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**DIGITAL MEDIA, DAILY LIFE AND PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT**

Edited by

David Ramírez Plascencia, Barbara Carvalho Gurgel
and Avery Plaw



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*Yunuen Ysela Mandujano-Salazar
and Luis Antonio Becerra-Soria*

Introduction

During the 21st century, as digital technologies and social media have become part of everyday life, online activism, also called hashtag, internet, or digital activism, has gained relevance for political and civil engagement. Particularly, social media has allowed for a greater exposure of citizens' voices than traditional media. In this sense, activists rely on the fact that they can engage directly in dialogue regarding the issues of their interest, voice their demands, unmask power, challenge misrepresentation in traditional media, and so on. Digital activism has been especially important in the development of the Fourth Wave Feminism. Although its ideological bases are similar to those of the Third Wave—a clear opposition to gender violence, inequality, and patriarchal hegemony—it differentiates for the employment of digital media to express and to call for public demonstrations. In the case of Mexico, feminism has gained notoriousness precisely with the use of social media to make visible the systemic violence against women in the country.

Two cases are relevant because of the concentration of gender violence and the use of social media as means of communication for feminist collectives: Ciudad Juárez and Mexico City—hereafter Juárez and CDMX. Juárez is a city with a history of femicides and disappearances since the 1990s. The prevalent impunity around these cases and the increasing violence against women in the city has been the context of the onset of many protests from the victims' families, as well as the starting point of scholar research concerning gender violence in Mexican society. However, social outrage has been mostly lacking. Until 2019, inside the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) feminist students had not been able to obtain the recognition of the community. On the other hand, at the National Autonomous University of Mexico [UNAM] the murder of a young woman

in the university grounds, in April 2017, provoked the discontent of students and originated a series of public protests at the university with the creation of different feminist collectives.

Thus, in this chapter, we analyze the use of social media in the development of two Mexican feminist university collectives—UNAM's *Mujeres Organizadas de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* [MOFFyL] and UACJ's *Uni Unida*. We relied on digital and regular ethnography, as well as on documental research to rebuild the history of the collectives and to analyze the role of social media in their formation, consolidation, and their activities online and offline.

Feminist digital activism in the 21st century

Castells (2015) has observed how alternative digital media—e.g. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—allowed the general public to create and to communicate information beyond the control of governments and corporations. By sharing sorrow, anger, and hope, through a medium which is a fast way to circulate images and opinions, they have created a sense of togetherness that allows users to overcome fear, connect practices, and initiate social movements that have begun social transformation.

As it is defined by Adler and Goggin (2005), civic engagement refers to the involvement of the members of a community in activities orientated to improve their surroundings in order to construct a better future. Social media is a space of socialization particularly sought by young people who begin to define themselves as citizens. Accordingly, digital technologies and social media are becoming a space for interaction and participation for youngsters, who may also be involved in offline civic engagement (De-la-Garza-Montemayor et al., 2019). Contrary to the so-called *slacktivism*—a neologism resulted by combining *slacker* and *activism*—online civic engagement has, indeed, contributed to raise consciousness through graphical and written testimony, toward social issues, resulting in a wider coverage by mainstream media and attracting public attention (Brimacombe et al., 2018). Castells (2015) and Gerbaudo (2012) consider that, for example, the Arab Spring in 2011 originated in Facebook and Twitter, which facilitated the organization of protests and the uprising, as well as global visibilization.

Fourth Wave Feminism has been particularly vocal in digital media. According to Kowalska (2017), its beginning has a direct correlation with the popularization of social media around 2008. Using alternative digital media, feminist organizations and individuals have denounced sexism, misogynistic acts, gender discrimination, rape culture, mediated abuse, and trolling in the discourse of mainstream media and other users. Feminist digital activism is molded by the Foucauldian idea of visibility. In digital culture, being seen, read, and shared is equal to claiming their existence. In opposition to other forms of activism, these feminist groups define themselves as *collectives* and are characterized by the pursuit of a horizontal

structure, instead of a hierarchical one. As a result, they promote the idea of *sorority* among women concerning gender issues. Feminist collectives around the globe have employed the use of hashtags in social media to promote online campaigns, such as #MeToo, #HeForShe, etc. In consequence, social media has provided a space of encounter for further engagement, cross-referencing with other movements, and for inviting members and followers to support other feminist groups (Turley & Fisher, 2018).

