

Miren Gutiérrez
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Coeditoras

**WOMEN, TECHNOLOGY,
AND POWER – UNMASKING
(AND DEALING WITH) DIGITAL
DISPARITIES IN THE TIMES
OF THE PLATFORMS**



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**Women, Technology, and Power
– Unmasking (and Dealing with)
Digital Disparities in the Times
of the Platforms**

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INTRODUCTION

Women, Technology and Power- an Introduction to Unmasking (and Dealing with) Digital Disparities in the Times of the Platforms

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The studies presented in this volume shed light on the complex interplay between gender representation and the broader issue of power asymmetries perpetuated by digital technology. While digital platforms have the potential to democratize information and provide opportunities for participation, they often reinforce existing gender biases, digital disparities, and stereotypes, particularly in male-dominated fields.

The book is structured around two main sections: “Intersectional Feminism, Platform Work & Infrastructures” and “Deconstructing Masculinity, Stereotypes, Disinformation & Bias.” At the same time, each section is organized in a way that case studies are offered first, followed by more theoretical approaches that connect to the cases by providing a broader context or connection. The intention is not to be comprehensive but to explore and reflect on these emerging issues to offer clues about the digital disparities and gender biases that arise from digital technology.

The “Intersectional Feminism, Platform Work & Infrastructures” section examines how feminist perspectives can shed light on the complexities of the platformization of work and relationships. Five articles dwell on these topics.

Pinar Apaydin and Özge Subaşı, in “Reclaiming Gold-Days as Decolonial Feminist Commons for Imagining Alternative Solidarity Systems,” use feminist perspectives to observe *gold-days* in Turkey. Gold-days, known as “Altın Günü” in Turkish, are a unique social and economic tradition in Turkey, prevalent among women. Some groups have adapted the concept to online fora, combining digital communication and networks, as well as physical gatherings. The study reveals how these groups employ the data infrastructure to put in place a decentralized mechanism of solidarity and saving.

Ane Arruabarrena, in “La culpa que nos une: Expresión de las emociones proscritas en comunidades online sobre maternidades,” explores support networks around motherhood. The demands that women experience in motherhood are increasing, given the requirements of the neocapitalist system for productivity and professional success. In this context, more and more women are using online communities as sources of information and as a place to share their experiences. Concretely, this work studies *guilt* as a transversal element in women’s narratives about their experiences as mothers through the analysis of the “Confessions” section of the website Lavidamadre.com, which offers anonymity.

In “Micro and nano Influencers: An emerging phenomenon that puts (some) power in the hands of women,” Nagore Madinabeitia Franco, Antonia Moreno, and Miren Gutierrez analyze the ascend of female nano and micro influencers. The influence wielded by social media personalities can be understood only through the lens of economics, as influencers exemplify the neoliberal concept of individuals as self-managed enterprises, where personal branding and self-promotion are key to success in a market-driven digital landscape. However, studying influencer marketing offers a view of the power dynamics in

the current platform-dominated landscape and provides insights into the shifting relationships between brands, creators, and platforms. The rise of micro and nano influencers represents a shift in traditional power structures within platforms and digital marketing. Unlike macro influencers or celebrities, these smaller-scale female content creators often have more niche audiences and closer relationships with their followers. This change in dynamics offers an opportunity to study how power operates at a more granular level on social platforms. Focusing on female influencers, too, allows for an exploration of gender-specific power imbalances.

Bresena Kopliku, Flora Gjoni and Elvira Drishti propose “Women and Digital Work in Albania – From Diversity, Autonomy, and Power to Exclusion and Cultural Restraints.” The study examines the growth of the digital labor market in Albania, highlighting both opportunities and challenges for women. While the sector has expanded significantly, especially post-COVID-19, many female workers face precarious conditions, particularly in location-based jobs like delivery services, which remain male-dominated due to cultural and societal barriers. Women are more represented in cloud-based work, benefiting from flexibility, yet still encounter issues like low pay and lack of social protections. The study employs feminist labor theory to analyze gender dynamics. It aims to fill gaps in research regarding women’s participation in the Albanian digital economy, emphasizing the need for better legal frameworks and support systems to enhance women’s roles in both remote and location-based work.

To end this section, Mayo Fuster proposes a theoretical contribution entitled “Feminist digital economy: A framework of dimensions of gender and feminist qualities of digital platforms.” Since its inception, the platform economy has been greeted as a more open, inclusive, and democratic model than the traditional economy. However, the effects of the platform economy on gender equality are still largely unexplored. This study offers a state-of-the-art perspective on gender perspectives about the platform economy, as well as an analytical framework of

gender and feminist qualities of digital platforms. This framework challenges scholars to consider its (1) economic mission and value system; (2) work-life care balance; (3) fair treatment and non-gender-based violence on platforms; (4) equal inclusion and participation of women at all levels; (5) intersectional access and impact; (6) equal access and empowerment of women and the reduction of privileges for men; (7) performativity; and (8) gender neutral technology or technological design favoring gender equality.

Meanwhile, the “Deconstructing Masculinity, Stereotypes, Disinformation & Bias” section addresses the critical issues of toxic masculinity and negative stereotypes in digital environments and the emerging trend of gender disinformation targeted against women who occupy the public sphere, as well as algorithmic bias.

In the first chapter of this section, Estibaliz Linares Bahillo, Ainhoa Izaguirre, and Amaia Mosteiro propose the article entitled “Third gender digital gap and Sexit- cyberviolences in childhood.” This analysis explores the digital experiences of Generation Alpha, mainly focusing on the emergence of a third-gender digital divide. This divide manifests in unequal behaviors, codes, and interactions among children aged 6 to 12, influenced by societal gender norms. The study highlights that while boys predominantly engage with video games and sports content, girls are more inclined towards beauty and lifestyle themes on platforms like YouTube and TikTok. It also points out the prevalence of sexist and patriarchal representations in gaming, which often reinforce harmful stereotypes. The research employs qualitative methods, including focus groups, to investigate these dynamics and aims to identify strategies for addressing gender biases in digital spaces.

In “How sportswomen are portrayed in Spanish media,” Ana Clara Gil Do canto, Antonia Moreno Cano, and Miren Gutiérrez reveal persistent biases reinforcing male dominance in sports discourse and subtly diminishing the presence of women. These contents are then disseminated online, contributing to the perpetuation of derogatory

stereotypes about women. Studying how sportswomen are represented by media can provide valuable insights into power asymmetries in the platform era for several reasons. Media representation of female athletes often reinforces gender stereotypes and cultural biases, reflecting broader power imbalances in society. By examining these depictions, we can understand how traditional power structures are maintained and reproduced in the digital age. The significant disparity in media coverage between male and female athletes highlights a crucial aspect of power asymmetry, too; in the platform era, visibility is a form of currency, and the continued underrepresentation of sportswomen in media reflects how existing power structures can be replicated and amplified through digital channels.

Graciela Padilla Castillo proposes an article entitled “Desinformación digital en la era de *deepfakes*. Propuestas legales y ciudadanas para reducirla.” It delves into the growing issue of digital disinformation exacerbated by *deepfake* technology. The study discusses the forthcoming 2024 EU Media Freedom Regulation, aimed at combating disinformation and regulating media services across the European Union. Despite initiatives, access to information remains challenging, with social media amplifying disinformation due to its reliance on free content. Deepfakes, AI-generated multimedia content mimicking real people, has broadened its impact, with applications now spreading to advertising, cinema, and even everyday social media interactions, notably with “*cheapfakes*,” simplified versions for humor or satire. Women, especially those who occupy the public sphere, are disproportionately affected by *deepfakes*, discouraging their civic and political participation and silencing their voices. The study highlights the main features of the 2024 regulation. The research identifies multiple technical indicators for spotting manipulated media, such as unnatural facial expressions, irregular blinking, and inconsistencies in audio-visual sync. As *deepfake* technology evolves, societal awareness and robust regulatory frameworks become essential. Padilla Castillo

advocates for both public education and technological advances in detection to counteract disinformation's effects effectively.

Finally, Lluís Gómez Bigordà and Sonia Ruiz, in “Charting Pathways: An Intersectional Impact Assessment for Vision and Language Foundation Models,” discuss the significant biases inherent in multimodal foundation models, particularly those used for vision and language tasks. These models, trained on large and often uncensored datasets, risk perpetuating systemic discrimination, especially against marginalized groups, by amplifying harmful ideologies and stereotypes. The authors propose an Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) framework that evaluates biases across three dimensions: Life-machine, focusing on human-machine interactions; systemic-political, addressing structural inequalities; and methods-metrics, emphasizing participatory practices. This framework aims to dismantle power imbalances and ensure AI systems are developed with fairness and justice in mind, advocating for an integrated approach to bias assessment throughout the AI lifecycle.

1. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THESE STUDIES

Despite their many limitations, digital technology offers specific opportunities for dissent, alternative participation and solidarity, and some forms of agency. This agency can be spotted in the case studies of the gold-days mechanism in Turkey, examined by Apaydin and Subaşı; the analysis of the “Confessions” section of Lavidamadre.com website, analyzed by Arruabarrena; and the nano and micro influencers who increasingly shape marketing strategies of big brands, exposed by Madinabeitia Franco, Moreno, and Gutierrez. However, as Brisena Kopliku and Flora Gjoni point out, platformized labor also generated exclusion and limitations based on gender.

Several articles, in fact, discuss digital platforms and the platform economy (PE) and its impact on gender equality. Fuster's analysis concretely discusses how the PE has evolved and its impact on various

economic sectors. She explores platform cooperativism, emphasizing alternative models within the digital economy, and discusses digital labor platforms, analyzing how these platforms shape work dynamics and economic relationships. Meanwhile, Kopliku and Gjoni observe how platform labor works from the ground in Albania.

The stereotypes about female athletes exposed by Gil Do Canto, Moreno Cano, and Gutiérrez and the gender disinformation disseminated online explored by Padilla Castillo can be the basis for biased algorithmic decision-making. This is how the perverse circle of algorithmic biased decisions is completed: As Gómez Bigordà and Ruiz explain, algorithmic decision-making systems, when trained on large uncensored datasets that include prejudices, can perpetuate and amplify existing societal biases. This occurs through several interconnected mechanisms. Natural language processing algorithms learn word associations from large text corpora, which often contain gender biases. Previous research, for example, has shown that these algorithms tend to associate male terms with career, intelligence, and rational thinking and female terms with family, emotions, and arts (Nadeem et al., 2022). When biased algorithmic outputs are used to make decisions, they can create feedback loops that further entrench discrimination (Vlasceanu & Amodio, 2022).

Gender disparities are explored in digital work environments, in representations of female athletes, in disinformation attacks, and, as Linares Bahillo, Izaguirre, and Mosteiro show, in schools where cyberviolences are exerted and toxic masculinity is promoted. These studies contribute to a growing body of studies exploring gender disparities in the platform economy (see, e.g., (Aljaraideh, & Rabee, 2024; Horvát & González-Bailón, 2024; Saw et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2022)). Creating equitable working and education conditions, as well as a fairer representation of women and girls, seem paramount.

The studies highlight both opportunities for agency through digital platforms and the persistent power asymmetries and challenges faced

by women in the time of the platforms. They collectively argue for equitable working conditions and better representation of women in digital spaces, as well as connect the dots between digital biases and unfairness and real-life discrimination. The volume underscores how algorithmic biases can perpetuate societal inequalities, emphasizing the need for frameworks that address these issues holistically. Overall, while acknowledging limitations, these studies advocate for a deeper understanding of how digital technology interacts with gender dynamics, aiming to foster more inclusive practices in both digital labor and representation.

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Section 1: Intersectional Feminism, Platform Work & Infrastructures

Capítulo 1.

Gold-Days as Feminist Commons for Imagining Alternative Solidarity Systems

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gold-day (Altın günü) is a rotating savings system rooted in Turkish women's networks, friend groups, or neighbors, functioning as an interest-free credit system (Bilecen, 2019). During difficult economic times, traditional women's gatherings offered a sense of solidarity among people who often shared similar cultural, social, and economic backgrounds (Büyükokutan, 2012).

These informal financial networks have evolved, including in the digital age, and provide an interesting lens through which to examine power dynamics in the era of platforms. Traditional Altın günü gatherings were face-to-face events where women would meet regularly; with the advent of digital platforms, these practices have adapted in several ways. Social platforms and messaging apps are now used to organize Altın günü meetings, set dates, and communicate about contributions. During the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, some groups have shifted to virtual meetings using video conferencing platforms, allowing the social aspect to continue even when in-person gatherings are not possible. In contrast, digital payment platforms and mobile banking apps have made it easier to collect and distribute funds, reducing the need for physical cash or gold exchanges (Bilecen, 2019). Digital platforms have

allowed Altın günü groups to expand beyond immediate geographic proximity, potentially including members from different cities or even countries. The adaptation of Altın günü to digital platforms offers several insights into power dynamics in the modern era. While digital platforms can democratize access to financial networks, Altın günü remains an exclusive practice; membership is still selective, based on trust, ethnicity, class, and social connections. This selectivity highlights how digital platforms can reinforce existing social hierarchies. Altın günü provides access to money for women who might otherwise have limited access to formal financial systems. Digital platforms potentially expand this access, empowering more women financially. As Altın günü moves online, questions of data ownership and privacy arise. Who controls the information about these financial transactions? How might this data be used or monetized by platform companies? As digital platforms mediate these financial networks, their algorithms may influence group formation, member selection, and even financial decision-making, subtly shaping the power dynamics within these networks. Finally, the reliance on digital platforms for organizing and conducting Altın günü activities creates a new form of dependency. Platform policies, changes, or potential shutdowns could disrupt these financial networks.

Büyükokutan (2012) describes a gold-day as a gathering where ten to twelve women (friends) usually meet at one member's home, where the host arranges a social event with food, tea, and other activities. During the gathering, each guest contributes a gold coin to the host. The following month, another member will host the event and receive the accumulated gold (Büyükokutan, 2012). It enables trusted participants to access financial capital for various reasons (Bilecen, 2019). Each cycle ends once every participant has taken a turn, with the duration depending on group size and meeting frequency. The literature explored gold-days to understand their role in women's lives in different geographies, such as in Muğla (Büyükokutan, 2012), Safranbolu (Sağır, 2013), and among immigrant women in Germany (Bilecen, 2019), illustrating the multiple and diverse functions of the practice, as well as a shared social focus

across all (Kahyaoglu et al., 2016). Previous studies reveal that the social and economic dynamics of gold-days are flexible, with participants collectively determining the exchange value, meeting times, and group size based on financial urgency and consensus (Büyükokutan, 2012).

Gold-days have also been examined as a form of Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA), and the Turkish version of “gün” is marked as a sociocultural activity among other global examples (Kahyaoglu et al., 2016). Their more economics-oriented take on gün builds on eleven motivations but still includes components like socializing, avoiding interest, need for prestige, social, and feelings of economic freedom along with more traditional economic needs. From a feminist commons perspective, however, these gatherings emphasize non-monetary contributions—such as care, support, and shared knowledge—alongside financial exchanges (Federici, 2018). Since the sharing goes beyond monetary exchanges, gold-days also embody the principles of monetary feminist commons.

1.1. Gold-Days as a Feminist Approach

Research on the practice of gold-days in Turkey, viewed as feminist commons, can deepen our understanding of how these communal savings systems challenge dominant economic models and inform the design of solidarity systems. Applying a decolonial feminist perspective to our reading of gold-days can open new pathways for placing women's social activities into the dominating economic structures. Decolonial thought in feminism underscores the significance of recognizing these systems as sites of resistance, where marginalized communities—particularly women—assert their economic sovereignty (Mohanty, 2003). In Turkey, these practices offer an opportunity to rethink financial systems and feminist solidarity within a decolonial framework.

As Vergès (2019) has argued, decolonial feminism critiques the overlapping forms of domination—patriarchy, capitalism, and colonial-

ism—while advocating for alternative, collective forms of power, like those seen in communal savings traditions (Federici, 2004). Gold-days gatherings exist outside the formal banking system (Kahyaoğlu et al., 2016), positioning them within economic autonomy and shared wealth pools—key commons and decolonial theory themes. In this context, decolonial could be applied not to liberate Turkey from colonization but to challenge the hegemonic financial models rooted in global capitalist structures (Keyder, 1987), including those influenced by Western powers. The gold-days offer an alternative to capitalist finance systems, resembling non-Western, reciprocity-based financial exchanges (Kahyaoğlu et al., 2016). It is a form of community self-reliance, supporting social bonds while bypassing formal financial institutions, often viewed as exclusionary, particularly to women and marginalized groups (Kahyaoğlu et al., 2016). Decolonial studies challenge the dominance of capitalist and neoliberal systems by highlighting practices that prioritize human relations, community resilience, and cooperative survival strategies.

1.2. Decoloniality and Financial Systems

From a decolonial perspective, focusing on epistemic colonization—where Western knowledge and worldviews overshadow and marginalize other forms of knowing and being (Escobar, 2018)—we can understand gold-days as essential, locally grounded financial knowledge systems acts of resistance. Grosfoguel (2009) highlights how decolonial theory reshapes political economy and global coloniality, challenging the Western hegemony in economic structures. The gold-days practice fits into this more extensive critique, providing a local and alternative financial system based on community. Pacquement (2020) and Decker (2005), focused on post-colonial Africa, provide insights into decoloniality efforts considering local and communal financial practices in contrast to the colonial banking models. These can serve as historical narratives of Turkish women's communal financing practices (such as the gold-days), resisting exclusion by formal banking systems. Our ap-

proach aligns with Boanada's (2013) call, as decolonial theory enables a critique and reimagining of global legal reforms and development policies while centering practices that colonial powers have historically marginalized. Decolonial feminist approaches highlight how women, especially in the Global South, are often excluded from formal financial systems (Federici, 2004). The decolonial perspective here aligns with feminist critiques of capitalism by emphasizing how marginalized communities, including women, create and sustain alternative economic structures (Federici, 2018).

To effectively inform designers, it is crucial to remain mindful of these contextual systems, ensuring that decolonial frameworks are not simply applied as universal solutions but are instead responsive to local needs, values, and practices. As articulated by Escobar (2018) and Tlos-tanova (2017), ontological design argues that design shapes not only the material world but also influences our ways of being and relating to each other. It suggests that each design decision impacts our reality, making it an existential practice that can sustain current power structures or open pathways to alternative, decolonial futures. This perspective aligns with Tunstall's (2013) concept of incorporating cultural, ethical, and communal values into the design process, emphasizing that design should reflect the lived experiences of the communities it serves rather than just dominant ideologies. While we have explored decoloniality within these financial systems, what truly matters is understanding and investigating gold-days as a feminist commons. We are interested in what it means to engage with underrepresented knowledge systems from a decolonial feminist perspective for the design of solidarity systems. Investigating current forms of gold-days as a case study offers insights into how localized, communal, and feminized forms of financial exchange can provide alternatives to capitalist ways of designing solidarity systems.

