

Honesty or Fakenry? Feminism as a strategic focus for brands on Instagram

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Abstract. Digital feminism has recently gained prominence in society as a result of the growing defence of feminist values in different social networks by influencers. In addition, brands are aware that they must communicate authentically to be relevant to their consumers. In this context, a content analysis of 415 posts from 5 of the most relevant Spanish feminist Instagrammers is proposed. The results show that the influencers combine their organic content with commercial content and that the nexus lies in content related to the themes of sorority and empowerment. Messages that bring together the interests of both parties (Instagrammers and brands) will be more credible and closer to followers.

Keywords: Digital Femenism; Instagram; Brand Activism; Femvertising; Strategy.

[es] ¿Honestidad o Falsedad? El feminismo como eje estratégico de las marcas en Instagram

Resumen. El feminismo digital ha ganado recientemente protagonismo en la sociedad como consecuencia de la creciente defensa de los valores feministas en redes sociales por parte de influencers. Además, las marcas son conscientes que deben comunicar de forma auténtica para poder ser relevantes para sus consumidores. En este contexto, se plantea un análisis de contenido de 415 posts de 5 de las Instagrammers españolas feministas más relevantes. Los resultados muestran que las influencers combinan sus contenidos orgánicos con los comerciales y que el nexo de unión reside en los contenidos relacionados con las temáticas de sororidad y empoderamiento. Los mensajes que reúnan los intereses de ambas partes (Instagrammers y marcas) resultarán más creíbles y cercanos para los seguidores.

Palabras clave: Feminismo digital; Instagram; Activismo de marca; Femvertising; Estrategia.

Sumario: 1. Introduction . 2. State of cuestión 3. Methodology. 4. Results. 5. Discussion and conclusions. 6. References.

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1. Introduction

While the number of active users in social networks grows in the world every day, different scholars study the impact of social networks on people from different cultures. Among the different uses that networks have, this research focuses on exploring the defence of feminism on Instagram, as a growing phenomenon. In this sense, the #Metoo experience on Twitter has served to give a voice to women who have suffered sexual harassment in multiple places and this hashtag represents a form of activism used by women to promote feminism from a global perspective (Ghadery, 2019). This means that some authors have discussed that digital feminism is an opportunity for feminists to make their voices heard creating new narratives against patriarchal institutions (Linabary et al., 2020).

Nowadays, due to the growing presence of feminist women in social networks, sometimes the contents are varied within this theme and ideas, opinions and recommendations appear to users in collaboration with brands. This phenomenon is called Femvertising and refers to those commercial messages that include the defence of women's values to promote the empowerment of women through advertising (Akestam et al., 2017). Some

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authors call it brand activism and these messages have characteristics that go beyond the commercial purpose through the inclusion of feminist values. Thus, Influencers present on different social networks regularly collaborate with brands by suggesting products with messages that promote women's equality (Akestam et al., 2017).

However, the content of the Instagram accounts of women with thousands of followers deserves a detailed analysis in order to find out the specific content they spread on their accounts to learn about female voices and their influence on society. For this, this paper is a study of 415 posts of 5 Influencers on Instagram whose purpose is to analyse, on the one hand, the content that Instagrammers organically communicate as part of their editorial content; and on the other, to study the commercial content that these influencers communicate on Instagram. As a consequence, we will know what content is genuine and what topics they link their commercial posts to. So, the originality of this work lies precisely in analysing the links that brands can find with this type of Instagrammers so that they can make collaborations without undermining the credibility of the influencer or the brand.

The contribution of this article is to show this narrative and the interest of the audience for the different topics that they spread on Instagram. All this leads us to affirm that this is an activist platform and has unlimited potential to spread feminist values in society leading us to understand feminism from a new perspective with new influencers. In the next section a review of the literature is made and then the methodology is explained to show the results and finally the main conclusions of this study are discussed.

2. State of the question

Digital feminism has gained prominence on social networks in recent years. As a consequence, global academic literature is focused on the connections between feminism and social media (Baer, 2016; Hutton et al., 2016; Manago, 2013). Furthermore, social and media phenomena such as *#MeToo* have served women from several countries to make visibility of sexual abuse. Thus, this movement has encouraged women from different cultures to follow and create different hashtags with the purpose of fighting against sexual violence and becoming a global feminism movement (Ghadery, 2019). In addition, the hashtag *#MeToo* is understood as a form of digital activism used by feminists to promote gender equality on social media. It also has been used by many actors, politicians, etc. fighting against sexual abuse in many countries (Ghadery, 2019).

