldita.es team increasingly focuses on discerning the “intentions behind the hoaxes” Hernández believes that the most effective way to debunk these narratives is through explainers.

Newtral identifies abortion, transgender rights, LGBTQ rights, femicides, gender-based violence, sexual violence, gender inequality, and all related legislation as the most frequent topics of false information. Trujillo asserts that these topics are currently being approached from different and riskier perspectives that go beyond simplistic ideas such as “male violence is a structural problem” or “rape culture is horrendous.”

Chequeado states that attacks seeking to undermine the legitimacy of female lawmakers, legislators, or government officials, along with false allegations of gender-based violence and criticism of public resources allocated to gender agenda programs, are some of the recurring gender-related disinformation topics in Argentina. Regarding the LGTBI community, Di Santi specifically mentions the law on comprehensive sexual education.

4.2.4. Typology of articles (RQ5)

All the interviewees acknowledge a clear trend toward explanatory content when addressing gender disinformation, although traditional fact checks remain one of the standard formats to tackle it.

The starting point for Maldita.es is verification, “the raw material” with which the platform works. However, as the section expanded, there was more room for explainers. Additionally, Maldita.es has established contacts and collaborations with NGOs, research centers, and other organizations. This way, the platform reaches places it could not otherwise, such as debates or international congresses. Explainers on Maldita.es experienced a resurgence starting in 2019, with their primary goal being to combat disinformation narratives that underpin hoaxes and require contextual information to be effectively addressed.

According to Trujillo, Newtral has never explicitly stated whether feminist topics are addressed through traditional fact-checking or explanatory journalism. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that the platform approaches topics by focusing on “data” and “exhaustive explanation.”

Di Santi explains that Chequeado's priority for combating false content on these topics is fact checking, although it also publishes journalistic investigations and explainers. In the latter case, their use is linked to topics that are less about disinformation and more about delving into specific realities, such as glass ceilings, wage gaps, and similar issues.

4.2.5. Work methodology (RQ5)

While the methodology used to fact check these topics varies across the platforms, the use of official sources, testimony from trusted experts, and the involvement of all writers in producing this content are some of the characteristics common to all three organizations.

Maldita.es and Chequeado ensure that their methodology for publishing feminist content is similar to that used for general fact checking. However, Maldita.es underscores its frequent consultation of sources such as the Ministry of Equality and a cadre of prominent experts. Conversely, Chequeado emphasizes adherence to language usage and specific practices, aligning with principles established in a practical guide for journalists signed by the Argentinean platform and the Gabo Foundation in 2024.

Trujillo (Newtral) expresses complete confidence in her “portfolio” of experts, emphasizing that they “fact-check each other” and review texts before publication to cross-verify information and resolve any potential disagreements on the essence of the content. Notable official sources she relies upon include the Ministry of Equality, the Interior Ministry, the National Statistics Institute (INE), Transgender Europe and INDRA. Trujillo also underscores the importance of incorporating academic papers into the fact-checking process.

In contrast to Newtral and Chequeado, Maldita.es opts not to attribute authors' names to published texts to shield writers from “social media scrutiny.” Newtral only omits including a journalist's name in cases where the articles are closely tied to current events and have passed through “many hands.” In the rest of the cases, it typically includes a byline to demonstrate the journalists' accountability for their reporting and, ultimately, for a question of transparency, explains Trujillo. Similarly, Chequeado considers that including the byline adds value to the work and recognizes the journalist's effort. However, the journalist has the final word, and if they prefer their name not to appear, the organization always respects their decision.

When “Maldito Feminismo” first appeared, Maldita.es initially assigned one dedicated writer to it, but this is no longer the case, and any team member can now create content unless the topic requires a more specialized approach, such as that used in data journalism, adds Hernández. Once the writer completes the first draft, the text undergoes scrutiny by four editors within the team's Telegram group

before publication. The article is not published if a dissenting vote arises within the group. The role of overseeing content coordination falls to the editor-in-chief. Hernández acknowledges the absence of specific gender training for writers but underscores that feminism is an integral aspect of Maldita.es's editorial policy, which includes gender parity in all areas and decisions.