Above, we introduced the practice of gold-days as a possible candidate for claiming as feminist commons. We follow up with a qualitative study of the current gold-days practices to unfold the shared values of contemporary applications of the gold-days in Turkey. We analyzed a

post titled “What are gold-days?” on an opinion-sharing platform and conducted three in-depth interviews with individuals from different gold-day groups. Our analysis highlights the inherent values present in gold-days, emphasizing their decolonial feminist potential. These qualities align closely with the concept of feminist commons, allowing comparison between gold-days and existing solidarity systems and envisioning new possibilities for the design of financial solidarity and community empowerment. This approach reveals the adaptive and care-oriented nature of gold-day by illuminating an underrepresented practice attributed to women to challenge Eurocentric financial models, particularly in the context of solidarity systems. Therefore, in this research, we ask, “How do gold-day reflect and expand feminist principles of *commoning*, and what can we learn for the design of solidarity systems?”. To connect our findings back to the design of digital systems, we also introduce three existing economic solidarity and sharing systems and map our findings from the gold-day study to derive conclusions about the pluralistic design of feminist solidarity platforms.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we followed a qualitative research design, as Creswell (2013, p .48) outlined, with two types of data collected: transcripts of in-depth interviews and text content of a specific blog thread comments to understand the contemporary applications of the gold-day.

We began by gathering public opinions on how gold-day is perceived. To achieve this, we analyzed a thread on *the Girls Asking blog*, a Turkish opinion-sharing platform akin to an urban dictionary, which has nearly one million users (İndeks Konuşmacı Ajansı, 2023) and a monthly click rate of 12.8 billion (Oran, 2017). The platform allows users to stay anonymous, fostering open questions and responses without peer pressure (İndeks Konuşmacı Ajansı, 2023). Despite its feminist-sounding title, it encourages idea-sharing across genders, with ‘female’ and ‘male’ tags for popular opinions. Topics span health, relationships, the economy, and

current events, and users can start threads, post questions, create polls, and share articles. We searched for the “altın günü” keyword and analyzed 24 comments under the post, “What are gold-days?”. These were compiled into an Excel sheet for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis included seven self-identified males and seventeen self-identified females, although we did not conduct any gender-related analysis in our study. While previous studies have emphasized privacy concerns (e.g., Zuboff, 2019) and other harms related to how digital platforms work, such as algorithmic bias or cyberbullying (e.g., Barlett, 2015), in our analysis of blog posts, the digital apps they use, and prior work on gold-days, we did not come across these aspects explicitly. While we acknowledge these risks, having studied only a smaller community and related digital footprints to understand a rooted ritual, we can confirm that these characteristics are not yet central to the gold-days-related practices.

The blog entries provided valuable insights into who participates in gold-days, as well as details about the practices, locations, and materials involved. After the comments on the blog posts gathered in the second stage, we conducted in-depth interviews with individuals participating in different gold-day groups to understand and contextualize gold-days’ differing aspects and commonalities. The overall analysis revealed three key themes: core objectives, financial aspects, and social arrangements. The literature indicates that women predominantly organize gold-day, and a half-gold coin is the standard exchange value (Büyükokutan, 2012). However, our analysis of the blog posts showed that mixed-gender gold-day circles exist in today’s Turkey, and a mutually selected amount of economic value can be exchanged. With this information, we applied purposeful sampling, selecting individuals with direct experience related to the critical issue under study (Creswell, 2013), aligning with our goal of exploring various gold-day practices and identifying their shared features. We contacted three gold-days members (diversified in age, gender, and geography, all with more extended experience attending gold-days). With this sampling, we aim not to give a complete picture

of the current gold-day but to revisit different stories about the practice. We conducted one-hour in-depth interviews with three individuals who shared their stories and perspectives on gold-day. This approach enabled us to explore diverse applications related to gender, age, occupation, and geography while uncovering commonalities in gold-day practices.

Table 1: Interviewees’ Details

Interviewee	Profile	Age/ Gender
Interviewee 1	Lives in İstanbul, participate in diverse gold-day groups simultaneously (relatives and friends)	Mid-thirties/Female
Interviewee 2	Lives in İzmir, participate in a mixed-gender gold-day group	Late twenties/ Male
Interviewee 3	Lives in Demre, a municipality of Antalya, participates in a gold-day group with friends for long-term	The early fifties/ Female

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The in-depth interviews are based on Boyce and Neale (2006). All interviews were recorded, and at the start of each session, the ethical procedure was explained to the interviewees, along with the presentation of ethical approvals obtained from the university (2020.257.IRB3.098). We explored interviewees’ experiences, perceptions, and practices related to gold-days, inquiring about event mechanics and personal and group motivations. While the interviews had an open and in-depth nature, key points included in all interviews were a walk-through of a typical gold-day, the motivations, opinions, and observations about the changes in the practice and meaning of gold-days. We transcribed these interviews, anonymized them, and integrated them into the same Excel sheet. Three interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring themes that would help understand the gold-day practices, applying an open coding procedure.

3. RESULTS

The following part introduces three main themes regarding gold-days: (3.1) core goals, (3.2) financial aspects, and (3.3) social arrangements.

3.1. Core Goals

The blog analysis identified key goals of gold-days, such as lump-sum payments (n:12), socializing (n=6), and helping someone in need (n:5), which are the most frequently mentioned. Some comments highlighted multiple goals or provided more specific examples, such as collective saving (n:4), collective buying (n:1), neighborhood solidarity (n:1), reciprocal help (n:1), creating a support fund (n:1), avoiding interest on installment payments (n:2), having meals (n:3), gossiping (n:2), dancing (n:1) and chatting (n:2).

While collecting lump-sum payments is the primary motivation, it is essential to mention that socializing and helping someone in need is inseparable from collecting money in the blog entries. Interviews further approved this perspective and gave more profound insights into the relations among these critical activities and the evolving significance of gold-days for participants.

3.1.1. Helping Someone in Need

Aligning with the blog comment analysis, the interviewees pointed out the benefits of gold-days for offering support to others.

For example, Interviewee 1 highlighted that gold-days are advantageous because they allow participants to assist one another while also benefiting from the pooled money. Contributions can be made gradu-

ally, like paying in installments, making it akin to using bank credit or installment plans at stores.

3.1.2. Collective Saving

Special occasions such as a family member's wedding or the need for an expensive product reveal a necessity for money; consequently, they hold a gold-day. Collectivity enhances purchasing power for costly products. Entry 5 illustrates this through an example of neighbors who engaged in a collective purchase using this ritual, agreeing on a price, selecting a washing machine model, and paying for it through monthly installments.

Raising money also generates peace of mind for some of the women. Interviewee 1 highlighted the significance of gold-days in the lives of homemakers, particularly in easing financial difficulties. They noted that many housewives, who are often not employed, struggle to access cash amounts like 500 TL quickly. Interviewee 1 explained that gold-days serve to save money gradually, frequently using small savings from daily expenses, such as setting aside leftover money from grocery shopping. For example, they might plan to spend 100 TL but end up paying 80 TL, saving the remaining 20 TL for a gold-day. This accumulated money is then used for special occasions or specific needs.

Interviewee 1's quote highlights the shared challenges, such as difficulty accumulating or saving money independently. Interviews further revealed that gold-days solidarity and mutual engagement motivated members to prioritize savings before spending, even during challenging economic times. All interviewees also emphasized the collaborative nature of saving within gold-day groups. Interviewee 2 emphasized the challenges of saving money individually, noting that gold-days encourage collective saving while also offering opportunities to socialize, such as meeting at a restaurant or bar. They mentioned that their group had established a rule requiring each member to bring a new gold coin to every meeting, a shared decision that motivates everyone to save regularly.

3.1.3. Maintaining Relationships

Three interviewees noted that gold-days provide an opportunity to strengthen relationships with family and friends. Interviewee 3 remarked that on designated days, five to six women come together, emphasizing that their gatherings serve not only monetary purposes but also hold sentimental value, as they help maintain friendships. Interviewee 1 also shared that they participate in this ritual to create opportunities to connect with their relatives. They explained that gold-days serve as an excuse to gather with family members, noting that setting aside time for these meetings requires effort. They arrange to meet on a specific day, contribute money to the host, and treat it like a family visit, enjoying time together.

Although the primary purpose of initiating the gold-day is to collect gold, both the blog entries (n:6) and several interview quotes indicated the relationship between the two, namely the constant interplay between solidarity and collective saving.

3.2. Financial Aspects

Both blog comments and interviews revealed that gold-days are flexible and cooperative arrangements regarding financial aspects. Individuals who participate in gold-days actively shape the rules and expectations of these exchanges to meet changing needs, prioritizing financial security for all members.

3.2.1. Accommodates a Variety of Currencies

Blog posts indicate that gold-days accommodate a variety of exchange media, including gold, dollars, and Turkish lira. While gold remains the primary exchange artifact in eight blog entries, monetary alternatives are prevalent, with ten entries explicitly mentioning cash.

Two entries highlight the flexibility of currency options by noting the acceptance of various foreign currencies.

Interviewees expanded on these ideas. Interviewee 1 pointed to the increasing value of gold as a critical reason for the growing preference for cash. While acknowledging gold's long-term value, all interviewees expressed difficulty affording it at its current market price. Cash provides liquidity, while gold is a more stable store of value. Interviewee 1 stated:

When people have money, they spend it. However, when it is gold, you cannot spend it immediately. It is on the side for investment purposes. It supports you on difficult days, like under the pillow. Nevertheless, when it is money, it is gone. You spend it. You cannot give gold to a shop, buy clothes, etc. But when you have cash, you will spend it immediately.

The concept of “under the pillow”—unreported savings outside of official financial systems—is culturally rooted and needs further exploration.

3.2.2. Credit-Taking Without Interest

The blog comments also draw parallels to bank credit systems (n:2) and credit cards (n:1), with two additional comments describing gold-days as a credit-taking without interest. Entry 10 reflected on the relation with the interest rate:

In that instance, whoever needs money receives the accumulated money. Not only with gold but also dollars and Turkish Lira are exchanged too. For example, each month, you give 100TL. In one month, you receive 1500TL from 15 people. It is like a credit without interest.

Based on our findings, on a gold-day, both the exchange value and the order of participants are flexible and collectively determined. Also, interviewees and blog commenters indicated that gold-days are an interest-free credit, where profit-making is not considered significant.

3.3. Social Arrangements

Blog entries indicated that gold-days are primarily held among women (n=3) while explicitly mentioning the participation of mothers (n=1), fathers (n=1), and neighbors (n=2). Based on the literature, gold-days are predominantly female-oriented (Bilecen, 2019; Büyükokutan, 2012). However, the blog analysis revealed that participation is not exclusively limited to women, as it included descriptions such as “neighbor” (n=2) and “father” (n=1).

Still, there is no first-hand reporting of the gendered experience of a gold-day from a male participant. Notably, Interviewee 2, a man in our study, provided a more substantial example of mixed-gender participation in these gatherings, which included two males and four females.

3.3.1. Trust and Familiarity

Relatives and friendships formed the foundation of these social networks. Interviewees emphasized the importance of friendship in maintaining gold-day groups. Interviewees consistently stressed the significance of trust and familiarity in selecting group members. As Interviewee 1 noted,

Participants should be trustworthy people. Otherwise, how will we receive that money next month? Each participant must be people who trust each other. So that everyone receives their share during those five months, and no one will be a victim. Trustworthy people, people we know, relatives, family, and friends are acceptable to our groups.

New members often require sponsorship from existing participants, emphasizing the role of trust in expanding the group. Interviewee 2 described their group as a circle of old university friends consisting of two men and four women. Interviewee 2 mentioned that one person joined the group later, whom they didn't know well at first but accepted because she was another member's friend. Over time, they have become friends, and the new addition has integrated well into the group. While

membership is exclusive, new participants can join through existing members. These gatherings serve as platforms for maintaining existing relationships and fostering new connections.

3.3.2. Varied Settings

Gatherings can take place in a variety of settings. Interviewees shared experiences of attending gold-days at participants' homes (Interviewees 1 and 3), during arranged drops (Interviewee 1), in cafes (Interviewee 2), and at restaurants (Interviewees 2 and 3).

While the posts and interviews do not explicitly discuss event costs, it is understood that expenses are shared among participants. Interviewee 1 mentioned that when hosting at home, guests typically bring food to assist the host, ensuring that the gathering does not become a financial burden for the host. They explained it as follows: one person might bring dessert, while others contribute items like savory cookies, bulgur salad, and pasta salad. The host prepares tea and cooks whatever they have on hand, such as pastries.

Interviewee 3's group meets at cafes, and she described their process as follows:

We have a breakfast day where everyone brings gold and gives it to the designated person. However, we pay for our meals. It used to be at home. Nevertheless, it is nice to be out. We watch TV, cooking shows, or chat when we held the gold-day at home.

Interviewee 2 highlighted the difficulties of organizing meetings for a group dispersed across the city, noting the convenience of meeting closer to participants' homes. Interviewee 1 explained that, even when they do not host social gatherings, they still uphold their commitment and ensure the gold is delivered to the intended recipient. In such cases, each participant stops by the host's place within a designated time frame, like between the first and fifth day of the week, to hand over the gold.

The distribution of the funds is typically aligned with participants' needs, and significant life events are discussed and prioritized within each group. The order of participants in a gold-day remains flexible. Interviewee 1 noted that when someone initiates a gold-day, they often take on the role of organizer. To address urgent requests, participants may intentionally change the order in which the host receiving the money is chosen. While some gold-day attendees prefer a random selection for determining the sequence, flexibility is prioritized, as Interviewee 1 shared that her sister-in-law expressed her financial difficulties and suggested organizing a gold-day for assistance. To support her, they set up a gold-day in which five participants each contributed one hundred Turkish lira monthly. Interviewee 1 took the initiative to find funds to help her sister-in-law, who was the first to receive the money.

The social fabric of gold-days shows that members prioritize mutual care by sharing organizational costs, coordinating meeting details, and ensuring that the gold reaches the host, even if no gathering occurs. Interviewees described gold-days as social structures where trust and care are built, transferred, and shared. Nevertheless, the trust and reference systems, cultural rituals of prioritizing those in need, and creating a socially safe environment remain central to the practice.

4. CONCLUSION

This section addresses our research question: "How can contemporary gold-days in Turkey provide insights for the future of feminist *commoning* practices and, more broadly, for the design and development of emerging solidarity systems?" We answer this question by connecting the key findings (overview, see Table 2) and the literature. Drawing on Tunstall (2013), we explore how to honor women's value systems and translate them into tangible experiences to address the design practitioners' take from this work. One way of making theoretical work more tangible to designers is to illustrate the outcomes concerning the existing systems. Therefore, we add three design examples to our discussion.

Gold-day practice fits into a more comprehensive critique by presenting a non-Western, community-centered alternative financial system. More broadly, our research builds on Grosfoguel's (2009) argument that decolonial theory reimagines political economy and global coloniality, challenging Western economic frameworks' dominance. Pacquement (2020) and Decker (2005), focused on post-colonial Africa, provide insights into how localized, communal financial systems (like gold-day) challenge colonial banking models' decolonization efforts considering local and communal financial practices in contrast to the colonial banking models. Our approach resonates with Boanada's (2013) call, as decolonial theory provides a framework to critique and reimagine global legal reforms and development policies, centering practices historically marginalized by colonial powers. However, as designers, we primarily focus on how these concepts can be articulated and integrated into the design process.

Table 2: Findings Summary

Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. collecting money 2. socializing (chatting, gossiping, dancing) 3. helping someone in need 4. collective saving 5. shared meals 6. the lack of interest charges on installment payments
Financial aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flexible and cooperative arrangements • accommodates a variety of currencies • credit-taking without interest
Social arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of friendship • the role of trust in expanding the group • the gatherings can occur in various settings
Indirect outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alleviate hardships • prioritize savings before spending • maintain relationships with relatives and friends

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Feminist commons emphasize the importance of shared resources and collective action within marginalized communities (Federici, 2018). These commons advocate for collaboration, mutual support, and resource pooling to challenge dominant power structures and promote autonomy. In gold-days, participants engage in collective saving, which strengthens financial resilience and fosters a supportive community, embodying the principles of feminist commons. As outlined in Table 2, our findings demonstrate that gold-days' flexible and collaborative nature serves various goals, including collecting money, socializing (through chatting, gossiping, and dancing), providing help to those in need, collective saving, sharing meals, and maintaining interest-free payments on installments. These gatherings typically occur among familiar individuals, such as friends and relatives, and the decentralized structure relies on trust among members, with the group only expanding when trusted sources introduce new participants.

In contrast, many digital platforms in Turkey opt for anonymity in solidarity efforts. However, they have a growing role amidst rising societal and economic challenges (Karabacak & Sezgin, 2019). We will examine two Turkish platforms focused on community support and resource exchange. One prominent example of decentralized digital solidarity is the Needs Map, a platform that allows individuals to post their needs (material, spatial, or monetary) as pins on a digital map, enabling others to provide support by sending money or goods (Needsmap, n.d.). Another example is "Askida Fatura," a platform launched by the municipalities where people can help reduce the debt burden of those facing financial hardship by paying their monthly bills (Askidafatura, n.d.). While both of the platforms helped an enormous number of people in need of financial support, Askida (Askidafatura, n.d.) and Needs Map (Needsmap, n.d.) are built on anonymity, overlooking the fact that people often seek to connect and build relationships beyond the transactional act of paying bills. Heminer, Teran, and Garavito (2022) discuss decolonial feminist care as "solidarity, kinship, and not charity," emphasizing it as a critical principle. However, anonymity often disregards or prevents such

relationships from emerging. Additionally, digital platforms collect vast amounts of user data, which can be used for manipulation, surveillance, or to benefit capital structures (Zuboff, 2019). Since these platforms are not always transparent about processing this data, economic and demographic data can become a concern. Researchers must analyze such aspects. In contrast, we have not observed such issues in our findings on gold-day circles.

In addition to these platforms, social media is increasingly utilized as a tool for solidarity (Tufekci, 2014), with influential individuals and accounts often acting as intermediaries (Sinha et al., 2023). However, alongside posts that promote solidarity, there can also be instances of cyberbullying, harassment, and the dissemination of misinformation (Cinelli et al., 2021), especially when solidarity is established indirectly and immediately without established organizational capacity (Tufekci, 2014). Drawing on decolonial finance studies that examine decolonial approaches to financial systems (Pacquement, 2020; Decker, 2005), a decolonial feminist perspective allows us to explore the interplay between sociality and financial exchange within money commons while emphasizing the importance of thoughtfully extending this sociality to solidarity platforms which creates a more sustainable organizational effort.