Other hashtags also have served to make sense of women's experiences of sexual violence by reading others' tweets and sharing their stories (Linabary et al., 2020; Mendes et al., 2018) helping women to come together with solidarity and social participation. On the other side, some scholars argue that digital platforms have allowed for the flourishing of gender-based hate and anti-feminist initiatives (Ging 2019; Powell and Henry 2017; Salter and Blodgett 2017; Semenzin and Bainotti 2020).

In this scenario, different scholars have discussed the advantages of digital feminism and they argue that it is the opportunity for feminists to make their voices heard creating new discourses against patriarchal institutions (Linabary et al. 2020). In this sense, social networks have played a fundamental role, both in accessibility and immediacy with the messages are spread. Moreover, social media have become platforms for social activism where women can promote gender equality and human rights through content adapted to several platforms, both written and audiovisual messages. As a consequence, social networks become a unique place to promote feminist activism from very different countries giving rise to common spaces for millions of potential followers. From this perspective, the defence of women's rights finds in social media several initiatives that give feminism a new global perspective (Ghadery, 2019).

In this context, some women take advantage of these spaces to spread feminist-themed thoughts, videos, books and even collaboration with different brands to promote products and connecting the brand purpose with women's rights. When it comes to advertising messages with the aim of defending women's values, this phenomenon is called Femvertising (Becker-Herby, 2013; Kapoor and Munjal, 2017; Pérez et al., 2017). This concept is defined as the advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages and imagery to empower women and girls, or "female empowerment advertising" (Akestam et al., 2017). This means that, although even Femvertising has a commercial purpose, it also has a social purpose, such as defending the women's rights through the ads. Moreover, different authors have studied this phenomenon and they have seen that Femvertising has different effects on consumer engagement and they consider it as a successful strategy for targeting female audiences (Akestam et al., 2017). On the other side, Femvertising could bring women's empowerment changing the representation of women in media and selling feminism back to women (Rae and Michael, 2017).

Some scholars have identified Femvertising as a form of brand activism (Varghese and Kumar, 2020). From this perspective, many influencers, Instagrammers and YouTubers promote feminist values in their networks and, in turn, collaborate with brands interested in defending these values in their commercials. Other scholars identify the feminism fourth wave as the adoption of new platforms of communication such as social media and the internet (Chamberlain, 2016) and focuses on sexual harassment and violence against marginalized

women (Munro, 2013). Recently, Femvertising themes are promoted in different social media and online conversations, especially using hashtags (Rodrigues, 2016).

The concept of Femvertising as brand activism is also closely connected to marketing strategies such as Corporate Social Responsibility, cause marketing or cultural marketing (Jaglois, 2018) connecting brands with social issues and providing some solutions. In this sense, conscious capitalism influences brands to promote social values (Kotler, 2017). As a consequence, those firms with an authentically purpose-driven brand can create stronger relationships with consumers. In this context, Femvertising would be expected to prosper as a result of brand activism in the era of conscious capitalism and as a form of cultural marketing (Varghese and Kumar, 2020) giving a new strategic perspective and objective of marketing.

Therefore, brands with a social purpose collaborate with women having a digital influence and a high level of engagement with their followers with the aim of promoting values and sell products. These followers are most of the millennials who use social media to obtain brand's information (Martínez-Sanz and Gonzalez Fernández, 2018) and they establish a relationship with firms by connecting and engaging through influencers (Akestam et al., 2017). With 2 billion monthly active users, Instagram has 500 million daily active users and images and it has 23% more engagement than images on Facebook. Moreover, videos have 38% more engagement than Facebook (Statista, 2022). Taking into consideration these data, Instagram is an important site for the construction and consumption of women's discourses (Chen, 2020; Cat, 2020).

In the case of Instagram, hundreds of women have profiles as female activists in defence of women's values. In this way, they take part in events, campaigns, publications, etc. whose purpose is to promote women's empowerment, freedom, mental health, self-care, etc. providing support and information while promoting a holistic perspective of women's interests. In sum, the activist influencers are the expression of neoliberal feminism using social media to encourage self-branding and consumer activities. By doing this, digital feminism reinforces the individual empowerment of women (Semenzin, 2022). In fact, other scholars study the effects of the use of strategies of self-branding by feminist activists on Instagram because this platform has risen to prominence in the influencer marketing sector to reach a big potential audience (Bainotti, 2021) becoming a successful digital activist.