Similarly, Chequeado follows a decentralized approach, distributing gender-related topics across its editorial team to ensure a pervasive gender perspective in all pieces. Di Santi explains that the feminist approach goes beyond mere content and that gender parity is upheld within the team of writers and the leadership of Chequeado. He assures that writers receive comprehensive training in feminism.

Newtral's editorial team, described as “predominantly young, mostly female and LGBTBI,” is naturally inclined towards gender-focused topics. Trujillo notes that a gender-focused approach permeates all the main sections, which, in her opinion, aligns with Newtral's positioning as the go-to platform “for contentious or perplexing issues related to the Ministry of Equality.” The Newtral writer explains that she faces challenges in fostering more collaboration between sections —particularly with the ‘Transparentia’ team, to improve access to data or process information requests, often involving reviewing gender-related topics produced by colleagues from other sections.

4.2.6. Audience engagement (RQ6)

Crucial to the work of the organizations under study is audience engagement, which also has a prominent role in feminist content.

For Maldita.es, the WhatsApp Chatbot is instrumental in engaging with its audience and gauging the pulse of trending topics on social media. Notably, consent-related queries concerning the “Only Yes is Yes” legislation have garnered substantial public engagement, particularly in the lead-up to International Women's Day. However, Pablo Hernández acknowledges that attacks on feminism are also commonplace. The platform observes a growing interest in these topics, which frequently surface in the traditional platforms of recurring disinformation, such as Telegram. Hernández explains how pro-Russian propaganda channels, amidst attacks on the Ukrainian government, disseminate disinformation about feminism, migrants, or climate change, “positioning themselves as an alternative (media) that counters the editorial trends of traditional media.”

Noemí Trujillo relies on audience feedback and input from fellow journalists primarily through social media, in the form of comments and shares. Monitoring social media networks is deemed essential, enabling her to anticipate topics on the verge of going viral. While Trujillo notes that feedback on her work is generally excellent, she acknowledges instances where people on social media have called for her dismissal.

Chequeado exercises caution in handling negative comments and “hostility” as part of its internal policy but remains open to readers' requests for verification on such topics. This type of request is “more constant” and less conditioned by “conjunctural episodes,” as with other topics. Di Santi notes that

disinformation on gender exhibits a marked “transnationality,” so that themes travel from Latin America to Europe and from Europe to the United States, and vice-versa. He also believes the phenomenon is attributed to the global context of political polarization, referring to the speeches of Javier Milei in Argentina or Spain’s far-right Vox party. “It’s a more emotional discourse that resonates much more and, in addition, targets violence, indignation and anger,” he claims.

4.2.7. The future of equality content within fact checking (RQ7)

In contemplating the future of equality content in fact-checking, Chequeado anticipates a growth in platforms dedicated to addressing these topics, spurred partly by the growing interest of international organizations combating disinformation.

Maldita.es identifies social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, as a crucial area, given that the young are highly active on them. Hernández notes the presence of “a very active misogynistic and anti-feminist discourse that is challenging to monitor due to the concise format of its videos, making it complex to respond with explanations.” Recognizing the susceptibility of these users due to their age and limited life experiences, Hernández emphasizes the importance of interventions to understand the displayed messages and how they are consumed “to educate future generations.”

For Newtral, adopting a nuanced gender perspective is imperative, encompassing additional approaches that address how these topics affect men as well.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Two significant milestones mark the commencement of fact checking on gender-related topics in Spain: the celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8, 2019, and the establishment of Spain’s first Ministry of Equality in 2020. These developments led to the approval of the “Trans Law” and the “Only Yes is Yes” legislation. In Argentina, the inclusion of topics in the fact-checking agenda aligns with the recent efforts of progressive governments to advance the rights of the affected groups –driven by the momentum of the feminist movement known as the “Marea Verde” (Green Tide) when discrimination and prejudice intensified on social media.