An alternative solidarity application that builds on sociality is *Çember*, launched in 2020, leveraging social power to pool money among acquaintances, drawing inspiration from the tradition of gold-day (Çember App, 2022). However, the digital nature of the application omits some of the everyday aspects inherent in the original practice of the gold-days. While the application maintains the trust element by allowing people to create their pools, they overlook the importance of in-person repetitive social interaction, thus reducing the definition of trust to something thoroughly economic. Face-to-face meetings remain essential to gold-days, as they cultivate community and shared experience. Additionally, *Çember* can be critiqued for not fully capturing the essence of gold-days due to its centralized decision-making framework. This structure restricts fund exchanges to bank accounts, which sets a

maximum saving limit and regulates transactions in a manner that diminishes the autonomous spirit of the practice. The interface could incorporate various elements of a gold-day by suggesting meeting points, facilitating date negotiations, and allowing users to adjust the sequence of hosts according to their needs.

In contrast, as interviews indicated, decentralized decision-making—where participants collectively decide on exchange values and meeting locations—enables gold-days participants to adapt more flexibly to shifting economic conditions and daily needs. This system can be utilized for various purposes, as portrayed in this study, such as saving, managing financial hardships during periods of low income, or covering significant, urgent expenses. Although inspired by a cultural ritual, this critique parallels the example of Çember, which struggles to remain true to its original practice and instead becomes integrated into the mainstream system. From a design perspective, comparing the gold-day practice to its application to the existing systems enhances our understanding of the interplay of inherent values within such knowledge systems.

Implementing gold-days into new, novel solidarity-oriented systems may also bring challenges and limitations. While decolonial approaches to finance present promising alternatives, they are not without challenges (Pacquement, 2020). For instance, while the gold-days gatherings promote trust and solidarity among participants, their reliance on close-knit, community-based relationships could limit their inclusivity and scalability. Participation often depends on trust and personal connections, so individuals outside these established networks may be excluded. Additionally, while flexible, the informal nature of gold-days may hinder participants from accessing protections, such as legal recourse in cases of non-payment. Also, as these systems evolve, they could unintentionally mirror some hierarchical or exploitative practices they seek to challenge, particularly if participants' financial circumstances or power dynamics shift over time. Design is viewed as an ontological tool that has the potential to transform social and cultural realities, thereby

influencing human experience, subjectivity, environment, and lifestyle (Tlostanova, 2017; Escobar, 2020). Recognizing the drawbacks and analyzing inherent value systems enables us to critically engage with how these values are embedded—or overlooked—in design decisions and user experiences. Following Tunstall's (2013) approach to value-driven design, we can create a more deliberate and thoughtful design process, ensuring that cultural, ethical, and communal values are central to the design process rather than being overlooked.

Our work seeks to inspire further analysis and the incorporation of these traditional practices and their inherent values into digital systems within the framework of feminist commons. Our findings highlight the central role of sociality in the functioning of monetary commons, emphasizing that gold-days diverge from the profit-driven logic of the capitalist world system (Grosfoguel, 2009). Unlike capitalist frameworks, gold-days is rooted in collective care, reciprocity, and mutual support, which fosters a sense of community rather than competition. As Federici (2018) emphasizes, commons are not static entities but are shaped by their specific historical, cultural, and social contexts. In the context of Turkey, gold-days function as a solidarity mechanism that addresses immediate needs amid fluctuating economic conditions. Understanding key features like its decentralized structure and the fluidity of its goals—whether for saving, financial survival, or meeting urgent expenses—is essential for effectively analyzing and applying its principles in different contexts.

Ontological design can be realized by examining the inherent value systems embedded in practices such as gold-days. From a decolonial feminist perspective, acknowledging existing knowledge systems that have historically been marginalized can empower designers to uphold these values while designing for and with communities. Instead of imposing a singular way of existing on communities, this approach can guide us in identifying which aspects to honor while engaging with alternative struggles, such as integrating sociality into monetary solidarity, significantly when mediated through platforms. This approach reso-

nates with Escobar's (2018) work, which underscores the importance of understanding local practices and knowledge as essential components in developing sustainable alternatives. Additionally, Tunstall (2013) emphasizes the value of engaging with diverse epistemologies to inform design practices that effectively respond to community needs. Even when designing for digital contexts, exploring the interplay between these underlying values can allow designers to position their work more consciously and encourage them to seek alternatives while preserving autonomous and care-oriented aspects. We propose a nuanced understanding of how such practices can influence contemporary social and economic structures by emphasizing these connections. These insights can guide integrating underrepresented and contextual values into the design of digital platforms and systems, ensuring that gold-days inherent flexibility, autonomy, and community-driven support are preserved in broader applications. Our research demonstrates how grassroots, women-led community approaches can challenge prevailing structures and inspire the design of innovative solidarity systems.

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Capítulo 2.

La Culpa que Nos Une: Expresión de las Emociones Proscritas en Comunidades Online sobre Maternidades

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1. INTRODUCCIÓN

La maternidad es un periodo de gran cambio y muchas mujeres ya no cuentan con el apoyo de las redes personales físicas que existían antaño, así que lo buscan en las redes sociales virtuales en forma de consejos y confirmaciones de que lo están haciendo bien (Jarvis, 2017). En 2015, la Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU) añadió explícitamente la necesidad de mejorar la salud materna como uno de los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio (ODM)¹. De la misma manera, dada su prevalencia en la sociedad actual, las políticas sanitarias y sociales empiezan a interesarse por la salud mental. En este contexto, las redes sociales del mundo virtual tienen la capacidad de conectar a una comunidad de mujeres que de otra manera podrían estar aisladas. En internet se puede pedir consejo, se puede buscar información de primera mano y se ofrece apoyo, de forma muy similar a las redes de maternidad tradicionales. La diferencia es que no hay limitaciones geográficas y que existe la posibilidad del anonimato.

Este capítulo analiza la presencia de la *culpa materna* en los relatos online anónimos de madres. Se centra en la prevalencia de dicha emoción y en su relación con otras emociones que se expresan en las comunidades online sobre maternidad y que son consideradas pros-

1. <https://research.un.org/es/docs/dev/2000-2015>

critas, como la frustración, la ira, o la tristeza (Jaggar, 1989), por no ser aceptables en base a las consignas de la maternidad intensiva, definida por Sharon Hays (1996) como la dedicación exclusiva de las mujeres al cuidado de sus criaturas, establecida como eje de la identidad femenina, y que abarca prácticas relacionadas con la lactancia exclusiva y prolongada y el apego del bebé o la crianza respetuosa, además de implicar la idea naturalizada de sacrificio y renuncia (Arciniega, Gómez, Hansen, Meda, Páez de la Torre y Santos, 2020).

Ya en 1978, Elaine Heffner, en su libro *Mothering*, alertaba de que el deseo de perfección, la naturaleza del consumismo y la proliferación de recomendaciones de “expertos” estaban contribuyendo en las frustraciones de las mujeres en la maternidad. Aun así, las madres en la actualidad valoran positivamente la información que pueden encontrar en páginas y comunidades de internet, especialmente la información que está basada en experiencias personales (Xie et al., 2021). El auge de internet y las redes sociales ha generado un nuevo grupo de personas, los/las *influencers*, que determinan las percepciones y los ideales de parte de la sociedad. Entre ellas están las “mamás blogueras” o “mamás *influencers*”, que comparten su experiencia de maternidad en distintas plataformas de redes sociales. Esta posibilidad de expresión personal a grandes audiencias a través de las redes sociales ha favorecido y ampliado las narrativas en torno a la maternidad (Visa Barbosa y Crespo Cabillo, 2015), aunque esa multiplicidad de narrativas no signifique necesariamente que haya diversidad.

Como dice Kathryn Jarvis (2017), la transición a la maternidad es un periodo de gran cambio para muchas mujeres y ya no cuentan con las redes de apoyo que existían antaño, así que buscan en las redes sociales los consejos y confirmaciones de que lo están haciendo bien. Sus investigaciones se valen de la teoría del apoyo social y la teoría del capital social para comprender la relación entre la experiencia de la maternidad y el uso de las redes sociales. Lo que Jarvis quiere evaluar es si éstas pueden considerarse un medio de apoyo y comunidad que aporte más en positivo, que las presiones que las redes sociales pueden ejercer sobre la maternidad y la crianza. En efecto, según Jarvis, las redes sociales

pueden añadir presión a las madres primerizas, pero también pueden ser un espacio de apoyo y consejos, lo cual explica el potencial de las redes sociales para mejorar las experiencias de maternidad.

Emily Petersen (2015), en un estudio sobre los conocidos como *Mommy Blogs* o blogs de madres, habla de que las mujeres participan en una comunidad que les permite concebirse a sí mismas de múltiples formas y que posibilita la construcción de la identidad mediante el rechazo de las normas y el favorecimiento de la experiencia individual vivida. Según la investigadora, los blogs de madres crean un universo que se rebela contra las formas ideales de la maternidad, mediante la promoción de una versión multidimensional de las vidas de las mujeres. Este tipo de blogs pueden generar el nacimiento de una conciencia a nivel de comunidad a través de las similitudes que las participantes encuentran cuando participan del apoyo emocional. Una reflexión que se relaciona con lo que decía Jaggar (1989) sobre las emociones proscritas y su potencial de cultura subversiva.

En 2020, David Matley analizó los comentarios en los foros de *Mumsnet*, la página dedicada a la parentalidad más seguida del Reino Unido. En su estudio, concluye que las emociones de culpa y vergüenza son expresiones de arrepentimiento maternal. Y aunque elementos como el anonimato pueden ayudar a las mujeres a hacer frente a discursos dominantes sobre la maternidad, su análisis también demuestra que este tipo de páginas se ven afectadas igualmente por normas regulatorias, dado que las expresiones de arrepentimiento van acompañadas de vergüenza y culpa, lo cual indica la dificultad de las madres de expresar dichas emociones, incluso en espacios anónimos. El artículo de Matley concluye que la prevalencia cultural de la noción de maternidad intensiva margina las experiencias de arrepentimiento y que, para cuestionar las ideologías opresivas de la maternidad, la sociedad tiene que aceptar emociones como el arrepentimiento como una respuesta legítima para una nueva identidad maternal (Matley, 2020).

Aquí la hipótesis es que la culpa es una de las emociones más presentes en las experiencias y los relatos de las mujeres en su vivencia de la maternidad, y que las redes sociales son un lugar propicio para ex-

presarla, anonimato. Los objetivos concretos de esta investigación son: identificar la presencia y prevalencia de la culpa entre las emociones expresadas por las madres en espacios virtuales anónimos, y observar las co-ocurrencias de la culpa con otras emociones proscritas expresadas en estos espacios.

2. METODOLOGÍA

El diseño metodológico consta de cuatro fases. En primer lugar, se selecciona el corpus de estudio: la sección *Confesionario* de la página web *Lavidamadre.com*². Esta página web es una comunidad en la que las madres puedan sentirse seguras para compartir ideas, experiencias e inspiración, y se escogió precisamente por la presencia de dicha sección, que proporciona un anonimato total a las participantes.

En segundo lugar, se delimita el marco temporal: desde que se creó la página, en julio de 2020 hasta febrero de 2023, cuando realizamos el análisis, lo que abarca un total de 3 803 confesiones. Dada la naturaleza de las redes sociales, no podemos acceder al contexto sociodemográfico de la muestra. La única información con la que contamos es que se trata de madres de habla hispana, tanto del Estado Español como de países de Latinoamérica.

La tercera fase consistió en categorizar y codificar la información recogida. Dada la amplitud del corpus de estudio y las potenciales ventajas metodológicas, se optó por utilizar la función Beta de codificación con Inteligencia Artificial (IA) del software Atlas.ti (Versión 23.2.1 (4325)). Se extrajeron las 3 803 confesiones de manera que permitieran una codificación adecuada. Se tomaron todas las confesiones de la página web y se convirtieron a formato txt. mediante un proceso de *parsing* (verificar que no faltasen palabras o signos de puntuación claves propios del lenguaje de programación y que los elementos estuvieran en

2. <https://lavidamadre.com/confesionario/>

el lugar correcto para facilitar la codificación y el análisis posterior). La codificación se realizó con la función de “AI Coding” del software Atlas.ti. Esta función se vale del modelo GPT de OpenAI, en el que se realiza un análisis con inteligencia artificial que genera una interfaz en la que todos los códigos pueden revisarse y modificarse.

A continuación, se realiza una revisión manual en la que los códigos con el mismo significado y los que dependían unos de los otros se unificaron, se eliminaron los que no aportaban información relevante o específica sobre las emociones y se eliminaron todos los códigos con menos de 50 citas, para poder trabajar con las categorías más relevantes. Este trabajo permitió pasar de los 3.300 códigos creados por la IA a los 34 códigos más representativos.

Tabla 1. Códigos seleccionados para la investigación, en orden de importancia descendente

Frustración	Culpa
Inseguridad	Agotamiento
Miedo	Arrepentimiento
Tristeza	Soledad
Preocupación	Responsabilidad
Dolor	Amor
Celos	Baja autoestima
Descontento	Estres
Autoexigencia	Presion social
Comparación	Ansiedad
Necesidad de espacio	Sobrecarga
Angustia	Insatisfacción
Confusión	Desilusión
Resentimiento	Nostalgia
Ira	Depresión
Felicidad	Desgaste emocional
Humor	Incomodidad

Fuente: Elaborada por la autora

La sección de resultados está ilustrada con fragmentos relevantes de los comentarios publicados. No se identifica a las autoras debido a que son todos anónimos.

3. RESULTADOS

Basándose en la codificación manual de las categorías, se ha generado una nube de palabras en la que aparecen plasmadas las emociones que más se repiten en las confesiones de las usuarias (figura 1). Las más repetidas en la codificación son las que aparecen en un tamaño más grande. Como puede observarse en un primer vistazo, la frustración (14,9%), la culpa (13,3%), la inseguridad (10%) y el agotamiento (8,7%) son las emociones con mayor presencia y representan, entre todas, cerca de la mitad (46,9%) del total.

Figura 1. Categorías de análisis más significativas sobre maternidades



Fuente: Elaborado por la autora

Mediante un análisis exhaustivo de las confesiones de estas cuatro categorías principales, se han dividido los resultados por ejes temáticos basados en los códigos generados con Atlas.ti, que son representativos

de la culpa generada por sentir emociones que se consideran proscritas en la experiencia de la maternidad intensiva. Estos ejes son: la búsqueda de tribu, las relaciones de pareja, las presiones desde distintos ámbitos, las expectativas frente a la realidad y el (re)encontrarse a una misma.

3.1. Los Ejes Temáticos Sugeridos a Partir de la Culpa Generada por Sentir Emociones Proscritas Son los Siguietes:

3.1.1. Buscando una Tribu

En una sociedad cada vez más individualista, la maternidad se vive en soledad. A ello se le une la frustración por la falta de corresponsabilidad en las tareas del cuidado, y las inseguridades por no poder compartir dudas. En este escenario, emergen las redes sociales como nuevos espacios de apoyo y de red, como podemos observar en las confesiones analizadas. Estos son los tres ejes que analizamos a continuación dentro de la búsqueda de tribu: la falta de corresponsabilidad, el sentimiento de soledad y la irrupción de la tribu online.

3.1.1.1. Falta de Corresponsabilidad

La corresponsabilidad en el cuidado de las crianzas es un tema que lleva años en la agenda política y social. Sin embargo, las confesiones en las que se expresa frustración por parte de las usuarias están en su mayoría relacionadas con la falta de apoyo de la pareja. Observamos, sobre todo, que la frustración se deriva de la falta de comprensión por parte de la pareja del esfuerzo realizado. La mujer sigue siendo la cuidadora principal, en los primeros meses quedándose sola con el bebé y después, en muchos casos, con reducción de jornada, mientras que la pareja mantiene su estructura laboral. Así, la emoción negativa se genera tanto por la falta de corresponsabilidad como por la ausencia de reconocimiento

del trabajo que implica la crianza, como puede verse en estos ejemplos de confesiones:

“Mi pareja no entiende porque estoy tan cansada. Cuando llego de trabajar me dedico a mi bebé de 16 meses y a llevar toda la casa, médicos, menús, la compra... pero él siempre dice estar más cansado que yo porque yo trabajo medio día y él no”.

“Me agobia criar sola! Amo a mi hijo, pero en ocasiones quisiera mandarlo de regalo al padre (que se la pasa bien gracias) a ver cómo le sienta hacer lo que nunca hizo, CRIAR! Estoy agotada física, mental y emocionalmente de ser quien contiene todo!”

3.1.1.2. Soledad

La maternidad trae consigo cambios bruscos en la cotidianidad, y puede generar cierta desconexión con la vida previa a ese momento, también en las relaciones personales. Esta sensación de soledad parece debida en gran parte a experimentar una desconexión con la vida anterior a la maternidad. Se percibe una idea de que las únicas que van a comprender realmente esa nueva situación y van a querer compartir esa cotidianidad son otras mujeres que ya han pasado, o están pasando, por la misma experiencia. El proverbio africano que dice que hace falta una tribu para criar a una infancia. En 2013, el ensayo *¿Dónde está mi tribu?*, de Carolina del Olmo (2013), tuvo gran repercusión y se considera una lectura de referencia sobre maternidad y crianza. Ha pasado una década desde su publicación y el aislamiento parece haber continuado creciendo. En las confesiones podemos observar los sentimientos de soledad por no poder compartir la experiencia.

“Me siento sola, a la única que le ha cambiado la vida es a mí. Mi marido sigue con su trabajo y sus aficiones, como si nada. Eso me enfada mucho”.

“Me siento sola muchísimos días, como si no tuviera más fuerzas para seguir, tengo a mis padres lejos que son los únicos que quiero que me ayuden. El resto no quiero ni que toquen a mi hijo”

3.1.1.3. La Búsqueda de la Tribu Online

Esta sensación de soledad y de falta de apoyos, unida a la idiosincrasia de la sociedad digital, provocan que muchas madres busquen esa tribu en internet, en lo que se viene denominando la tribu online (Cova y Dessart, 2022). Las madres buscan lugares seguros en los que poder compartir sus experiencias y sentir que no son las únicas que las viven. Como podemos ver en las confesiones, ese espacio genera una conexión que contribuye a relativizar de alguna manera las emociones negativas.

“Confieso que leer tantas confesiones me ha ayudado a entender que no estaba sola durante todo este año y que todas nos sentimos así en algún momento. Gracias por expresar vuestros sentimientos para que las demás encontremos apoyo en vuestras palabras”.

“Leo las confesiones para sentirme identificada y dejar de sentirme culpable y juzgarme por todo. #nosoylaunicayesomereconforta #graciasmamisdelmundo ❤️”

3.1.2. Relaciones de Pareja

Si las relaciones de pareja ya son complejas de por sí, la llegada de la maternidad puede alterarlas aún más, tanto de forma temporal como permanente. La demanda de la crianza y la conexión con ese nuevo miembro de la familia puede generar sentimientos de rechazo de las mujeres tanto al sexo como a la pareja como compañera de vida.