In the current context of excessive use of social networks by young people, the construction of identity, as well as the dissemination of ideas associated with feminism, in some cases have a purpose linked to consumption (Carrera et al., 2020). Although it is uncertain to differentiate between the real and the virtual, as a consequence of the content on social networks, the reality is that its impact on the population is great and will be even greater, given the presence it has in people's lives. As a consequence, it is necessary to analyse to what extent feminism has found a place to discuss freedom and social progress or, on the contrary, if the debate lacks sufficient depth to change the mentality of people. In some cases, awareness is a reality and, in addition, the voice of women is gaining more and more prominence through digital initiatives with attractive commercial and cultural proposals.

3. Methodology

The sample for this study is based on the ranking drawn up by Navarro and Villegas-Simón (2022) on Spanish feminist influencers on Instagram. The five most active influencers on Instagram at the time of this research (June 2022) were selected from this list. Hence, Amaia Romero was excluded from the sample given that she only had 72 publications since the opening of her Instagram profile in 2017 (Romero, 2022) and @srtabebi (Srta Bebi, 2022) who only had 2 publications, although this profile was replaced by that of its author, @bebi__fernandez (Fernández, 2022). Therefore, the final sample analysed is summarised below (Table 1):

Table 1. Ranking of Spanish feminist influencers on Instagram.

Influencer	Number of publications	Number of followers
La vecina rubia	4 486	2 800 000
Bebi Fernández	1 528	527 000
Moderna de pueblo	1 225	1 700 000
Leticia Dólera	1 170	211 000
Barbi Japuta	654	65 700

Source: own elaboration based on Navarro and Villegas-Simón (2022), La vecina rubia (2022), Fernández (2022), Moderna de pueblo (2022a), Dólera (2022a), and Japuta (2022).

The online software Export Comments was used to extract 100 posts from each of the influencers analysed. After a first analysis of the 500 posts, blank comments or those in which only emoticons appeared were

discarded, so the final corpus that was analysed included 415 comments dating from 2019 to 2022. After observing and interpreting the comments provided by Export Comments, a research template was developed based on a content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) where two blocks of analysis were distinguished: editorial content and monetisation. Within the first block of analysis on editorial content, 16 themes were detected in the comments studied, which are summarised in (Table 2).

Table 2. Themes of Spanish feminist influencers on Instagram.

Authenticity	Maternity
Romantic relationships	Mental health
Empowerment	Profession
Feeding	Self-care, health, well-being
Freedom	Sex
Friendship	Sorority
Guilt	Stereotypes
Leisure	Violence against women

Source: own elaboration.

As for the second block of analysis of monetisation, which refers to the possible revenue streams from their activity communicated on Instagram, two possibilities were distinguished: advertising allusion or collaboration with brands, and promotion of a personal professional project that could be consumed or purchased.

4. Results

In relation to the first block of analysis explaining the editorial content, it is possible to distinguish the themes and their frequency on which the posts of the influencers analysed are based, as summarised in (Table 3).

Table 3. Themes of Spanish feminist influencers on Instagram.

Theme	Appearance based on the total number of posts (415) by each influencer
Sorority	20,5%
Authenticity	15,7%
Empowerment	13,5%
Friendship	12,6%
Leisure	11,4%
Self-care, health, well-being	9,2%
Profession	9,2%
Stereotypes	7,2%
Freedom	7%
Mental health	4,1%
Violence against women	3,8%
Maternity	1,7%
Feeding	1,4%
Guilt	1,4%
Romantic relationships	1,4%
Sex	1,4%

Source: own elaboration.

Given the type of influencers analysed in the study, sorority (20.5%) is by far the most frequently repeated theme. This is followed by authenticity (15.7%), empowerment (13.5%) and friendship (12.6%). In last place, with an identical percentage of 1.4%, are the topics of sex, relationships, guilt and food. If we go deeper

into the analysis of each profile, in (Table 4) we can see a breakdown of the appearance of each of the topics analysed by each Influencer in the sample.

Table 4. Detailed analysis of the themes of Spanish feminist influencers on Instagram.