In Mexico, feminist digital activism has been present since 2011, when #mujeresenlacantina was created to make visible the inequality of treatment for women in Mexican restaurants and cantinas, where they were, by tradition, denied service and even asked to leave the premises. This hashtag eventually functioned as a way of calling for a public manifestation to confront the owners of these restaurants in CDMX (De la Cruz, 2011). In 2015, #RopaSucia appeared on Twitter. This movement was created by female poets to expose the inequality in the Mexican academic and cultural sectors, as well as their misogynist and sexist behavior. The users shared their personal anecdotes about personalities such as Octavio Paz. Furthermore, this digital project was followed by a demonstration in which artists created a *tendedero* [a clothes line] constituted by different garments on which the best tweets were printed and “washed” with a mixture of water, ink, wine, and coffee to symbolize that those actions cannot be cleaned (Suárez Gómez, 2016).

In April 2016, Mexican feminist activists followed the #MiPrimerAsedio movement of Brazil, which invited women to share their first experience being sexually harassed to expose that women are victims of sexual violence on a daily basis (Silverstone, 2017). The Mexican version was #MiPrimerAcoso, which became a trending topic and had the participation of thousands of women, many of whom experienced their first harassment during childhood at the hands of relatives (Rocha, 2016). This movement strengthened the participation in a feminist demonstration on April 24, 2016, which was summoned by many local collectives around Mexico—with #VivasNosQueremos—to demand security and respect for women, as well as to claim justice for the victims of femicide, rape, and disappearances (Hijar Juárez, 2016).

In the spring of 2017, another hashtag was used to claim for justice and as a way to make visible the systemic violence against women in Mexico and the tendency to revictimize them. #SiMeMatan originated after the body of a young woman, Lesvy, was found in the grounds of the UNAM. The Attorney General’s Office of CDMX published on its Twitter account that the victim had been drinking alcohol and using drugs before her death. This caused the indignation of numerous women who began using Twitter with the mentioned hashtag to share details about their lives that could be used to criminalize them in case they became victims (Redacción Animal Político, 2017).

Another relevant example is the #MeToo movement that appeared in Mexico during March 2019, with #MeTooEscritoresMexicanos. The first

tweet that originated this movement was published by a user who declared that a known Mexican writer had manipulated, beaten, impregnated, and abandoned more than ten women. After this hashtag became trending topic, the Twitter account @MeTooEscritores was created for users to share their violent experiences with other Mexican writers (Milenio digital, 2019). Later, other accounts appeared in order to expose gender violence on several social and academic fields (Hernández, 2020).

Thus, the use of digital platforms as means for activism to attract attention to social issues and to summon offline movements has been gaining relevance among feminist collectives. In Mexico, the last decade has increasingly seen the use of social media by feminist activists to express their demands and organize public demonstrations.

Femicides and feminist activism in Mexico City and Ciudad Juárez at the turn of the century

The systemic violence against women for their female quality, most of the time perpetrated by men who are in a relational situation of power, is what has been called by feminist theorists as *femicide/feminicide* (Lagarde, 2006). Juárez has been known for being a capital of femicides; however, the violence against women has occurred everywhere in Mexico for a long time.

In CDMX, a metropolis of more than 20 million people, there has been a long tradition of feminist movements since the early 20th century. The ideological bases of these movements have been diverse and evolving, including labor inequalities of working women, gender violence, decriminalization of abortion, support for raped victims, inclusion and recognition of women and of indigenous groups in national politics, and so on (Stephen, 2012). It is in this context that the Fourth Wave feminism arose. It has been proposed that it began in the second decade of the 21st century, arriving in Mexico in 2019 (Galván, 2019). Its characteristic is the use of new digital technologies and the incorporation of youth in social movements (Ballesteros, 2020; Varela, 2020).

Mobilizations began to be more frequent with the use of social media to summon for demonstrations. Initially, the participation of feminist groups was complementary to larger protests or their displays of discontent were represented by a small number of participants. The start of larger mobilizations of women in CDMX happened on April 24, 2016, with the "Violet Spring" movement; thousands of people were summoned on social media with the #24A to demonstrate against gender violence, particularly against femicides (Priego-Broca, 2016). In 2017, these protests continued after the murders of Lesvy and two other women #NiUnaMenos. In 2018, the so-called "Green Tide" of the #26S broke out, characterized by green scarves, a symbol that emerged in Argentina to represent the legalization of abortion (Elige Red, 2017). In 2019, two extremely important demonstrations took place. On August 12th and 16th, with #NoMeCuidanMeViolan,

Mexican women took to the streets to protest against gender-based violence—in this year, the number of murders of women was 9 to 10 per day—as well as for the rape of a female high-school student by the police (Galván, 2019; Redacción Animal Político, 2019). Finally, on March 8, 2020, it was registered the largest participation in a feminist demonstration in CDMX, with 80,000 women. The calling to take to the streets in order to commemorate the International Day of Working Women was joined by a general outrage after the femicide and dismemberment of a woman on February 9th with #NiUnaMás (La Equipa Editorial, 2020; Notimex, 2020).