3.1.2.1. "CERO Ganas de Sexo"

Uno de los motivos que genera mayor frustración y culpa es la desganancia para las relaciones sexuales. Las confesiones hablan de madres que están en un momento de sus vidas en el que el sexo no es una parte importante, y sin embargo en muchos casos tratan de darle un lugar en sus vidas por las demandas de sus parejas.

"Hace casi 5 meses que di a luz y tengo CERO ganas de sexo. Yo lo intento. Lo juro. Pero nada... no quiero ni con un palo 🍷"

"Tengo O ganas de sexo. Cuando lo hago es porque me da cosa tener a mi marido tan necesitado".

3.1.2.2. Se Terminó el Amor

Igualmente, el convertirse en madre puede generar un desenamoraamiento de la pareja, tanto puntual como a largo plazo. En las confesiones podemos percibir tanto tristeza como frustración, y en ocasiones ansiedad por querer mantener la familia a pesar de esa falta de amor de pareja.

"Ya no estoy enamorada de mi marido, pero estamos juntos por nuestra hija".

"Desde que he sido madre he dejado de amar a mi pareja, solo lo veo como el padre de mi hija y no mi compañero de vida. Ya no nos miramos como pareja, solo como padres".

3.1.2.3. Descubrir a una Nueva Persona en la Paternidad

Las confesiones también expresan un cambio en la forma de ver al otro progenitor, en una especie de despertar en el que las nuevas responsabilidades descubren a una persona que no conocían antes o que no imaginaban que se comportaría así en la paternidad, con la consi-

guiente decepción. El darse cuenta genera también el planteamiento de la separación o el divorcio, pero existe el miedo por la custodia compartida y la potencial incapacidad de ese otro progenitor para la educación y la crianza.

“Había idealizado tanto a mi marido siendo padre... Me he llevado tal decepción que a veces me entran ganas de separarme”.

“Mi marido no es el padre que pensaba que sería. Les grita, ellos no se sienten bien, y no se corresponsabiliza. Me divorciaría, pero no lo hago por no tener que renunciar a los niños ni un solo día. Me siento muy triste”.

3.1.3. Presiones Desde Distintos Ámbitos

La experiencia de la maternidad es intensiva, pero eso no significa que la vida se detenga. Las madres sienten presiones que les generan angustia, culpa o tristeza. Dicha presión viene de diversos ámbitos; en este caso se han escogido tres que son muy prevalentes en las confesiones analizadas y representativos: el laboral, el corporal y el social.

3.1.3.1. *La Imposibilidad de Conciliar*

Tratar de compaginar la maternidad con la vida laboral genera inseguridades y sobre todo culpa tanto por no poder ser todo lo productivas que se quisiera como por ese tiempo “robado” a las criaturas y sus potenciales consecuencias a largo plazo.

“Me siento muy culpable por tener que trabajar tantas horas y no poder llevar a mi hijo a todos los sitios que me gustaría como el parque, cumpleaños, actividades... Por otro lado, siento que, si no lo hago yo, no lo hace nadie y es aún más frustrante”.

“A veces siento que es mi culpa que mi hijo todavía no hable, por haberlo dejado solo tanto tiempo para ir a trabajar”.

3.1.3.2. *Un Cuerpo que No Se Reconoce*

Igualmente, el cuerpo sufre cambios significativos durante el embarazo y el posparto, y estos pueden generar inseguridad en las mujeres. A ello se le suman las dificultades para conciliar la crianza con el tiempo para hacer ejercicio o cuidar la forma física, lo cual genera frustración.

“No me gusta el cuerpo que tengo después de mi embarazo. Pero tampoco hago nada por mejorarlo porque termino exhausta de estar con mi bebé todo el día”.

“Tres años tras el parto de mis repes y sigo sin aceptar mi cuerpo. La piel de mi barriga por mucho que la he cuidado sigue flácida y se me caen las lágrimas frente al espejo al verme”.

3.1.3.3. *Redes Sociales*

Las redes sociales, como se ha visto en el punto 3.1.3., pueden ser un apoyo importante para las madres, pero a su vez tienen el potencial de generar inseguridades en ellas, si atienden a las cantidades de información que se les presentan y que a menudo son contradictorias unas con las otras, o consumen contenido de cuentas de maternidad que muestran una imagen idealizada de la experiencia (Djafarova, 2017).

“Debo de hacerlo muy mal, pero veo en Instagram a las instagramers que acababan de ser mamás todo el día fuera de sus casas haciendo mil planes y yo me paso el día entero en casa con mi hija... no debo saber organizarme”.

“He dejado varias veces Instagram porque no soporto a las super mamis perfectas con sus hijos perfectos y su vida perfecta. Yo tengo 3 niños muy pequeños y mi vida es un infierno”

3.1.4. *Expectativas Frente a Realidad*

Las madres primerizas se enfrentan a una experiencia nueva, cada vez con más información proveniente de diferentes ámbitos: el fami-

liar, el médico, el social, el académico... Toda esa información crea unas expectativas que no siempre se cumplen, generando sentimientos negativos de frustración, culpa, tristeza y otros en esas mujeres. Se han seleccionado cuatro elementos que sirven de ejemplo de ese choque entre expectativas y realidad: el parto, la conexión madre-bebé, el postparto y la lactancia.

3.1.4.1. Problemas en el Parto

Cada vez hay más información sobre partos respetados, con herramientas de gran utilidad como el plan de parto, por ejemplo. En redes pueden verse vídeos de partos en casa, sin epidural, en un intento por desmedicalizar este proceso fisiológico. Estas iniciativas pueden ser muy empoderadoras, pero a su vez generan emociones como la culpa, la tristeza o la ira cuando las cosas no van como se esperaba en base a toda esa información. También hay alusiones a la violencia obstétrica, un aspecto que consideramos importante destacar.

“He tenido un aborto hace dos meses estaba de 12 semanas y siento que soy la culpable. No dejo de pensar en el tema y no quiero sentir que me olvido de mi hija de 3 años”.

“No pude hacer piel con piel con mi bebé xq se lo llevaron nada más nacer xq respiraba mal. Me lo echo en cara todos los días. Sé que no es mi culpa, pero siento que lo he fallado. Necesito que me perdone...”.

3.1.4.2. Conexión Maternofilial

Otra de las ideas que promulga la maternidad intensiva es la conexión maternofilial, que surge de forma natural e inmediata. Sin embargo, las confesiones nos ofrecen otras perspectivas de esta realidad. Expresan sentimientos de falta de conexión que pueden ser difíciles de verbalizar. La culpa por no sentir esa conexión es una constante en las confesiones al respecto.

“Tras el parto prematuro mi bebé ha tenido que quedar ingresada. Al sexto día de incubadora la trajeron a planta en una cuna. No me sale instinto de cojerla, de limpiarla... me da miedo hacerlo mal y me siento muy mala madre”.

“Todas te dicen que tienes que sentir ese enamoramiento instantáneo por tu bebé según nace, y yo que solo tengo agotamiento me siento una madre horrible”.

3.1.4.3. *Posparto*

El posparto ha sido una parte generalmente olvidada en la atención a las nuevas madres. Sin embargo, cada vez más se percibe (y se reclama) la necesidad de cuidados en una fase que puede resultar muy difícil por diversos motivos: el cambio de vida, el cansancio, las alteraciones hormonales, etc. La falta de apoyo en esta fase puede generar depresión posparto, una realidad que a menudo genera culpa en las madres que la viven.

“Creo que sigo con depresión posparto y no sé qué hacer después de 10 meses, nadie me entiende, sigo pensando que no tendría que haber tenido a mi hijo, pero por otro lado ya no podría vivir sin él”.

“Tengo depresión posparto. Quedé embarazada por tercera vez. Pero esta vez yo no lo programe. Me siento mal por no sentir felicidad”.

3.1.4.4. *Lactancia*

Otro de los choques con la realidad frente a la idealización suele venir de los problemas que pueden generarse con la lactancia. Las dificultades para amamantar generan culpa en las madres, a las que se les insiste, tanto desde el ámbito médico como desde la propia sociedad, en la importancia de la lactancia para la salud de los bebés. Así, ven su experiencia como un fracaso personal, con las emociones negativas

que ello conlleva, como la culpa y la vergüenza (Hvatum, 2017; Schilling, 2013).

“Siempre pensé que cuando tuviera hijos les alimentaría con lactancia materna. Mi bebé no engorda y tengo que darle biberón y algo en mi interior no para de repetirme que no soy buena madre... Estoy muy frustrada con la lactancia”.

“Yo no pude dar el pecho, Me dolía horrores! Voy al psicólogo, la niña tiene hoy, 19 meses y me sigo maltratando por mi fracaso”.

3.1.5. (Re)Encontrarse a una Misma

La experiencia de maternidad es tan poderosa que puede llegar a modificar la identidad de una misma. Así, a menudo las nuevas madres no se reconocen y sienten la necesidad de reencontrar a aquella persona que fueron, principalmente a través del trabajo o mediante ese espacio propio que sienten que han perdido.

3.1.5.1. Trabajo como Liberación

Igual que la imposibilidad de conciliación entre la vida laboral y la crianza es un hecho que provoca emociones como la frustración, el agotamiento o la culpa, hay confesiones que hablan de la capacidad liberadora del trabajo fuera de casa, y de su efecto en poder volver a una identidad que ya no es solo la de madre, y que puede reconectarlas con su identidad previa.

“He empezado a disfrutar de la maternidad cuando he dejado el pecho y he empezado a trabajar. Sentirme realizada y libre me permite ser una mejor madre”.

“He empezado a trabajar después de 7 meses en casa con mi bebé... y me hace inmensamente feliz volver a mi vida de antes!”

sión de la culpa materna, especialmente cuando viene acompañada del anonimato. Es interesante comprobar las diferencias que pueden observarse en la expresión de dicha culpa dependiendo del nivel de anonimato en redes (Djafarova, 2017). A diferencia de los relatos de mujeres analizados en otros estudios sobre redes sociales en los que existe un método de identificación personal, las confesiones de *Lavidamadre* son completamente anónimas. Esta diferencia hace que los relatos de las mujeres que participan en esta sección y que son el objeto del estudio expresen sentimientos y emociones considerados tabú en la sociedad occidental (Matley, 2020). Estos resultados de la investigación refuerzan la hipótesis de que el anonimato permite hablar con mayor libertad de emociones consideradas proscritas en la experiencia de la maternidad, y puede unir a las usuarias que ven que aquello que no se atreven a compartir en otros espacios no considerados seguros y libres de juicio, no les ocurre solo a ellas. Igualmente, al contrario de lo observado en otros estudios (Matley, 2020; Barbero-Mauri, 2023), la sección *Confesiones* no tiene administradores que bloqueen o censuren el contenido, lo cual permite un nivel aún mayor de libertad a la hora de expresar las emociones sin filtros. Consideramos una oportunidad el seguir investigando este aspecto y centrar una parte de los próximos trabajos en las potenciales diferencias entre confesiones anónimas y no-anónimas mediadas en redes.

Como se ve en el apartado de resultados, la culpa aparece como la segunda categoría más prominente en las confesiones sobre la maternidad expresadas de forma anónima, junto a la frustración. Y se relaciona con otras emociones negativas, como el arrepentimiento. Pero su particularidad es que funciona independientemente o como resultado del resto de las emociones no deseables bajo los estándares de la maternidad intensiva. El volumen del corpus utilizado para la investigación y su especificidad nos brinda la oportunidad de continuar el análisis de los datos buscando profundizar en los elementos que generan dicha culpa e identificar, por ejemplo, cuáles se refieren a acciones concretas y cuáles a sensaciones de no llegar a alcanzar el ideal de la buena madre, que

como dice Sutherland (2010), pueden ser expresados como culpa pero referirse, en realidad, a la vergüenza.

Por último, destaca la idea de la creciente imposibilidad de cumplir con las demandas de la maternidad intensiva, la necesidad de un espacio propio como mujer y la culpa que ello genera, como se ha visto tanto en la literatura como en el propio estudio. Como dice Badinter: “Culpable, forzosamente culpable. El espectro de la mala madre se le impone con más crueldad cuanto más haya interiorizado el ideal de la buena madre. Ante estas pruebas conflictivas, la mujer y la madre se sienten igualmente perdedoras”. (Badinter, 2017: 159). Es el ideal de la maternidad del que hablaba Hays (1996), en el que nunca llegas a hacer nada bien. Creemos que seguir estudiando la presencia de estas emociones proscritas en redes sociales puede contribuir a la visibilización de una situación en la que las madres viven en soledad, como se ha podido observar en esta investigación, y que en realidad es un problema estructural. La posibilidad de compartir estas experiencias en un espacio considerado seguro por las usuarias puede funcionar como una herramienta para poner de relieve dicha estructuralidad y contribuir a subvertirla.

5. REFERENCIAS

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Capítulo 3.

Micro and Nano Influencers: An Emerging Phenomenon that Puts (some) Power in the Hands of Women

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital landscape, influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most powerful strategies in the world of communication and advertising. As social media platforms continue to shape consumer behavior, brands are increasingly turning to small influencers to connect with their target audiences in more authentic and engaging ways. Many of these micro and nano influencers—who have 1,000 to 10,000 and 10,000 to 50,000 followers, respectively—are women. For example, in the US, female influencers generally have a slight majority in most influencer categories, except for mega-influencers (Influency, 2023). Despite the imbalance—after all, mega-influencers are primarily men—this can also be interpreted as a sort of power. At its core, an influencer is someone who can affect the purchasing decisions of others due to their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. As Almeida (2017: 13) puts it:

An influencer is a professional who, due to their knowledge and expertise in a sector, becomes a reliable prescriber of a product or service for the general

public. Their opinions are highly valued due to the reliability and trust granted to them by their followers.

This definition highlights the key elements that make influencers valuable to brands: that is, expertise, credibility, and a loyal following. However, this does not mean that influencers are *powerful*.

Influencer power can only be interpreted in neoliberal economic terms, as they embody the neoliberal ideal of the individual as an entrepreneur of the self. They build personal brands, monetize their social capital, and operate as independent contractors in the gig economy (Carlson, 2023). Besides, an influencer's worth is determined by market forces –their ability to attract followers, engagement, and brand deals reflects their value in a free market system (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Influencers transform their social connections and personal authenticity into marketable assets, aligning with the neoliberal logic of extending market principles to all spheres of life (Andonopoulos, 2021). They enable highly targeted marketing, supporting the neoliberal emphasis on consumer sovereignty and market segmentation (Pemberton, 2023). Influencers personify the archetype of flexible, self-motivated workers constantly optimizing their performance and adapting to market demands (Baber et al., 2023). An influencer's success or failure is framed because of individual effort and savvy rather than structural factors, aligning with neoliberal individualism (Mastrangelo, 2021). Influencers' content often blurs the line between personal life and work, reflecting the neoliberal erosion of distinctions between professional and private spheres. That is, influencers are both products and propagators of neoliberal economic principles, embodying ideals of entrepreneurship, market-driven value, and individualism in the digital economy.

The predominance of women as micro and nano influencers cannot be interpreted as a step towards equality, either. Mastrangelo (2021), for example, critiques the rise of “girlboss feminism,” which equates empowerment with individual financial success and market competition. She explores how this form of so-called *feminism*, spread through wellness culture, self-help, and platformized multi-level marketing, upholds

neoliberal and racial capitalist structures while marginalizing collective feminist struggles (Mastrangelo, 2021). Mastrangelo argues for a more intersectional, collective approach that challenges these oppressive systems. Besides, self-sexualization appears to be a phenomenon present across all levels of female influencers, from nano to macro. Research indicates that self-sexualization is a common strategy used by social media personalities to gain attention and increase engagement (García Medrano et al., 2023). While brands are increasingly recognizing the importance of working with a diverse range of influencers to represent different perspectives and reach broader audiences, this is not yet common. A look at the *Forbes* list of the 65 best female Spanish content creators of 2024, 27 of whom are influencers (Forbes Women, 2024), offers the idea that most are in their 20s and 30s, thin, white, and beautiful. This narrow representation reinforces the notion that a woman's worth is primarily tied to her physical appearance and youth, ignoring the diverse talents, experiences, and perspectives that women of all ages, body types, skin shades, and backgrounds can offer. Such limited portrayal can contribute to unrealistic beauty standards, potentially leading to body image issues and self-esteem problems among women (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Besides, the type of content that gains traction on platforms can influence self-sexualization behaviors, as sexualized photos tend to gather more *likes* on platforms like Instagram. Micro and nano influencers generally have higher engagement rates and are perceived as more authentic by their followers; this authenticity may lead to less pressure to self-sexualize compared to macro influencers. Macro influencers, who often operate in fashion, lifestyle, and entertainment niches, may face more pressure to conform to idealized body images and sexualized content expectations (García Medrano et al., 2023). However, micro and nano influencers are not immune to strategic content creation, including self-sexualization. Younger influencers, particularly those from Gen Z, may exhibit more tolerant attitudes towards self-sexualization; a study shows that 52% of Gen Z trust the influencers they follow, which could impact how content is created and perceived (Kolsquare, n.d.).

Meanwhile, there is evidence suggesting that micro and nano influencers may be more prone to disseminating conspiracy theories and disinformation compared to more prominent influencers. Micro and nano influencers are increasingly being used to spread political messages and disinformation, often without disclosing who paid for it (ProMarket, 2021). Wellness and New Age influencers, many of whom fall into the micro and nano categories, have been identified as critical conduits for “conspirituality” – a blend of conspiracy theories and spiritual beliefs and conspiracies. The perceived authenticity and trustworthiness of micro and nano influencers make them attractive to political campaigns and special interest groups looking to sway public opinion (Simmons, 2023). However, it is essential to note that not all micro and nano influencers engage in spreading conspiracy theories.

Influencers may appear to wield authority on social media platforms. Still, it can be argued that the true power lies with the platform owners themselves, not the content creators using those platforms. Platform owners like Meta (Facebook/Instagram), ByteDance (TikTok), and Google (YouTube) have ultimate control over the algorithms that determine content visibility, prioritization, and reach. They can boost or suppress content at will, effectively controlling an influencer’s ability to reach their audience. The platforms collect vast amounts of user data, including engagement metrics, demographic information, and behavioral patterns. These data are valuable assets that they can monetize through targeted advertising, while influencers have limited access to these insights (Van Dijck et al., 2018). Platform owners provide and control the entire infrastructure that enables influencers to create and distribute content. This includes features, tools, and analytics that influencers rely on to manage their presence. They set and enforce the rules of engagement on their platforms and can change terms of service, content guidelines, and monetization policies at any time, potentially impacting an influencer’s livelihood or content strategy. Influencers are heavily dependent on these platforms for their audience and income,

too; if a platform decides to ban or restrict an influencer, they can lose access to their followers and revenue streams almost instantly (Abidin, 2018). While influencers can earn money through brand deals and platform monetization features, the platform owners typically take a significant cut of any on-platform earnings. Market dominance: Major social media platforms have achieved such scale and network effects that it is challenging for influencers to migrate their audience to alternative platforms. This power dynamic highlights that the platform owners themselves hold the ultimate power in shaping the digital landscape where influencers operate.