The findings of our study reveal that the three examined fact-checking platforms consistently publish articles on gender and LGBTI rights, whether weekly (Maldita.es or Newtral) or monthly (Chequeado). These pieces often appear in dedicated sections such as “Maldito Feminismo” or, in the case of Newtral and Chequeado, under the tags “Igualdad” and “Equidad”, respectively. The timing of these publications corresponds directly with significant feminist and LGBTI calendar days, including International Women’s Day, Pride Day, or current affairs about these communities that gain prominence in public discourse.

The studied organizations highlight several recurring themes in their daily fact-checking endeavors, encompassing derision of the feminist movement, the false connection between homosexuals and pedophilia, government resources allocation

to gender-related programs, abortion, transgender and LGBTI rights, femicides, gender-based violence, sexual violence, gender inequality, and legislation related these concerns. The content analysis reveals a commonality in the primary targets of disseminators of disinformation, with the feminist movement being a focal point (Pérez-Bernal, 2022) along with other recurring themes undermining women’s historical claims, such as gender-based violence (Herrero-Diz, 2020; Mottola, 2023).

Additionally, it is evident how disinformation narratives are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and challenging to counter because they are based on insults or predicting possible consequences of events, all of which are unverifiable since they appeal, as is commonly the case with fake news, to primary emotions (Arencón-Beltrán *et al.*, 2023; Pérez-Bernal, 2022). In response to these evolving challenges, the explanatory format is gaining prominence over traditional fact checking, as it is better suited to counter disinformation narratives that go beyond simple falsehoods and delve into specific realities. This trend aligns with the broader recognition within fact checking that explainers are useful and necessary to provide information with “context, depth and detail” (Moreno-Gil *et al.*, 2023, p. 12).

The methodology employed in addressing disinformation on gender-related themes remains consistent with traditional fact checking, focusing on consulting official sources and expert testimonies as pivotal elements. Generally, any writer in the team can undertake the creation of this content, although, at Newtral, Noemí Trujillo stands out as a journalist specializing in feminism. Bylines are typically included in pieces as an exercise in transparency and to acknowledge and value the work of journalists. The exception to this practice is observed in “Maldito Feminismo”, where a non-byline policy is followed to protect journalists from social media backlash and disinformation.

Audience engagement, recognized as fundamental in fact-checking (Moreno-Gil *et al.*, 2021), remains a priority in verifying gender-related content. The WhatsApp Chatbot is a crucial tool for Maldita.es and Newtral, allowing these platforms to receive fact-checking requests and doubts from the public, providing insight into falsehoods on the verge of going viral. Similarly, monitoring social media enables fact-checkers to anticipate trending topics, often exhibiting transnational characteristics originating from other countries or continents.

The representatives of the analyzed platforms believe that fact checking on gender is here to stay, driven by the growing interest of supranational bodies in addressing this type of disinformation. At the same time, they emphasize that the primary battleground for fact checking will be on social media, particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where the young audience is predominant.

In conclusion, fact checking emerges as an activist movement (Herrero-Diz *et al.*, 2020) aiming to bring visibility and address misogynist and anti-feminist online discourses (García-Mingo *et al.*, 2022).

Despite its limitations, this study serves as a preliminary exploration of gender verification in Spain and Argentina, shedding light on the origin, defining characteristics, recurring themes, methodology, and

audience engagement in this emerging phenomenon, which has received scant academic attention and is paving the way for future research in various directions.

Future research should explore the topic in other geographical contexts, expanding the number of analyzed platforms, and scrutinizing aspects anticipated to become relevant as the phenomenon consolidates. Among these topics are the challenges

this type of verification faces, potential collaboration agreements between fact-checking organizations and other entities, and the public's perception of its social impact.

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7. Authors' contribution

Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Data curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyse or synthesize study data.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.	Author 1
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.	Authors 1 y 2
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.	Authors 1 y 2
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Writing / original draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	Authors 1, 2 y 3
Writing / review & editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision -including pre- or post-publication stages.	Authors 1 y 2

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