In contrast, Juárez is a city of about 1.5 million people at the northern border with the United States. It has always attracted a migrant population looking to cross to the neighboring country. Since the 1960s, when Mexico implemented an export-led economic model, the city became a receptor of numerous *maquiladoras*—factories mostly destined to low-cost manufacture and assembly processes. This turned Juárez into an attractive destination for people looking for a job in the country. Thus, it has a high percentage of migrant and floating population that, sometimes, live in precarious conditions.

Another characteristic of *maquiladoras* that has shaped the city is that more than half of the workforce is female (Staudt & Campbell, 2008). This situation has been considered as one of the reasons for the infamous violence against women that has characterized Juárez since the 1990s; since, as women entered the labor force and became breadwinners or began to be economically independent, they were perceived as transgressors of the patriarchal system (Monárrez Fregoso, 2010). Between 1993 and 1999, more than 160 women were raped, mutilated, and murdered in Juárez; this number has been a source of debate, because authorities categorized them as homicides, suicides, or accidents (Lagarde, 2006). Most of these victims were identified in the narratives of local and international press as young poor women working at *maquiladoras*, highlighting that they put themselves in risky situations; thus, implicitly or explicitly, blaming them (Monárrez Fregoso, 2000). Since then, thousands of women—not limited to the media-built stereotype—have been raped, murdered, or disappeared, and more than 90% of cases remain unsolved (M. E. López, 2018).

After decades of impunity and continuous hate and violence against women, civil society activism surged, but not with enough strength to involve wide sectors of population. At the beginning, families and friends of victims led demonstrations claiming justice; soon, diverse human rights and feminist activists—many of them from international groups—joined the activities to raise awareness about violence against women, urging to put the issue on the political agenda (Staudt & Campbell, 2008). However, the “pandemic of femicide in Ciudad Juárez” (M. E. López, 2018, para. 19) has not stopped and feminist activist groups remain painfully ignored by society and authorities, battling against rooted machismo, misogyny, and a generalized violent context.

Development of MOFFyL and Uni Unida

UNAM and UACJ are two public universities in Mexico, but they have very different contexts and history regarding activism. Established in 1973, the UACJ is the major public university in Juárez, having 34,000 students (Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 2019a). Meanwhile, UNAM, founded in 1910, is the largest university in the country, with 360,883 students (Portal de Estadística Universitaria, 2020).

Feminist collectives at UNAM began to appear in the 1980s with the purpose of denouncing misogyny at the university. In the 1990s, various feminists presented the Rector a proposal for the creation of the University Program for Gender Studies, which would promote research on feminist issues and participate in the design of policies on gender equality. The result of this was, in 2004, the project of Institutionalization and Transversalization of the Gender Perspective. In 2005, the addition of Article 2 to the General Statute of UNAM was created establishing that women and men have the same rights, obligations, and prerogatives. In 2014, the network of feminist collectives, Red No Están Solas, began accompanying victims of gender-based violence at the UNAM and denounced the sexual violence of teachers and students. Toward 2016, the Feminist Collective of the Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales and the Asamblea Feminista de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras were created and presented a questioning to the Protocol for the Care of Cases of Gender Violence. Finally, in 2017, the MOFFyL emerged (Medina Ramírez, 2020).

The collective MOFFyL was created in order to denounce the ineffectiveness of the UNAM's authorities in addressing gender-based violence, whether physical or verbal, despite the fact that it signed the agreements of the Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality, also called HeForShe, of the UN Women (ONU Mujeres, 2016). Also, they criticized the compliance with the Protocol. From 2002 to 2019, there were at least 16 femicide cases (Michel, 2019); from 2016 to 2019, there were 921 complaints regarding sexual abuse and gender violence (Rincón, 2019). However, several feminist collectives, including MOFFyL, have expressed that those are not the actual number, since the attention to cases of gender violence by the Protocol is insufficient, due to the lack of accompaniment, the minimization of complaints, and the lack of confidence on the part of the students (Ruíz & Pigeonutt, 2019). MOFFyL members also expressed their disagreement with the lack of information regarding Lesvy's case, both by the UNAM's authorities and the Attorney General's Office. They demanded that the authorities did not minimize this murder, calling it "an illegality" instead of addressing it as a femicide. This case caused a discomfort on the feminist collectives and the general community, marking a breaking point that strengthened their political involvement (Ruíz & Pigeonutt, 2019).

In 2018, after International Women's Day, MOFFyL organized *tendederos* in the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras [FFyL], to denounce the