In contrast, in this chapter, we analyze precisely nano and micro influencers' strategies and their impact. Studying influencer marketing is relevant for observing power dynamics in the current platform-dominated landscape. This analysis provides insights into the shifting relationships between brands, creators, and platforms. Influencer marketing has undergone a significant transformation over the past decade. What began as celebrity endorsements has evolved into a complex ecosystem of content creators, ranging from mega-celebrities to niche experts with small but dedicated followings. Large social media platforms and macro-influencers have dominated the traditional power structure in influencer marketing. However, the rise of nano and micro influencers is challenging this dynamic, as nano and micro influencers are carving out their niches, often with more engaged and loyal followings.

The objective here is to analyze the value that this type of female influencer brings to brands. To achieve this, a content analysis of 140 publications has been carried out during March, April, and May 2024, on the Instagram and TikTok profiles of seven influencers, including two nano, three micro, and two macro influencers ($N = 7$). In addition, two in-depth interviews have been carried out with a nano influencer and a micro influencer, and a quantitative survey of 166 people, using the Google Form platform, to find out people's perceptions of influencers and the advertising they carry out.

Next, we offer a more nuanced definition of micro and nano influencers. Then, we offer the methodology in detail, followed by the results and the conclusions.

2. THE RISE OF MICRO AND NANO INFLUENCERS

While macro influencers with hundreds of thousands or millions of followers were once the primary focus of marketing campaigns, recent trends have shifted attention toward micro and nano influencers. These smaller-scale content creators, typically with followings between 1,000 and 50,000, have become increasingly attractive to brands for several reasons. First, micro and nano influencers often have a more genuine connection with their audience, leading to higher engagement rates, as they often have a more genuine connection with their audience, leading to higher engagement rates (George, 2023). Studies show that nano and micro influencers consistently outperform mega influencers in terms of engagement. Nano influencers achieve an average engagement rate of 9.3%, while micro-influencers reach 4.9%, both significantly higher than the 1.63% typically seen with mega-influencers (Kozlov, 2024). This increased engagement is attributed to the authenticity and relatability of smaller influencers, who are often viewed as trusted experts within their niche communities.

Second, micro and nano influencers tend to specialize in specific topics or industries, allowing for more targeted marketing efforts. Nano influencers typically focus on niche topics, often positioning themselves as opinion leaders in particular fields (influeData, 2022). This specialization enables brands to reach highly interested and engaged target audiences that are precisely curious about their products or services. For example, a nano influencer's account might be dedicated entirely to handmade paper-mâché sculptures, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, or Art Deco architecture, providing an opportunity for brands with related products to connect with a precisely targeted audience. Additionally, nano influencers are considered more niche-focused compared to their larger counterparts, which makes it easier for brands to reach different segments

and better position their products or services (SA, 2024). For instance, a local restaurant could collaborate with an Instagram food vlogger who specializes in exploring exotic cuisines, allowing the brand to connect directly with an audience of food enthusiasts.

And third, collaborating with multiple smaller influencers can be more budget-friendly than partnering with a single macro-influencer. Micro influencers typically offer more budget-friendly collaboration opportunities compared to macro influencers, who command hefty fees (Smith, 2024). Nano influencers are often willing to collaborate in exchange for complimentary products or services rather than monetary compensation, which can be particularly beneficial for small businesses or those with limited budgets (Oakley, 2024).

To better understand the influencer landscape, it's crucial to categorize influencers based on their follower count. Table 1 offers their full scale.

Table 1: Influencers' ranges of followers

Influencer Type	Follower Range
Nano Influencers	1,000–10,000
Micro Influencers	10,000–50,000
Macro Influencers	500,000–1 million
Mega Influencers	1 million+

Source: Websays (2019).

Each category offers unique advantages and challenges for brands looking to leverage influencer partnerships.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to analyze the value that female influencers bring to brands across different tiers of influence. The research design incorporates content analysis, in-depth in-

terviews, and a quantitative survey to provide a comprehensive understanding of influencer marketing dynamics.

A systematic content analysis was conducted on 140 publications from the Instagram and TikTok profiles of seven female influencers during March, April, and May 2024, based on Rodríguez Herrero and colleagues (2022) and Websays (2019). The influencers are Eider García, Rita Comin, Olaia Madinabeitia, Joane Zugasti, Paula Herrero, Dulceida, and Sara Baceiredo, all self-identified as women. They all disseminate content via two platforms: Instagram and TikTok. The sample included two nano influencers, three micro influencers, and two macro influencers ($N = 7$), chosen based on opportunity and diversity, allowing for comparison across different levels of influence. This method aligns with previous studies on social media content analysis, such as the work of Martínez Allué and Martín-Cárdaba (2024), who examined child influencers on YouTube and TikTok. The content analysis focused on identifying key themes, engagement metrics, and brand collaboration strategies employed by influencers across platforms.

Two in-depth interviews were conducted with a nano influencer and a micro influencer to gain deeper insights into influencer perspectives and strategies. Their selection was based, again, on opportunity, their knowledge and experience in the field, level of engagement with the audience, content strategies, personal objectives, authenticity, collaboration with brands, and ability to adapt to platform changes. These aspects allowed a comparison between their different approaches and how their level of influence affects perspectives and strategies for connecting with your followers. The qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of influencer motivations, challenges, and perceptions of brand collaborations. The interview method draws inspiration from studies like Distenfeld (2022), which explored conversations around sustainable and fast fashion on TikTok. The questionnaire included questions such as “What strategies do you use to interact with your followers?” and “How do you tailor your content to meet the needs and interests of your audience?”

A survey was administered to 166 participants using the Google Form platform to assess public perception of influencers and their advertising practices. This quantitative component provides valuable data on consumer attitudes and behaviors related to influencer marketing. The survey design was informed by previous research on social media engagement, such as the study by Dotson (2021) on female TikTok influencers and self-presentation.

The content analysis data was coded and analyzed for recurring themes, engagement patterns, and brand collaboration strategies. Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis to identify critical insights from influencer perspectives. Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations to uncover trends in consumer perceptions and behaviors. This multi-faceted methodology allows for triangulation of data from different sources, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

By combining content analysis, qualitative interviews, and quantitative survey data, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the value female influencers bring to brands across different tiers of influence on Instagram and TikTok.

4. RESULTS: THE POWER OF NANO AND MICRO INFLUENCERS

This section includes the results of the content analysis, the interviews, and the survey.

4.1. Content Analysis

The content analysis confirms the idea that one of the most significant advantages of working with nano and micro influencers is the authenticity they bring to brand collaborations. These influencers not only share their intimacy with followers but also have a closer relationship

with them, fostering a sense of trust and credibility that more prominent influencers may struggle to maintain. Here, we analyze the content of the sample accounts. Tables 2 and 3 offer a summary of their posting habits, reach, and interactions with their followers.

Table 2: Selected nano influencers

NANO INFLUENCERS	Eider Garcia (@Eidergarcia_)	Rita Comin (@Ritacominmunne)
Age	24	22
Engagement	11.40% (Instagram)	12.56% (Instagram)
Followers	7,605 (Instagram) / 21.6 mil (TikTok)	5,317 (Instagram) / 39.4 mil (TikTok)
Type of content	Fashion, lifestyle	Lifestyle
Publication frequency	1-2 times/day	1 time/day.
Interaction	Eider García maintains good interaction with her followers since she has comments from her audience interacting with her content positively. She shows herself naturally by creating organic content, showing her daily looks and her day-to-day life. García's "good" interaction has been evaluated based on the quantity and positive tone of the comments on his posts, reflecting the interest and commitment of his audience. In addition, specific metrics have been compared, such as frequency of comments, likes, or responses to stories, to identify if there are differences in the level of interaction and analyze whether this engagement is consistent in different types of publications.	Comin maintains a good interaction with her followers, as she has comments from her audience interacting with her content. She holds a good response on TikTok, where she shows her day-to-day life. Thanks to the naturalness she expresses, she gets many comments, likes, and views on her videos. This traffic also helps her grow on TikTok, as in many of her videos, she makes a call to action, encouraging her followers to visit her Instagram profile.
N. of video views	Average: 10,000 (Instagram) / 3,000 (TikTok)	Media de 10 mil en Instagram / 2,000 (TikTok)
Growth rate	9.46% (Instagram) / 2.3% (TikTok)	5.07% (Instagram) / 6.85% (TikTok)

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on observations.

Table 3: Selected micro influencers

MICRO IN-FLUENCERS	Olaia Madinabeitia (@Olaia_H)	Joane Zugasti (@Joanezugasti)	Paula Herrero (@Paulaherreronav)
Age	26	24	22
Engagement	2.28% (Instagram)	4.98% (Instagram)	6.16% (Instagram)
Followers	26,000 (Instagram) / 28,900 (TikTok)	49,900 (Instagram) / 281,700 (TikTok)	17,400 (Instagram) / 2,522 (TikTok)
Type of content	Fashion, lifestyle	Fashion, lifestyle	Fashion, lifestyle
Publication frequency	Every day except Thursdays and Saturdays	Every two days on Instagram except Saturdays and on TikTok every day.	2-3 times per week on Instagram y TikTok.
Interaction	Madinabeitia maintains a good interaction with her followers, obtaining responses to the call to action she makes in her posts. In addition, she has a channel on Instagram where she maintains daily contact with her 670 followers.	Zugasti's interaction is reflected in the <i>likes</i> and direct messages. She is focused on growing her female audience and creating content that is more oriented to that sector. On the other hand, she also has a dissemination channel with almost 1000 members.	Herrero's profile shows a good response from her followers, even though it is a small account. Although she does not have a close community on TikTok, or Instagram, apart from her followers, she has outstanding metrics in terms of likes, views on <i>reels</i> , and comments.
N. of video views	Average: 25,000 (Instagram) / 8,000 (TikTok)	Average: 46,000 (Instagram) / 10,000 (TikTok)	Average: 20,000 (Instagram) / 2,000 (TikTok)
Growth rate	1.69% (Instagram) / 11.64% (TikTok)	1.98% (Instagram) / 0.07% (TikTok)	0.86% (Instagram) / 0.63% (TikTok)

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on a thorough observation of the contents.

In the behavior and interaction of these influencers, the following key points are highlighted. First, as seen in the literature, nano and micro influencers have higher response and interaction rates than macro influencers. This is because they have smaller communities and can more easily interact with their followers. Studies have shown that nano and micro influencers tend to have higher engagement rates compared to the

average 1.63% their macro counterparts obtain (Kozlov, 2024), and the analysis of the cases corroborates this. The results also show there is a difference between nano and micro influencers. The former demonstrates engagement rates from 11.40% to 12.56% –higher than the average 9.3% (Kozlov, 2024), while the latter offers an average rate of 4.47% —close to Kozlov’s estimations of 4.9% for this group (2024). This increased interaction can lead to more meaningful brand exposure and potentially higher conversion rates. Smaller influencers generally have more capacity to interact directly with their followers through comments, direct messages, and live streams. This level of engagement fosters a stronger sense of community and can lead to more impactful brand recommendations. Macro influencers, due to their more significant followings, may struggle to maintain the same level of personal interaction. However, they can still leverage their broad reach to create substantial brand awareness.

Nano and micro influencers typically focus on specific niches, allowing brands to target highly engaged audiences with precision. This specialization enables more effective and relevant marketing campaigns. In the analyzed sample, these issues are primarily fashion and lifestyle.

Figure 1: Comments on the post of micro-influencer Olaia Madinabeitia

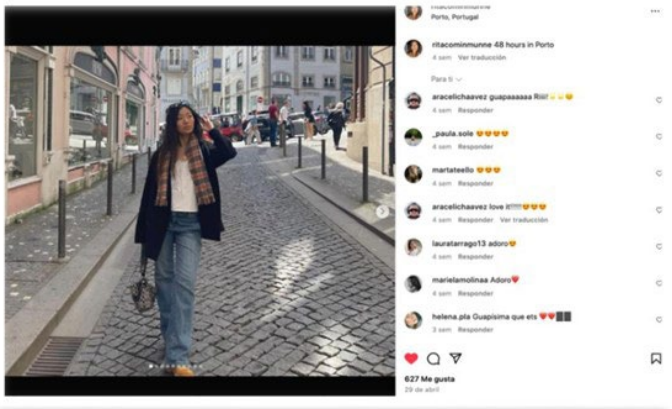


Source: Official Instagram of Olaia Madinabeitia (2024)

Comments and likes are essential measures to analyze interaction with the community. All the profiles studied show a positive response in terms of comments and likes. This shows the importance of close interaction with the audience and how the size of the community can influence engagement, as well as pointing out the differences in the response of followers to organic and promoted content.

Nano and micro influencers often produce content that feels more authentic and relatable to their audience than traditional marketing. Their posts may have a more *homemade* quality, which can resonate strongly with followers who appreciate genuine, unpolished content. In contrast, macro influencers typically have more polished and professionally produced content. While this can be visually appealing, it may sometimes feel less authentic or relatable to the average consumer. Smaller influencers often excel at weaving brand messages into their content in a way that feels natural and authentic. This storytelling approach can be more effective in building brand affinity than traditional advertising methods.

Figure 2: An entry on nano influencer Rita Comin’s Instagram accounts



Source: Rita Comin official Instagram (2024)

For brands with limited budgets, working with nano and micro influencers offers a more affordable entry point into influencer marketing. The lower costs associated with these partnerships allow brands to diversify their influencer portfolio and potentially reach a wider audience. Nano and micro influencers often approach brand collaborations with enthusiasm, as these partnerships can be significant opportunities for growth and exposure. They may be more willing to work closely with brands to create tailored content that aligns with both their brand and the sponsor's objectives. Our sample influencers work with brands, from Mango, Shein, and Revlon, to yepoda and Good News. Macro influencers, having established themselves in the industry, may have more standardized collaboration processes and potentially less flexibility in terms of content creation. However, they bring the advantage of extensive experience and a proven track record of successful brand partnerships. By partnering with nano and micro influencers, instead, brands can tap into particular audience segments. This targeted approach can be precious for niche products or localized marketing efforts. Working with multiple nano and micro influencers allows brands to create a diverse range of content styles and perspectives around their products or services. This variety can help brands appeal to different segments of their target market. The lower investment required for nano and micro influencer partnerships enables brands to experiment with varying types of influencers, content styles, and campaign structures. This agility can lead to more refined and effective marketing strategies over time, such as, for example, using the profiles of nano- and micro-influencers to send them your new products or active promotions (a new launch of makeup products, clothing collaborations, announcing a new promotion for a coffee brand...), in exchange for content in the form of reels, stories or publications, mainly on Instagram and TikTok, which may or may not be paid.

4.2. Interview Results

Three ideas stand out from the interviews. Influencers are aware of their value for brands, as they are supposed to be transparent, authentic, and more affordable compared to more significant profiles. Both influencers highlight the importance of genuineness and transparency, both to capture the attention of brands and to retain their followers.

I treat (my followers) them like my friends, in a very natural way. That's the strategy, and I think it works. I want them to see me in a natural way, that I'm a ordinary girl, with a normal life. (The interaction with followers) also depends. Normally, I mostly receive *likes* and interactions in the story. I create a kind of narrative so that I trigger conversations (Olaia Madinabeitia).¹

Nano influencers value and cultivate their closeness and personal connection with their followers, generating trust and high engagement by responding directly to and maintaining relationships with them.

I try to show myself as I am and expose what I like... *Likes* and direct messages (are the most common responses from my followers), which I try to answer 95% of the time (Eider Garcia).²

-
1. Entrevista a Olaia Madinabeitia: ¿Cómo define tu relación con tus seguidores? ¿Qué estrategias utilizas para interactuar con ellos? El trato como mis amigas, de manera muy natural. La estrategia en realidad es esa, y creo que funciona. Quiero que me vean de una manera natural, que soy una chica normal, con una vida normal. ¿Cuál es el tipo de interacción que más recibes por parte de tus seguidores (comentarios, me gusta, mensajes directos, etc.) y cómo responde a ello? Esto también depende, normalmente lo que más recibo son likes e interacciones en la historia. Creo una especie de narración para que pueda conseguir conversación.
 2. Entrevista a Eider Garcia: ¿Cómo defines tu relación con tus seguidores? ¿Qué estrategias utilizas para interactuar con ellos? Intento mostrarme tal y como soy y enseñar lo que a mí me gusta. ¿Cuál es el tipo de interacción que más recibes por parte de tus seguidores (comentarios, likes, mensajes directos, etc.) y cómo respondes a ello? Likes y mensajes directos que intento contestar al 95%

In addition, their collaborations are more accessible, allowing brands to work with various profiles on a tight budget. Content is all important, allowing influencers to position themselves as experts in their field.

My content is based on fashion and beauty brands. I tend to focus a lot on that since it's what I like and I'm good at. I mainly show new things and my everyday style.... (Posting frequency) depends a bit on the month, since the time also counts. There are better and worse months, perhaps Christmas, sales, Black Friday... that's when I have the most work (Olaia Madinabeitia).³

Micro influencers combine this authenticity with greater reach, allowing them to impact broad audiences without losing their cost-effectiveness.

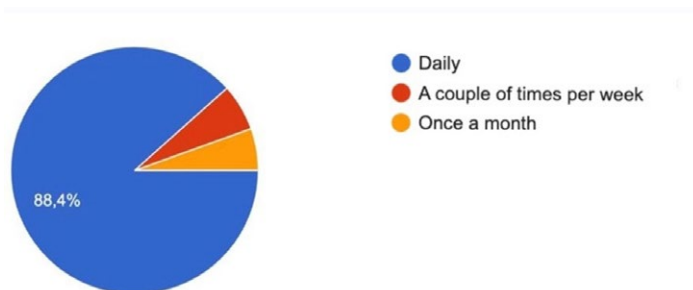
4.3. Survey Results

Influencers, advertising, and collaborations. The demographics of the people who responded include age groups from 16 to 20 years of age (4.21%), from 20 to 30 (66.86%), from 30 to 40 (28.31%), and from 40 to 60 (7.8%). Almost all (93.45%) were girls and women, while only 6.6% were boys or men. Female participants reported consuming influencer content daily, while the most popular topics included fashion, travel, beauty, sports, technology, cooking, and lifestyle. The most used platforms were Instagram and TikTok. 75.9% of respondents admitted to making a purchase influenced by an influencer promotion.

-
3. Entrevista Olaia Madinabeitia: ¿Podrías describir el tipo de colaboraciones que sueles realizar con marcas o empresas? Mi contenido se basa en marcas de moda y belleza. Suelo centrarme mucho en eso ya que es lo que me gusta y se me da bien. Enseño novedades principalmente y mi estilo del día a día. ¿Con qué frecuencia participas en colaboraciones con marcas y cuál es la duración típica de esas colaboraciones? ? Esto es un poco dependiendo del mes, ya que la época también cuenta. Hay meses mejores y peores, quizás navidades, rebajas, black friday.. es donde más trabajo tengo.