Theme	Instagrammer				
	barbijaputaaa	bebi_fernandez	lavecinarubia	leticiaadoleraoficial	modernadepueblo
Empowerment	6,3 %	20,5 %	6,9 %	25,3 %	7,6 %
Sorority	38,5 %	2,7 %	5,2 %	16,8 %	29,3 %
Freedom	11,5 %	2,7 %	1,7 %	7,4 %	8,7 %
Guilt	1,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	5,4 %
Mental health	2,1 %	0,0 %	3,4 %	2,1 %	12,0 %
Profession	2,1 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	33,7 %	4,3 %
Friendship	1,0 %	0,0 %	53,4 %	17,9 %	3,3 %
Authenticity	0,0 %	69,9 %	17,2 %	2,1 %	2,2 %
Self-care, health, well-being	4,2 %	4,1 %	13,8 %	3,2 %	21,7 %
Maternity	2,1 %	0,0 %	1,7 %	0,0 %	4,3 %
Violence against women	9,38 %	1,37 %	0,00 %	6,32 %	0,00 %
Romantic relationships	1,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	5,4 %
Leisure	11,5 %	1,4 %	5,2 %	27,4 %	6,5 %
Sex	4,2 %	1,4 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	1,1 %
Stereotypes	18,8 %	1,4 %	1,7 %	2,1 %	8,7 %
Feeding	3,1 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	3,3 %

Source: own elaboration.

Furthermore, regarding the second block of analysis on monetisation, it is also possible to extract which influencers most use Instagram as a loudspeaker for the activity they carry out to obtain economic income. In this regard, (Table 5) shows the types of monetisation that are most frequently repeated in the study obtained.

Table 5. Most recurrent monetisation of Spanish feminist influencers on Instagram.

Type of monetization	Appearance based on the total number of posts (415) by each influencer
Mention of their own professional project	22%
Mention and/or paid collaboration with brands	16,9%

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the previous table show that there is an interest in using Instagram to publicise their personal professional projects (such as books, diaries, podcasts, or films, among others) as can be seen in (Image 1) or to monetise their number of followers through collaborations with brands (sponsorships, branded content, advertising, etc.) as illustrated in (Image 2).

Image 1. Leticia Dólera’s book signing in June 2022 in Madrid.



Source: Dólera (2022b).

Image 2. Collaboration of Moderna de pueblo with the publishing house RBA.



Source: Moderna de pueblo (2022b).

(Table 6) shows that, of the 5 influencers analysed, 4 of them are the ones who most publicise their own projects on Instagram. These women are Barbi Japuta, Bebi Fernández, La vecina rubia and Leticia Dólera. As it can be deduced, it has not been detected that Moderna de pueblo communicates this kind of projects in the sample studied. In general, these projects are mainly related to the themes of sorority (34.1%), their profession (17.6%), leisure (14.3%) and empowerment (12.1%), as can be seen in (Table 7). On the other hand, a detailed analysis of each of the influencers shows that the projects that Barbi Japuta communicates on Instagram are related to promoting sorority (43.6%); Bebi Fernández highlights the authenticity (50%) of her projects that she publicises on Instagram; while the projects of La vecina rubia are related to leisure proposals (50%) and those of Leticia Dólera in publicising her professional side (50%) as a director and writer.

Table 6. Analysis of the frequency of appearance of the influencers’ own projects.

Theme	Instagrammer			
	barbijaputaaa	bebi_fernandez	lavecinarubia	leticiadoleraoficial
Empowerment	3,6 %	25,0 %	0,0 %	28,6 %
Sorority	43,6 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	25,0 %
Freedom	7,3 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	3,6 %
Guilty	1,8 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Mental health	1,8 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	3,6 %

Profession	3,6 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	50,0 %
Friendship	0,0 %	0,0 %	25,0 %	10,7 %
Authenticity	0,0 %	50,0 %	0,0 %	3,6 %
Self-care, health, well-being	3,6 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	3,6 %
Maternity	3,6 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Violence against women	10,9 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	3,5 %
Romantic relationships	1,8 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Leisure	7,3 %	0,0 %	50,0 %	25,0 %
Sex	1,8 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Stereotypes	16,4 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Feeding	3,6 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %

Source: own elaboration.

Table 7. Themes of own projects.

Theme	Appearance
Sorority	34,1%
Profession	17,6%
Leisure	14,3%
Empowerment	12,1%
Stereotypes	9,9%
Violence against women	7,7%
Freedom	5,5%
Amistad	4,4%
Authenticity	3,3%
Self-care, health, well-being	3,3%
Mental health	2,2%
Maternity	2,2%
Feeding	2,2%
Guilt	1,1%
Romantic relationships	1,1%
Sex	1,1%

Source: own elaboration.

As for the mention and/or collaboration with brands, (Table 8) shows that there are also 4 influencers who carry out this type of commercial activity, namely: Bebi Fernández, La vecina rubia, Leticia Dólera and Moderna de Pueblo. In this case, Barbi Japuta does not appear in this study because the collaborations have not been detected in the sample of this research.

Table 8. Analysis of the frequency of appearance of influencers' collaboration with brands.