The survey highlights differences in digital consumption habits between genders and the significant impact of influencer marketing on purchasing decisions despite concerns about transparency and trust.

Figure 3: Social platform use frequency



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the survey

The two most salient issues in the survey results involve influencer marketing regulation and transparency. Despite confessing to being motivated by an influencer promotion, 82.5% of respondents do not consider influencers to be transparent, and 17.9% do not trust influencer recommendations in general. Besides, 70.5% of them believe that platform advertising is not well-regulated. Respondents expressed concern about the lack of clarity when presenting advertised products. There is a general call for greater transparency and regulation, especially for paid collaborations.

However, they do not specifically say whether this is a problem for nano and micro influencers, who are perceived as more transparent and authentic. That is, there is concern about the opacity in identifying promotional content. In fact, respondents emphasize the need for influencers to be honest about their collaborations so consumers can distinguish between editorial and advertising content. Therefore, there is a demand for more severe sanctions for those who do not comply with advertising transparency regulations. 98.8% of respondents indi-

cate that it is not clear when a promotion is paid for, and there is a perception that mentions of payment are hidden to improve statistics. Respondents conclude that the public tends to accept transparent, unpaid promotions better than paid campaigns.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The advantages of macro influencers include their broad, diverse reach, massive visibility, high-quality, professional content, significant brand exposure with a single post, and broad audiences. However, they show lower engagement rates compared to profiles with fewer followers, potential perception of less authenticity due to numerous campaigns, high costs for brands, difficulty in targeting specific audiences, and potentially slower follower growth rate due to their already large follower base. That is where smaller influencers seem to have emerged as effective competitors. Despite their smaller reach and atomization, they are often perceived as more authentic and relatable and can generate higher engagement and more genuine connections with followers; for brands, sponsorships are usually less expensive and allow for more precise audience segmentation.

The mixed-methods approach of this study provides a view of the influencer landscape, offering insights into content strategies, audience perceptions, and the evolving nature of digital marketing. We can see that micro and nano influencers provide unique value to brands through higher engagement rates and more authentic connections with their audiences compared to macro influencers. This aligns with the trend of brands seeking more targeted and cost-effective marketing strategies. The rise of micro and nano influencers challenges traditional power structures in digital marketing, offering new opportunities for niche marketing and authentic brand-consumer connections. However, the power dynamics in influencer marketing are complex. While influ-

encers may appear to have significant weight, the ultimate control lies with platform owners who dictate algorithms, data access, and monetization policies.

Our survey indicates, too, that people demand transparency about which influencer advice comes from the uninterested experience of products and services and which one comes from being paid by brands. Besides, they also demand regulation. Regulations about misleading publicity generally apply to influencer marketing (Ascolese, 2023). In Italy, for instance, influencer Chiara Ferragni was fined €1 million for falsely claiming proceeds from a product would go to charity (Riedenstein, 2024). Thus, the European Union is pushing for stricter and more harmonized regulations for influencer advertising across member states (Riedenstein, 2024). This matter does not escape ordinary people's attention.

Besides, there's a concerning trend of narrow representation among top female influencers, often favoring young, thin, white, and conventionally attractive women. This perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards and fails to reflect the diversity of potential audiences. The influencer ecosystem reflects and reinforces neoliberal economic principles, with influencers embodying the ideal of the individual as an entrepreneur of the self. While micro and nano influencers offer benefits, they may be more susceptible to spreading misinformation or conspiracy theories, highlighting the need for responsible brand partnerships.

The rise of female nano and micro influencers represents a significant shift in the influencer marketing landscape. These smaller-scale content creators offer brands opportunities to connect with niche audiences. As consumers continue to seek genuine connections and relatable content, the value of nano and micro influencers is likely to grow. By embracing the power of nano and micro influencers, brands can create more dynamic, authentic, and impactful marketing strategies that resonate with today's consumers.

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Capítulo 4.

Women and Digital Work in Albania – From Diversity, Autonomy and Power to Exclusion and Cultural Restraints

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1. INTRODUCTION

The digital labor market in the Western Balkans, including Albania, has experienced significant growth in recent years, largely driven by technological advancements, global economic trends, and the increasing demand for flexible work arrangements (Gigmetar, 2023). This growth has been particularly noticeable since the early 2010s, with the proliferation of internet access and mobile technology, and was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Dionizi et al., 2023).

The digitalization of work has led to the rise of both remote (cloud-based) and geographically tethered (location-based) platform work. The former involves tasks that can be completed from any location, such as freelance digital work. At the same time, the latter includes services like food delivery and ride-hailing that require physical presence (Howson et al., 2021). The pandemic accelerated digitalization trends in Albania, significantly reshaping the labor market. Online shopping and e-commerce experienced a boom, leading to the creation of new jobs in platform work sectors. The number of online workers doubled between

February 2021 and February 2022 in Albania, representing an increase of +63.1% (Andjelkovic et al., 2024). In August 2022, Albania recorded the second-largest population of online workers per 100,000 inhabitants in the region, with approximately 222 online workers per capita (Andjelkovic et al., 2024).

However, this rapid growth also highlighted challenges related to job quality and worker protection. Despite the development of the digital labor market, many platform workers in Albania face precarious working conditions. The Fairwork Albania 2023 report, for example, reveals that most platform workers are paid below the living wage, and the majority lack social protections such as health insurance or job security. These issues are particularly pronounced in the food delivery and ride-hailing sectors, which are dominated by local platforms rather than international giants (Fairwork, 2023). One of the significant challenges in the Albanian digital labor market is the lack of comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks.

Despite its growing significance, the platform economy remains under-researched. The role of women within this sector and the gender segmentation of the platform labor market in Albania is still insufficiently explored, with limited understanding of the gender dynamics at play. However, the literature on gender studies in Albania from different perspectives is rich. Some of the leading research conducted from the perspective of gender studies covers the relationship between migration and gender (Çaro, 2011; King & Vullnetari, 2003; Nikaj & Titili, 2024; Vullnetari, 2012); studies on how women and social issues are covered by the Albanian media (Godole, 2023); women and activism in post-1991 Albania (Danaj, 2018), gender discrimination in the labor market (Miluka, 2013); gender propaganda in communist Albania (Këlliçi & Danaj, 2016) or gender gaps in land ownership and inheritance (Zhllima et al., 2023). An increase in interest is noted in the study of women's representation in technology. Bedini (2023) addresses the issue of women's underrepresentation in STEM fields in Albania and attempts to address

it from all angles, including that of policymakers and women engaged in research and innovation (Bedini, 2023).

The platform economy in Southeast Europe is predominantly male-dominated, with women facing significant barriers, especially in location-based platform work. By August 2022, women comprised 41.4% of Albania's gig workforce, reaching 43.1% earlier in the year (Andjelkovic et al., 2024). Albania is the only country in the region where women earned over 60% of men's income, with the highest convergence in hourly wages, which could influence income distribution (Andjelkovic et al., 2024). Despite this progress, men continue to earn more than women in online work, a trend observed across Southeast Europe. Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping the digital labor market in Albania which is reflected in the different women's representation in geographically – tethered or cloud-work labour market. The sector remains largely male-dominated, with women facing cultural restraints and societal expectations that limit their participation especially in geographically tethered jobs. In the geographically tethered sector, that is food delivery, taxi drivers, e-commerce etc., the main delivery companies in Albania have only males working as drivers or in ride-hailing and no women working in the sector, excluding here the administrative office positions.

On the other side, in Albanian cloudwork, the percentage of women is higher in comparing to other countries of the region and Albania stands out for having a higher participation rate of women in online gig work compared to neighboring countries (Gigmetar, 2023). Therefore, based on this reality and data, we raise the research questions:

(i) What factors influence the gender segmentation in Albania's digital labor market, particularly between cloud-based (remote) work and geographically tethered (location-based) work?

(ii) Why is there a notable gender disparity in participation, with women more represented in cloud-based work and significantly underrepresented in geographically tethered sectors like delivery and ride-hailing?

Through this paper, we argue that this gender disparity in digital work, in addition to physical barriers, is explained by the cultural constraints resurfaced after the collapse of the communist regime.

Overall, this paper contributes to the growing platform economy literature (e.g. Anwar & Graham, 2022; Prassl, 2018; Ravenelle, 2019; Schor et al., 2020) by not only bringing the voices of Albanian women workers but also by focusing on two key forms of digital labour (remote work and place-based work) via platforms and their job quality implications on women in Albania. The paper provides critical insights into the Albanian digital labor market, especially concerning gender dynamics, a topic that is not widely studied.

1.1. Feminist Perspectives on Gender Segmentation in Digital Labor Markets

This paper is based on feminist labor theory which can provide a nuanced understanding of how gendered dynamics shape women's experiences in digital labor markets. Feminism provides a critical lens on 'working space' as a theoretical and empirical focus for digital geographies (Richardson, 2018). Feminist Labor Theory critiques traditional labor frameworks by highlighting the ways in which gender, power structures, and the social construction of labor intersect. It argues that patriarchal norms shape labor markets, and that women's contributions, especially in unpaid roles, remain invisible or underappreciated, calling for a reevaluation of labor to include these critical contributions.

Women are excluded from geographically tethered labor markets, which remain culturally and structurally hostile to them. This reflects broader critiques of digital economies that, while offering new opportunities, perpetuate inequalities in other forms (Boris & Vapnek, 2018).

The rise of women in cloud-based gig work can be framed as a product of digital labor restructuring. Feminist labor theory examines how digital technologies often create uneven opportunities for women, with

sectors like delivery services remaining inaccessible due to cultural and physical barriers. This speaks to the importance of recognizing how technological advances intersect with gendered labor markets, as seen in Albania, where cultural norms continue to influence the division of labor (Adachi, 2010).

The existing literature on women in digital labor markets reveals a variety of trends and challenges faced by women globally, particularly in cloud-based and geographically tethered work. Despite the rise in digital work, particularly since the pandemic, there is a dearth of information about women's experiences in gig work, and the literature on the subject has grown haphazardly, making it unclear what is known and what needs more research (Desjardins, 2024). One of the significant challenges is the persistent gender digital divide. In many regions, especially in low- and middle-income countries, women face barriers in accessing digital technologies, which limits their participation in digital labor markets. This digital divide manifests as lower representation in digital labor, driven by disparities in digital and technological skills and occupational segregation (Urhan, 2022).

Moreover, traditional gender inequalities, such as unpaid caregiving responsibilities, push women toward home-based work on digital platforms, which while offering flexibility, often reinforces their lower participation and earning potential in comparison to men. Research also shows that women, particularly in regions like Latin America and Africa, are more likely to be economically insecure and face psychological impacts due to the intensity of work on digital platforms (Anwar, 2022; Galperin & Arcidiacono, 2020).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection to explore the gender dynamics in Albania's digital labor market. The

interview questions were designed to align with the two main research objectives: understanding the factors that influence the gender segmentation in cloud-based (remote) work and geographically tethered (location-based) work, and identifying the cultural and structural barriers that contribute to this segmentation.

2.1 Sampling

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who could provide rich insights into the digital labor market in Albania. The sample consisted of 27 participants: 15 male workers from geographically tethered jobs (e.g., delivery services, ride-hailing) and 12 female workers engaged in cloud-based platforms (e.g., Upwork, Fiverr). The participants were chosen based on their experience in these sectors, with a focus on those who could articulate the gender-specific challenges and opportunities in their respective fields.

There were identified no women as drivers in geographically tethered jobs such as delivery services. Additionally, interviews with male workers in location-based sectors were conducted to gain a broader understanding of the cultural and structural barriers that prevent women from participating in these professions. Their perspective on the inclusion of women in the delivery market was explored through indirect questions, such as whether they had female colleagues, the company's efforts to involve women in the delivery market, and their views on whether this type of work is manageable for girls and women.

2.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both male and female workers, allowing for flexibility in the discussion while ensuring that key themes related to gender dynamics were explored. The interviews consisted of 20 questions divided across the two groups of work-

ers to address the two primary research questions. These questions were split into 10 questions for each group, ensuring that both cloud-based and geographically tethered workers could provide insights relevant to the study's objectives.

The division of questions was based on the two research questions, ensuring that each group provided relevant insights into their respective work environments: (i) *Cloud-based work (remote)*: Participants in this group, primarily women, were asked 10 questions focusing on how they navigate the flexibility, autonomy, and challenges of working on digital platforms. The questions were designed to explore key themes such as balancing professional and domestic responsibilities, the potential for economic autonomy, and barriers related to platform fees and market competition. Sample questions included: "How do you balance platform work with your domestic responsibilities?" and "What challenges do you face in negotiating fees on digital platforms?" (ii) *Geographically tethered work (location-based)*: Male participants working in delivery services or ride-hailing were asked 10 questions, designed to explore the societal norms, safety concerns, and structural challenges that prevent women from participating in these physically demanding, location-based jobs. The questions also examined their perspectives on gender roles within their professions. Sample questions included: "Do you have female colleagues in your workplace, and how are they perceived?" and "What are the main barriers that women face in entering geographically tethered jobs such as delivery work?"

Indeed, The first research question—"What factors influence the gender segmentation in Albania's digital labor market?"—aligns with interview questions on barriers to entry and gendered experiences in both cloud-based and location-based work. In the results, these factors are discussed in relation to cultural norms, structural barriers, and societal expectations. Male participants' views on the inclusion of women in geographically tethered jobs further explore gender segmentation, particularly regarding the appropriateness of such roles for women. The second research question—"Why is there a notable gender disparity in

participation?”—is addressed through interviews on participants’ experiences with digital platforms, job quality perceptions, and how cultural factors influence gendered labor dynamics. This question informs the results, highlighting women’s representation in cloud-based work versus their absence in geographically tethered sectors. Interview questions also explored how societal and structural barriers affect women’s choices and limit their participation in male-dominated sectors like delivery and ride-hailing. Overall, the research questions were designed to directly capture data on gender segmentation and disparity, which are thoroughly explored in the results section.

Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to one hour and was recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews were conducted in person and via video conferencing, depending on the location and availability of the participants.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within the data. Thematic coding was applied to the interview transcripts, with key themes emerging around the topics of gender segmentation, cultural norms, labor market barriers, and the flexibility of cloud-based work. Feminist labor theory was employed as the analytical framework, guiding the interpretation of data in relation to power structures, gender relations, and labor market segmentation.

This method allows for a nuanced understanding of how cultural and structural factors intersect to shape women’s participation in the digital labor market, with a particular focus on Albania’s unique socio-economic context. The interview answers were analysed following these key themes:

(i) *Historical and Societal Context*: The questions aimed to explore how Albania’s historical legacy, particularly the influence of the social-

ist regime and the post-communist transition, has impacted gender roles in the labor market. This aligns with the results that discuss the persistence of patriarchal norms and gender-based exclusion from geographically tethered work.

(ii) *Gender Disparity in the Platform Economy*: The questions explored why women are more present in cloud-based work but almost absent in geographically tethered sectors. The results reveal that while cultural norms limit women's participation in physically demanding jobs, they find more opportunities for inclusivity in cloud-based work.

(iii) *Women in Cloud-Based Work – Opportunities and Barriers*: Questions were designed to examine both the empowerment and autonomy that digital platforms offer women, as well as the challenges they face, such as competitive markets and platform fees. The results confirm that while digital work provides flexibility, it also comes with economic uncertainties for women.

(iv) *Geographically Tethered Work*: This section of the interviews explored the cultural and structural barriers that prevent women from participating in geographically tethered professions. Questions probed into societal perceptions of certain jobs as “masculine” and the safety concerns that discourage women's participation, aligning with the findings presented in the results.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Historical and Societal Context

The male participants were entirely engaged in physically demanding, location-based work, where no women were identified as drivers or couriers, underscoring the gender disparity in these professions. Interviews revealed that 100% of the male participants believed that

culturally ingrained perceptions of certain jobs as “masculine” made it inappropriate for women to participate in geographically tethered roles.

In contrast, the female participants, all engaged in cloud-based work, provided a different perspective. 80% of the women mentioned that they appreciated the flexibility and autonomy that digital platforms offered, allowing them to balance professional responsibilities with domestic duties. However, 75% of these women reported challenges such as high platform fees and competitive market conditions, which limited their ability to generate stable income. Additionally, 50% of the female respondents worked part-time on digital platforms while maintaining other primary jobs, often due to concerns about financial instability.

This demographic profile, supported by these quantitative insights, underscores the gender divide in Albania's digital labor market, with men predominantly occupying geographically tethered jobs, and women finding greater participation in flexible, cloud-based roles.

The legacy of Albania's communist past also plays a role in shaping current labor market dynamics. A history of gender-based prejudices and patriarchal elements has influenced the Albanian labor market. During the socialist regime, policies were implemented to promote gender equality, including women's participation in diverse disciplines (Cenaj, 2023). Constant emphasis was given to gender equality, and the Constitution even mentions it (Gjonca et al., 2008). Investments in childcare facilities and education positively stimulated women to enter and remain in the labor market. During that period, the government policy of full employment increased female participation, and, as a result, employment rates were higher than in most OECD countries (Dileo, 2017). In addition, the ideology and propaganda through books or media proclaimed the participation of women in all kinds of jobs, even those that were considered physically tricky. While gender inequality decreased in Albania during the socialist era, the “women's emancipation model” of the time failed to provide women an equal share of the reproductive labor, frequently placing them in a position where they

had to perform both productive and reproductive tasks (Këlliçi & Danaj, 2016). This failure was proved when the socialist regime fell, and women were obliged to stay home because of the high unemployment rates. Women's participation in the labor market has steadily decreased since the country's transition to a market economy began, as evidenced by the decline in the number of employed women, the increase in the number of unemployed, and the more significant proportion of housewives (Dileo, 2017). High migration rates also affected women's economic and social life; during 1990 – 2000, migration from Albania was typically very male-dominated, and women were obliged to stay home and take care of the family (Vullnetari, 2007). This situation has changed recently, especially after the introduction of technology and the diversification of the labor market for women.

While the socialist regime promoted women's participation in the workforce, especially in traditionally male-dominated industries, the transition to a market economy has seen a retreat from these progressive policies. Social and economic developments following the overthrow of the regime in Albania acted as a catalyst for the perpetuation of patriarchal and stereotypical attitudes, particularly those related to gender (Cenaj, 2023). After the fall of communism, women's employment in Albania decreased significantly, as they were expected to return to domestic roles, reinforcing traditional gender norms. Between 1989 and 2001, the percentage of women working in the labor force fell from 47.4% to 40.7%, with 45.1% of those women classified as housewives (Gjonca et al., 2008). This historical context continues to affect women's access to labor markets today, particularly in geographically tethered professions where male dominance is still strong. In Albania, the labor force participation rate among females is 52.8%, and among males is 67.7% for 2023¹.