Themes	Instagrammers			
	bebi_fernandez	lavecinarubia	leticiadoleraoficial	modernadepueblo
Empowerment	0,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	9,3 %
Sorority	0,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	11,6 %
Freedom	0,0 %	0,0 %	5,0 %	4,7 %
Guilty	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	2,3 %
Mental health	0,0 %	0,0 %	5,0 %	7,0 %
Profession	0,0 %	0,0 %	35,0 %	4,7 %
Friendship	50,0 %	0,0 %	10,0 %	2,3 %

Authenticity	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Self-care, health, well-being	50,0 %	80,0 %	10,0 %	34,9 %
Maternity	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	4,7 %
Violence against women	0,0 %	0,0 %	5,0 %	0,0 %
Romantic relationships	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	9,3 %
Leisure	0,0 %	20,0 %	35,0 %	9,3 %
Sex	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %
Stereotypes	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	4,7 %
Feeding	0,0 %	0,0 %	0,0 %	4,7 %

Source: own elaboration.

Table 9. Themes of collaborations with brands.

Themes	Appearance
Self-care, health, well-being	31,4%
Leisure	17,1%
Profession	12,9%
Sorority	10%
Empowerment	8,6%
Mental health	5,7%
Romantic relationships	5,7%
Freedom	4,3%
Friendship	4,3%
Stereotypes	2,9%
Maternity	2,9%
Feeding	2,9%
Violence against women	1,4%
Guilt	1,4%
Authenticity	0%
Sex	0%

Source: own elaboration.

The most frequent themes of the influencers studied when it comes to collaborating with brands (Table 9) are those related to self-care / health / wellbeing (31.4%), leisure (17.1%), their profession (12.9%), and sorority (10%). After analysing each of the influencers, it can be seen that the collaborations of La vecina rubia (80%), Bebi Fernández (50%) and Moderna de pueblo (34.9%) were mainly related to self-care / health / wellness brands, while those of Leticia Dólera are related to her profession (35%) and leisure proposals (35%) where she participates. Finally, Bebi Fernández also refers to friendship (50%) in her collaborations with brands.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Feminism has become a topic of global interest in social networks as a result of the social movements in defence of women's values worldwide. Moreover, social media have become platforms for social activism where women promote gender equality and human rights on the internet. As a consequence, social networks represent an excellent opportunity to promote feminist activism.

Influencers, Instagrammers and YouTubers promote feminist values in their networks and, in turn, collaborate with brands interested in defending these values in their commercials to engage millennials as followers. In this context, Femvertising is present in social media as a result of brand activism in the era of conscious capitalism (Varghese and Kumar, 2020) giving a new strategic perspective and objective to marketing communication.

In this research, we have analyzed the collaboration between brands and Instagrammers with a high level of engagement with their followers. These followers are most of the millennials who use social media (Martínez-Sanz and Gonzalez Fernández, 2018) and they connect with brands through influencers (Akestam et al., 2017).

The objective of this research has been to identify the content that women with a high number of followers share on their Instagram profiles to better understand these connections to identify which content is genuine and what topics can reinforce the credibility of brands and Instagrammers.

In relation to the research carried out, it can be highlighted that the themes that shape the editorial content of the feminist Instagrammers analysed are centred on sorority, authenticity, empowerment and friendship; while the themes that are at the heart of the monetisation of their activity that they communicate on Instagram are related to sorority, self-care/health/well-being, their profession, leisure and empowerment.

In fact, sorority and empowerment are the two themes that serve as a connection between the editorial content of the influencers analysed and the monetisation they communicate on Instagram. Therefore, it could be concluded that the most credible messages would be those that are able to unify the interests of the Instagrammer and the brand that wishes to collaborate on an advertising level, or when the influencer herself wishes to publicise a professional project that she wishes to advertise.

Among the practical applications of this work, it is worth highlighting the analysis, strategy and reflection provided in this work, which should be replicated by brands that want to collaborate with influencers, especially those with such a strong position as those analysed in this work. If we want to promote and maintain the credibility of both parties (Instagrammers and brands), the collaboration should be based on the common connections that can be established, instead of establishing advertising collaborations based only on the number of influencers' followers.

One of the main limitations of this work, resulting from the extraction tool used, lies in the analysis of the text comments of the sample, without considering the images. Therefore, in the future, we could consider using a paid tool where both parts of each post, i.e. text and image, can be downloaded.

Finally, we can affirm that Instagram, like other social networks, has unlimited potential to spread feminist values in society. In short, the voice of women is gaining more and more prominence in digital networks and their influence and commitment is an opportunity for researchers in future studies.

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