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1. Albania | World Bank Gender Data Portal <https://liveprod.worldbank.org/en/economies/albania>

3.2 Gender Disparity in the Platform Economy

The digital labor market shows a stark gender divide between cloud-based and geographically tethered work. Women have found opportunities in cloud-based work, making up nearly half of the gig workers. However, their presence in geographically tethered sectors like delivery and ride-hailing remains minimal. Cultural norms, which dictate traditional gender roles, and structural barriers contribute to this disparity.

3.3 Women in Cloud-Based Work—Opportunities and Barriers

Cloud-based work, such as freelancing on platforms like Upwork or Fiverr, has provided many women with opportunities to engage in flexible work that can be done remotely. This flexibility is particularly valuable for women who need to balance work with family responsibilities, especially in Albania, where traditional gender roles still assign women the primary caregiving roles (INSTAT, 2023). The diversity of job opportunities on digital platforms allows individuals to explore various roles and tasks, providing flexibility and the chance to apply different skills across multiple fields. Women in developing countries have benefited from increased employment prospects, economic security, and empowerment brought about by the digital revolution (Sarker et al., 2024). By using digital marketplaces, women get greater flexibility and job satisfaction, enabling them to better manage their personal and professional lives, even with family responsibilities. Galerand & Kergoat (2008) argue that women's relationship with work holds the potential for subversion and emancipation, highlighting the importance of challenging the separation between professional and domestic work through feminist labor theory. Our in-depth interviews showed that through technology, women encounter a variety of work experiences, platforms, and types of tasks. This includes the diversity of jobs available on Upwork or Fiverr to the different clients they interact with, and the various types of work they can perform.

The interviewees highlight the range of professional activities that they can engage in:

It is absurd the diversity of things you can do there. I enjoy exploring and finding new resources for my primary profession, teaching, even in relatively simple but innovative things (Vala, 44 F, Teacher).

These go beyond traditional professions such as teaching to new areas of teach-related work, programming, legal translations, educational materials, interpreting services, and many others on digital platforms and call centers.

3.3.1. Empowerment and Autonomy

The study participants highlighted the benefits of digital platforms, including the autonomy to manage schedules and the ability to balance personal and professional commitments. Women appreciate the freedom to choose their work and manage their time. This autonomy is particularly significant given Albania's traditional gender roles. The rapidly emerging digital economy, which refers to a variety of economic activities that extensively use digital information technology in economic production activities, primarily with information networks as the carrier and digital knowledge and information as crucial production factors, has given women new opportunities in recent years to obtain more resources and realize women's empowerment and autonomy (Xue et al., 2024). Academics claim that one reason for the appeal is that these platforms provide "flexible" and "family-friendly" online work options, releasing employees from the time and space constraints of "mainstream" 9–5 office settings (James, 2022). Actually, autonomy is another key benefit of working on digital platforms, as mentioned by the interviewees.

You manage your time; you offer the services you like and want to do depending also on the time you have (Drita, 39, F, Programmer).

Women appreciate the flexibility to manage their schedules and balance personal and professional commitments.

3.3.2. Challenges in Cloud-Based Work

Despite these opportunities, women often feel powerless or with limited power when entering digital platforms, facing hurdles like high platform fees, competitive markets, and fear of financial instability. In addition, domestic work in Albania is still primarily women's work, and this prevents their total commitment to the platform work because of the fear of losing the stable primary job, the lack of time, and because of family responsibilities.

I work 4 hours in the afternoon in a call center. I put on my earphones, talk to the clients, and at the same time cook or do chores... I sometimes think it would be better if I open my profile in Upwork to do business plans... But I am afraid to do so. And if I fail? (Manjola, 42, F, primary job–Finance)

Most of the interviewees are employed in platform work, part-time, and off the books.

3.3.3. Negotiations

Negotiations with clients are another challenging aspect for women working in cloud work. Even though some of the interviewees feel exploited by the platform because of the meager payments, they still prefer to work on the platform because of the guarantee and safety it provides to them.

I have tried to negotiate the price twice, but I have not been successful. That is why I prefer to work many times for a colleague of mine (a man) who is also working for Upwork. He negotiates the price, and so I get the payment from him (Eda, 42, F, translation).

I avoid talking privately to the client outside the platform, even though it might be better in terms of payment. They have asked me to do so, but I did not accept. Upwork and Fiver ensures you precisely this: to be paid correctly, it is a guarantee, and I feel safer. (Drita, 39, F, programmer).

3.4 Geographically Tethered Work—From Cultural Restraints to Physical Barriers

Cultural norms significantly shape women's participation in geographically tethered professions like delivery services and ride-hailing. Traditional gender roles assign primary caregiving responsibilities to women, creating barriers to physically demanding or public-facing work. Such jobs are seen as “masculine,” and safety concerns further discourage women's participation. Anwar (2022) argues that platforms create inequality because of the gendered nature of sociopolitical and cultural relations, as well as the labor process that is mediated by technology. The workforce in the Albanian platform economy is notably homogeneous, with nearly all workers being men (Fairwork, 2023). In Albania, cultural norms play a significant role in shaping the labor market, particularly in geographically tethered professions like delivery services and ride-hailing.

Traditional gender roles, deeply ingrained in Albanian society, often position women as primary caregivers, responsible for domestic duties and childcare. This societal expectation limits their participation in professions that require physical presence, long hours, or work in public spaces, which are culturally seen as more suitable for men.

3.4.1. Perceptions of Gender-Appropriate Work

One cultural barrier is the perception that some jobs, especially those involving physical labor or public engagement, are inherently masculine. Delivery work, for example, requires navigating Albania's often chaotic urban environments, which are perceived as unsafe or unsuitable for women. Interviews with male workers from these sectors revealed that women's involvement in such jobs is seen as “inappropriate,” reflecting societal views that women should be confined to “softer” professions, such as caregiving, teaching, or office-based administrative work.

It is pretty evident that they [former female drivers] couldn't work for long in this kind of job, even though the manager tried to create the right work conditions for them. But you know, driving a motor is difficult even for us as men, especially here in Albania, with all the chaotic traffic... And, then, the clients... No, it is not an appropriate job for girls (Andi, 28, M, food delivery).

This perception reinforces a gendered division of labor, where women are excluded from jobs that are physically or socially demanding despite being capable of performing them.

3.4.2. Structural Barriers

Structurally, the lack of gender-sensitive policies and protections further exacerbates women's exclusion from geographically tethered work. Many companies in Albania's gig economy, particularly those in delivery services, do not offer adequate workplace protections or accommodations for women. Safety concerns, such as the risks associated with navigating public spaces late at night or in unsafe neighborhoods, disproportionately affect women and discourage their participation in these sectors. Moreover, companies often fail to provide gender-specific support, such as maternity leave or flexible working hours, which could make these jobs more accessible to women.

In our company, most of the administrative staff, meaning those in the office, is made of women. I can understand that, but women as drivers... No, that doesn't make sense (Ari, 42, M, food delivery).

The patriarchal structure of the labor market is also maintained by the absence of efforts to recruit and retain women in geographically tethered sectors actively. Although some companies have made attempts to hire women, such as by creating diversity initiatives, these efforts have failed mainly (Fairwork, 2023). As indicated in the interviews, even when companies hire women for positions like delivery drivers, they often leave the job within a short period due to hostile work environments or the perception that the work is unsuitable for them. The

fact that women do not feel comfortable or safe in these roles highlights the deep-rooted cultural barriers that prevent their participation in specific sectors of the labor market. Sinaj & Tushaj (2011) examine the involvement of women in the Albanian labor market, highlighting that despite equal access to education, women face higher unemployment rates compared to men. This is largely influenced by societal and cultural expectations that confine women to specific roles and discourage their participation in certain labor sectors. This finding aligns with the cultural restraints that limit women's involvement in geographically tethered jobs, such as delivery and ride-hailing services. In delivery and ride-hailing, it is tough for companies to ensure women's safety in public spaces. Cultural beliefs about women's capabilities are often invoked to justify their absence from such professions, perpetuating a segmented labor market that limits women's access to diverse job opportunities.

3.4.3. Regional Disparities and Access to Work

Additionally, geographical inequalities in Albania further limit women's opportunities. The platform economy is heavily concentrated in the capital, Tirana (Kopliku et al., 2024), where more progressive attitudes toward gender roles may create slightly more opportunities for women. However, in rural areas and smaller towns, traditional cultural norms are even stronger, further restricting women's access to geographically tethered work. These regional disparities highlight the uneven distribution of opportunities for women in Albania's platform economy, with urban women more likely to access cloud-based work and rural women excluded from both cloud-based and geographically tethered work due to infrastructure and societal constraints.

While cloud-based gig work has been more inclusive for women in Albania, the geographically tethered labor market remains resistant to change. The gig economy could offer more flexibility and opportunities for women in physically demanding jobs if cultural norms and structural barriers were addressed. However, until societal views shift to see

women as capable of engaging in these professions and policies are introduced to support them, this segmentation is likely to persist.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a nuanced exploration of the digital labor market in Albania, highlighting a distinct gender divide between cloud-based and geographically tethered work. By drawing upon feminist labor theory, the paper sheds light on how cultural norms, structural barriers, and historical legacies continue to shape women's participation in the platform economy.

The findings reveal that traditional gender roles continue to shape job segmentation in the Albanian labor market. Women are more likely to participate in cloud-based work due to its flexibility, while geographically tethered professions like delivery services and ride-hailing remain male-dominated. Cenaj (2023) observes that post-communism, women's roles in Albania have often reverted to domestic duties, with cultural norms reinforcing traditional gender expectations. This confirms our finding that societal perceptions limit women's participation in jobs considered "masculine" or physically demanding. Similarly, Anwar (2022) argues that gendered sociopolitical and cultural relations perpetuate inequality in digital labor markets, validating the conclusion that patriarchal structures exclude women from certain types of work.

However, while these cultural norms are deeply embedded, the increasing participation of women in cloud-based work demonstrates that digital platforms offer an opportunity for greater inclusivity. Xue et al. (2024) also highlight that the digital economy can empower women by providing them with new resources and opportunities for autonomy. Nonetheless, this empowerment is limited, as women remain largely excluded from geographically tethered sectors due to physical and cultural barriers.

Cloud-based work has provided Albanian women with opportunities for flexibility and autonomy, as highlighted by the findings. Women value the ability to manage their schedules and balance work with family responsibilities, which are traditionally assigned to them due to cultural expectations. This mirrors the findings by Schor et al. (2020), who note that digital platforms offer workers autonomy, albeit at the cost of job security. Indeed, the flexibility of cloud-based work allows women to fulfill both professional and domestic roles, confirming the theoretical framework set out by Richardson (2018), which critiques the traditional labor division and emphasizes the need for recognition of women's unpaid work in domestic spheres.

However, while digital platforms offer flexibility, they also come with significant challenges. Many women in cloud-based work face high platform fees, intense competition, and financial instability. Prassl (2018) acknowledges this precarious nature of gig work, where workers, particularly women, often experience low pay and insecure working conditions, which limits their ability to negotiate better deals. This is consistent with the experiences of Albanian women in platform work, who report difficulties in setting fair wages and managing client expectations.

The study confirms that culturally ingrained gender norms and structural barriers prevent women from participating in geographically tethered jobs such as food delivery and ride-hailing. Fairwork (2023) reports that the Albanian platform economy is overwhelmingly male-dominated, with nearly all workers in these sectors being men. This aligns with our findings that cultural perceptions of these jobs as *masculine* roles deter women from entering these professions. The patriarchal structure of the labor market is further reinforced by the absence of gender-sensitive policies, such as maternity leave or safety protections for women in these physically demanding jobs, as noted by Sinaj & Tushaj (2011). Without such policies, women are discouraged from engaging in jobs that require physical presence in public spaces, which are perceived as unsafe or inappropriate for women.

Moreover, the geographic concentration of opportunities in Albania's capital, Tirana, exacerbates these disparities. As Kopliku et al. (2024) highlight, women in rural areas face even greater cultural and infrastructural barriers, which limit their access to both cloud-based and geographically tethered work. This regional inequality further perpetuates the segmentation of Albania's labor market, with women in urban areas more likely to engage in digital work.

The legacy of Albania's communist past continues to influence women's labor market participation, particularly in geographically tethered sectors. While the socialist regime promoted gender equality in the workforce, encouraging women to take on roles traditionally considered masculine, these progressive policies were reversed after the transition to a market economy. Vullnetari (2012) notes that the post-communist era saw a retreat to traditional gender norms, with women expected to return to domestic roles and a significant decline in female employment. This historical context helps explain why women remain largely absent from male-dominated sectors like delivery services today.

The findings suggest that without significant shifts in cultural attitudes, structural barriers, and supportive policy interventions, gender segmentation in Albania's digital labor market is likely to persist. Adachi (2010) argues that feminist labor theory calls for a reevaluation of labor practices to ensure inclusivity and recognition of women's contributions. This echoes our conclusion that gender-sensitive policies and cultural shifts are crucial for achieving gender equity in the platform economy. For Albania to foster a more inclusive labor market, it must address both the societal expectations that confine women to certain types of work and the structural barriers that prevent their participation in all sectors of the economy.

By investigating the complexities of women's experiences in Albania's platform economy, this study contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to foster more equitable digital labor markets worldwide. Longitudinal studies on the transition from traditional to digital

labor markets would provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of gender dynamics and the factors that influence women's transitions between different types of platform work.

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Capítulo 5.

Feminist Digital Economy: A Framework of Dimensions of Gender and Feminist Qualities of Digital Platforms

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1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has led to the development of the platform economy (PE), which refers to the production, consumption, and distribution of work and capital among physically disseminated groups supported by digital platforms (Benkler, 2006; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Castells, 1999). The PE includes a variety of forms and terms, such as Commons-Based Peer Production (Benkler, 2006), Collaborative Economy (Botsman & Rogers, 2011), and Sharing Economy (Sundarajan, 2016). Beyond well-known pioneering initiatives like free/open-source software and Wikipedia, the PE has expanded to online microwork (Upwork), mobility services (Blablacar ridesharing), food delivery (Deliveroo), and domestic work (Care.com), among others. However, existing research has mainly focused on a few sectors, such as vacation rental platforms like Airbnb and taxi services like Uber (Van Doorn, 2018).

The PE is growing rapidly and exponentially (Kenney et al., 2020; Urzú Brancati et al., 2020), disrupting at least thirty-three economic areas (Fuster Morell & Espelt, 2019). Before COVID-19, around 11% of the EU adult population had participated in computer-mediated work supported by platforms (Pesole et al., 2018). The pandemic has further accelerated its expansion (Aloisi, 2022; Codagnone, 2022; EIGE, 2022a;

Piasna et al., 2022). This is evident as in 2020, around one-third or more of employees in the EU worked from home regularly – far above estimates of one in twenty workers doing so in 2019 (Sostero et al., 2020). These developments have opened up a debate on the future of work (Lund et al., 2021).

Even though the PE was initially greeted as a more open, inclusive, and democratic model than the traditional economy (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014), later on, evidence questioned these assumptions, such as the issue of gender equality in digital settings (Huws, 2003).

Gender equality (GE) is a fundamental human right. However, it represents one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies, as referred to by the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), the Beijing Declaration (United Nations, 1996), and the Council of Europe in the Istanbul Convention (2011). The more recent UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development targets GE as one of its 17 goals (United Nations, 2015). At the EU level, the European Commission targets and defines three pillars of GE: ending gender-based violence and challenging gender stereotypes, thriving in a gender-equal economy such as the gender pay gap, gender segregation, platform workers' access to social protection, and work-life balance, and achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics (European Commission, 2020). Despite global and regional efforts, progress is slow (EIGE, 2021a), and this slow rhythm was worsened further by the COVID-19 pandemic. While, already in 2014, one in three women in the EU had suffered physical or sexual abuse, the pandemic has exacerbated cyber- and intimate partner violence (EIGE, 2020b, 2022b; Kourti et al., 2021; Weeks et al., 2023).

Within the context of an expanding PE and exacerbated gender inequality, it is unclear whether the PE contributes to or hinders the three pillars of gender equality. Gender analysis on the PE is limited and fragmented, and no holistic analytical frameworks exist to address how the

new form of PE work reconfigures gender equality (EIGE, 2022a; Grau & Fuster, 2021). Even more, there is an absence of knowledge on which measures would effectively tackle gender inequalities in the context of the PE, such as which type of PE models or which public policies favor GE. This chapter, therefore, poses the following question: What characterizes digital gender equality in digital platform work settings?

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology is based on an integrated narrative review (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Torraco, 2016; Wong et al., 2013). The literature review aims to situate the current study within the body of the relevant literature and provide context to justify the proposed dimensions for the resulting framework (Snyder, 2019).

It provides an overview of the previously published works and a description of the existing knowledge on the topic under question: What characterizes digital gender equality in digital platform work settings? The review identifies, appraises, selects, and synthesizes all high-quality research evidence and arguments relevant to that question (George et al., 2023). The purpose of this literature review is to generate new insights into gender equality in digital platform work settings. This will be achieved by systematically reviewing, critiquing, and synthesizing existing literature, ultimately leading to the development of a new integrative framework.

The literature-integrated narrative review starts by mapping, classifying, and selecting the main literature in the field. The literature selection was based on a previous selection of papers linked to a systematic literature review (SLR) of gender approaches in the digital economy question (Grau & Fuster, 2021), which was based on a sample of 500 papers of the most relevant scientific work and policy papers across different social sciences from 1995 to 2020 in the Google Scholars and Scopus databases. The final sample includes the most recent works from

2020 to 2024, drawn from leading journals and reference books in the field, based on the author's expertise. This curated collection of articles, which forms the basis for this integrated narrative review, is listed in the reference section.

The second step involved reviewing the existing literature on gender approaches to analyzing the platform economy. This review had two objectives: first, to identify the stages of existing knowledge on this topic, and second, to determine the challenges that hinder the development of a framework to answer the question, 'What characterizes digital gender equality? Finally, based on the literature analysis and the type of dimensions of gender and feminist qualities previously present in the literature, the author integrated the dimensions into a framework of dimensions.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Challenges in the State of the Art on Gender Approaches for the Analysis of the Platform Economy

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to investigate gender approaches in the digitally mediated economy highlighted the scarcity and disconnection between three gender approaches (Grau & Fuster, 2021)¹: First, the "feminist theory of technology and information and communications technology (ICT)" approach, developed during the mid-1980s and early 1990s, articulates a feminist critique of ICT and digital technology, albeit without an economic dimension (Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Faulkner, 2001; Haraway, 1985; Plant, 1997; VNS Matrix,

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1. The SLR was based on a quantitative and qualitative sample of 500 papers of the most relevant scientific work and policy papers across different social sciences from 1995 to 2020 in the Google Scholars and Scopus databases.

1995; Wajcman, 2004). The contributions from this first approach argue that technology is not gender-neutral but is embedded in gender discrimination dynamics, and new forms of digital violence are emerging (Powell & Henry, 2017). This approach provides critical technological analysis but lacks an economic focus.

The “feminist political economy” approach analyzes the patriarchal system, power, and the hegemonic economy drawing upon political and feminist economic frameworks and argues that platform work replicates other historical patterns of economic colonialist domination and global chains of productive and reproductive systems (Duffy, 2007; Gurumurthy, 2012; Gurumurthy et al., 2016; Huws, 2003, 2019b; Lee, 2011; Van Doorn, 2017; Waldby & Cooper, 2010). This approach provides significant and deep economic analysis relevant to the PE analysis but lacks the ICT focus (for an exception, see Fortunati, 2007; Graham et al., 2020; Huws, 2003, 2019b; Jarret, 2015; Terranova, 2000; Van Doorn, 2017).

The “mainstream economic analysis of women’s participation and labor in the digital economy” approach focuses on women’s disparities in access, capacity to use, and ways of engaging with ICT (Davaki, 2018; Schoenbaum, 2016; UNCTAD, 2019; World Bank Group, 2016) and policy interventions to reduce gender divides (Ambujam & Venkatalakshmi, 2009; Carchio, 2019; Davaki, 2018; Ravanera, 2019). While this literature contributes to shedding light on women’s unequal access to opportunities in the digital economy, it reduces gender to “women”. It lacks a feminist or critical analysis of both technology and the economy.

When thinking about how to bridge the gap in the interplay between the PE and gender and how to build a holistic gender perspective of the digitally mediated economy, all three approaches provide pieces of the puzzle. What is missing are the means to integrate them into a single holistic framework that will enable interdisciplinary analysis connecting the economy, technology, and gender spheres. This article aims to provide a framework for gender and feminist qualities of the platform economy.

3.2. State of the Art on the Platform Economy and Gender Equality

Despite an initial and still generally gender-blind approach, recent literature has started to focus on the gendered effects of platform work (EIGE, 2020a), from the third gender approach of “mainstream economic analysis and women’s participation and labor in the digital economy”.

The existing literature has focused chiefly on examining questions related to the second pillar of GE of a gender-equal economy pertaining to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in the PE’s working conditions (notably equal participation, the gender pay gap, and the gender care gap). However, very few works have explored to what extent gendered technological biases are involved, and gendered violence in the context of platform work is unexplored. Importantly, gender-based violence in the PE work context has not been addressed.

One body of literature focuses on equal access to technology and ICT skills (EIGE, 2020a). While there are no significant differences concerning access to technology (UNCTAD, 2019), studies have observed that women usually have fewer ICT skills, which thwarts their ability to fully benefit from the potential of ICT tools (Propel London, 2019; Rowntree, 2020; WISE, 2017). Another set of studies has focused on women’s inclusion in platform work (Eurobarometer, 2016; Smith, 2016). The emerging evidence suggests that platform work reproduces the well-established gender exclusion, segregation, and the gender gap present in the broader economy (EIGE, 2020a; Freeman, 2010; Mirchandani, 2010; Overseas Development Institute, 2019; Rubery & Fagan, 1993; Schor, 2017, 2020). While gender-disaggregated data on platform work is generally minimal (see Forde et al., 2017; Piasna et al., 2022; Urzì Brancati et al., 2020), the Online Labour Index, based on data scraping indicators of activity in platforms, estimates approximately 61% male and 39% female rates of labor supply in the online gig economy (OIL, 2021), in line with a recent survey of platform workers conducted in 10 EU countries (EIGE, 2022a).

Very few studies, however, have adopted an intersectional perspective, which considers how gender interacts with other axes of oppression, such as race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or migrant/citizenship status (Crenshaw, 1989). From a multivariable analysis, different authors argue that PE, as well as gender inequality, reproduces race and class hierarchies and biases (Edelman & Luca, 2014; EIGE, 2022a; Galí Magallón, 2022; Huws, 2019a; Kwan, 2022; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022; Van Doorn, 2017).

Another set of studies has focused on the work-life balance and the division of unpaid care afforded by the PE (Huws et al., 2018; Piasna et al., 2022). While early contributions celebrated platform work as a flexible conciliation alternative to traditional employment (Singer, 2014), later interventions have argued that this happens at the cost of reinforcing the unequal distribution of care work by keeping women at home while performing paid work (Churchill & Craig, 2019; EIGE, 2020a; Gerber, 2022; Huws, 2019a; Tandon & Rathi, 2021). In addition, platform-mediated care services, offered by women, are poorly protected (EIGE, 2020a; Galí Magallón, 2022; Gregg, 2011; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022; Vyas, 2021; Wajcman & Dodd, 2016).

In conclusion, gender analysis on current emerging fields of PE studies has tackled fragmented elements regarding equal access and equal opportunity dimensions of gender equality, working conditions, and work-life balance. However, left out is the dimension of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of their gender (EIGE, 2021a). Both women and men experience gender-based violence, albeit it disproportionately impacts women (FRA, 2014). Gendered violence takes many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic (FRA EU, 2014). Freedom from gender-based violence is central to international and regional definitions of gender equality (European Commission, 2020). It is also one of the biggest challenges in our society (European Commission, 2020). In the

EU alone, gendered violence has been calculated to cost €366 billion a year, representing more than the cost of corruption (EIGE, 2021b). Gender-based violence can take place in multiple settings (Bettio & Ticci, 2017), at home, in the streets, and increasingly in cyberspace (Henry et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2000; Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2022), but also in the work context (ILO, 2021; MacKinnon, 1979). Sexual harassment in the workplace is a common experience for women in the EU, affecting 11% and 41% of women in 2021 (Eurostat, 2022). This form of gender-based violence is increasingly mediated by digital technologies (EIGE, 2020b; Henry et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2022). Despite significant data gaps, a 2014 FRA survey revealed that 9% of women who had experienced online gender-based violence reported being harassed by someone from their workplace (FRA, 2014).

The situation created by COVID-19 has further exacerbated gender-based violence, with the United Nations (2020) estimating a 25% increase since the pandemic. Gender-based violence is growing in the two spaces the PE reinforces, the digital and at home, because of telework (EIGE, 2017; Moore, 2018; Schröttle et al., 2018; Stringhi, 2022). Although these trends are related to the PE, there is a substantial lack of studies examining the relationship between the PE and gender-based violence (Bettio & Ticci, 2017). Despite these data gaps, anecdotal evidence reveals the prevalence of gender-based violence suffered by platform workers employed in private spaces such as the home to provide cleaning and child-care services (Galí Magallón, 2022). There is longstanding evidence that domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and other forms of violence by clients (Kambouri, 2013; Mkan-dawirer-Valhmu, 2009). However, this is intensified among platform workers who cannot report clients for fear of bad ratings, resulting in loss of work (Anwar et al., 2021; Gebrial, 2022; Kampouri, 2022). However, this has not been studied systematically. Similarly, it has been identified that, in the delivery sector, women “riders” suffer sexual harassment

when delivering orders to people's homes or cyberharassment through digital channels, but they are disincentivized to report it for fear of being penalized by the platform rating system (Centeno Maya et al., 2022; Garrell Ballester et al., 2020). The more precarious working conditions of PE, where minor social protection and gender quality regulatory control exist, create a more vulnerable situation regarding gender-based violence for platform workers.

Another new and relevant aspect of gender equality analysis in the PE is gendered technology. From socio-technical systems, several studies have examined how apparent neutral approaches to technological design reveal gender-biased assumptions (Broussard, 2018; Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Davis & Chouinard, 2016; Evans, 2017; Massanari, 2015; Nagy & Neff, 2015; Rosner, 2018; see for a focus on gender perspectives on data D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). This is relevant for understanding gender equality here, given that the PE is mediated -by definition- by technology. The PE's use of algorithmic management and the adoption of gamification techniques enable intensive forms of surveillance and reinforced discrimination (Van Doorn, 2017; Zuboff, 2019) and may also reproduce gender stereotypes (Kenny & Donnelly, 2020; see also EIGE, 2022a). However, technological approaches to GE in the PE have been limited, lacking an interdisciplinary integration of the platform economy's economic and technological spheres.

In sum, while studies on the PE have begun to analyze non-discriminatory and equal access and opportunities in the PE work context, it has so far ignored questions of gender-based violence and a holistic analysis that considers and integrates all aspects related to how gender equality operates in platform work settings. This should investigate the role of technology and the digital base of the PE in determining gender equality and incorporate an interdisciplinary perspective on gender equality in the PE that considers its economic-technological entanglements.

3.3. Challenges in the State of the Art on the Interplay Between Platform Model Design and Gender Equality

PE can be based on mainstream profit-oriented models, known as “platform capitalism” (Srnicek, 2016), as well as alternative prosocial models around cooperativism and democratic organizations, known as “platform cooperativism” (Bauwens & Kostakis, 2014; Scholz, 2016). Platform cooperativism can reach a large scale, such as Smart, a cooperative of cultural freelancers operating through a digital platform that has reached more than 40,000 members in Europe. To empirically differentiate these two models, a framework resulting from previous analyses (Fuster Morell, 2018) allows the characterization of the different models based on their democratic qualities and diverse alignment with policy goals such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Pillar of Social Rights (Fuster Morell, Espelt & Renau Cano, 2020) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Platform models

PE Models	Socially oriented model	For-profit model
Governance & Economy	Non-for profits, participative governance	For-profit corporations, closed governance
Knowledge & Technology	Open sources, software & open knowledge	Closed technology
Impact	Economic & social	Economic

Source: Fuster Morell, Espelt & Renau Cano (2020)

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) asked for the promotion of prosocial models of the platform economy (Florianschütz, 2019). However, most alternative prosocial models are under-researched (Srnicek, 2016) as research has focused on profit-oriented models (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). Widely known definitions of platform economy still show a bias toward mainstream models, including Airbnb, Uber, Deliv-

eroo, and Taskrabbit (Sundararajan, 2016). These definitions generalize the characteristics of these models toward the whole ecosystem of the platform economy (Laukkanen & Tura, 2020). DiQUAL aims to characterize the PE by considering the diversity of models it can take.

Finally, the gender perspective required in the design of economic models and policies is in its initial stages (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017). The platform economy field is no exception. The preliminary analysis points out that gender perspectives in platforms are very scarce, i.e., only 3% of a sampled 27 platforms have gender equality actions (Fuster & Espelt, 2021). There is indeed a lack of knowledge and analytical tools on how to incorporate gender equality in platforms and policies that DiQUAL aims to cover.

3.4. Challenges in the State of the Art on the Interplay Between Policy, Gender Equality, and the PE

The platform economy has become a top priority for governments worldwide (Codagnone & Martens, 2016; Hong & Lee, 2018). The urban dimension of the platform economy is reflected in that city governments must confront the most significant challenges and opportunities (Davidson & Infranca, 2016; Mont et al., 2020; Voytenko Palgan et al., 2021).

Despite the “placelessness” implied by its intrinsically digital nature, the platform economy has been identified as an urban phenomenon (Davidson & Infranca, 2016; Davies, 2019; Graham, 2020; Mont et al., 2020; Salice & Pais, 2017). Dense populations and highly networked physical spaces are converging with new digital technologies to drive a concentration in cities (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015, 2017). Consequently, cities offer an appropriate environment for the platform economy. As a result, cities are the primary focus of the platform economy’s economic activity and, physically, the recipients of its most significant impacts (Schmidt, 2017), such as gentrification caused by short-term rental

platforms like Airbnb (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Urban spaces, with their dense population concentrations, offer the critical mass necessary for digital platforms to operate with minimal friction (May et al., 2017). The desire or necessity for more independent lifestyles with part-time work attracts people to the PE (One Earth, 2015), thus creating a fusion of supply and demand.

For this reason, most platform companies embedded in hubs of innovation are based in large cities, where these are concentrated. Furthermore, location-based sectors such as transportation (like Uber), accommodation (Airbnb), and domestic services (like Helpling or Bubble) take advantage of population density. In the case of telework, online sectors such as IT and communication and knowledge-intensive services also concentrate on cities, despite some contrary trends, including international involvement (especially from the Global South) and some decentralization related to COVID-19 (Graham & Ferrari, 2022). Agglomerative forces linked to the unequal spatial distribution of skills, human capital, and opportunities explain the concentration of remote work in cities (Hartal et al., 2021).

Because of its urban character, the PE has raised cities as proactive policy actors (Salice & Pais, 2017). In 2018, as part of the Sharing Cities program, I directed in partnership with Barcelona City Council, through which 50 cities worldwide celebrated a Sharing Cities Summit and signed “A Common Declaration of Principles and Commitment on Platform Economy” (See Sharing Cities Declaration, 2018). Cities play a leading role in the regulation and promotion of PE policies, which also shapes the different models of PE. National states have a significant role in some regulatory areas, such as the regulation of labor conditions of platform workers. However, most of the competencies are concentrated at the European level under an EU strategy. In this regard, the European Union institutions are the most determining policy actors on platform economy regulation. The European Commission has developed propositions that will regulate the PE in the next five years (“Digital Services,” “Digital Markets Act,” “A European Strategy for Data,” “Artificial Intel-

ligence Act”, and “Working Conditions in Platform Work”).² However, according to my preliminary gender analysis, the gender perspective is minimal (i.e., mentioned one time in an entire directive).

Regarding how PE public policies would contribute to the third pillar of GE related to equality in participation and politics, gender research points out that gender perspectives in policy are a vital instrument for gender equality (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017, p.160). The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 observes that integrating a gender perspective in the digital economy is essential to reach the goal of gender equality. Moreover, platform work poses challenges to the application of gender equality and non-discrimination legislation in employment (EIGE, 2020a). Most platform workers are classified as self-employed or independent contractors, which results in limited access to social and work protection measures (De Stefano, 2015; Huws et al., 2019; Vandaele et al., 2019), including those essential for achieving gender equality. In addition, it is unclear if gender equality plans could adapt to digital platforms. For example, there is no consideration for equality plans about gender dynamics embedded in technologies, such as algorithms based on sexist stereotypes (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). There is also a troubling lack of gender-disaggregated data on platform work to inform policy design. The European Commission is currently promoting a first directive on gender-based violence, a request for further data and research efforts and measures on new forms of violence related to ICT. In summary, there is a lack of research on the adoption of a gender perspective and the adaptation of present gender equality policy regulations to digital platforms, which DiQUAL aims to cover.

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2. Digital Services Act–COM/2020/825 (European Commission EC), 2020a); Digital Markets Act–COM/2020/842 (EC, 2020b); A European strategy for data–COM/2020/66 (EC, 2020c); Artificial Intelligence Act–COM/2021/206 final (EC, 2021a); Working conditions in platform work–COM/2021/762 (EC, 2021b). The gender violence directive later in text COM(2022) 105 final 2022/0066 (COD) (EC, 2022).

Another policy challenge is that research has focused on the city, national, or European level, but with little integration of the diverse governmental players and policies. In addition, most empirical analyses on the PE have been microeconomic, based on single platforms, while a macroeconomic perspective of the PE expansion has rarely been approached (Codagnone, 2016). This limits the knowledge available to inform public policy.

For all these reasons, building a multi-governance framework can enable the analysis of all government levels operating in a particular city: one that integrates a gender analysis for understanding how the PE adapts or challenges existing gender equality policies.

In sum, the framework aims to address the three pillars of GE in the platform economy. It will provide a holistic framework for GE to tackle the gender-equal economy pillar and the gender-based violence pillar in the PE work context and address the equal politics pillar by analyzing the gender perspective in PE policies.

3.5. A Framework of Dimensions of Gender and Feminist Qualities of Digital Platforms

This framework aims to address the question of what characterizes digital work mediated by platform technology. The chapters provide a holistic analysis of the gendered dimensions of PE. The study integrates dimensions such as opportunities, working conditions, work-life balance, gender-based violence, algorithmic bias, and technological access and dynamics. The framework also integrates and analyzes the interconnection between these diverse dimensions of GE in the context of the PE work. The perspective is aligned with recent ecological models of GE that incorporate various aspects into holistic frameworks (Dahlberg & Krug, 2022; Di Napoli et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant in terms of gender-based violence, which tends to be investigated as an isolated dimension (see, i.e., EIGE's Gender Equality Index) or not investigated

at all (see, i.e., Dahlberg & Krug, 2022; Di Napoli et al., 2019; UNDP's Gender Inequality Index).

To build a digital gender equality holistic framework, first, the values of the three gender approaches to the digital sphere present in the literature are integrated; that is, “feminist theory of technology and ICT,” “feminist political economy” approach, and “mainstream economic analysis and women’s participation and labor in the digital economy”. This involves integrating three dimensions: concepts of gender-diverse participation derived from women’s studies, the analysis of power and its systematic dynamics and roots from feminist economics, and insights from a political economy perspective. Second, it includes an intersectional analysis of how gender is interrelated with other axes of discrimination and oppression, such as race, age, and class, in the context of platform work. Third, it is interdisciplinary: economical-technological-gender; as a result, bridging the gap between mainstream and critical approaches, particularly between feminist theory and gender studies, and the emerging field of platform economy studies, including the current set of theories applied to investigate the democratic quality of the platform economy (that of commons theory from the Ostrom School and digital commons, social economy and digital social innovation).

Among others, this framework of the dimension of gender equality in the work context mediated by the technology of the PE aims to serve to characterize and holistically analyze gender equality in PE.

The resulting set of gender equality dimensions to consider is to investigate how they take form and operate in the socio-technical settings of a digital platform concretely are

(1) economic mission and value system: favoring social provisioning of needs and placing life at its center.

(2) work-life care balance: favoring a better production and reproduction balance and contributing to reducing an unequal distribution of care.

(3) favoring fair treatment and non-gender-based violence on platforms.

(4) favoring equal inclusion and participation of women at all levels.

(5) intersectional access and impact: reducing other axes of inequality such as class and race.

(6) contributing to equal access and empowerment of women and the reduction of privileges for men.

(7) performativity: contributing to equal performativity and values and beliefs aligned with gender equality.

(8) gender neutral technology: technological design favoring gender equality.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The digital revolution has resulted in the development of the platform economy, which refers to the production, consumption, and distribution of work and capital among physically disseminated groups supported by digital platforms. The COVID-19 crisis has further accelerated the expansion of the PE and has disrupted work and life organization. Since its inception, the PE has been greeted as a more open, inclusive, and democratic model than the traditional economy. However, the effects of the platform economy on gender equality are unexplored.

On the one hand, the chapter provides a state-of-the-art overview of gender perspectives on the platform economy. To tackle the research question “What characterizes digital gender equality?” at least three limitations in the literature of PE studies must be uncovered. First, in terms of the three pillars of gender equality, there are unsystematized works and data gaps regarding gender-equal access and opportunities for the pillar to thrive in a gender-equal economy (EIGE, 2022a). More importantly, there is a vacuum of knowledge on the first and most crit-

ical pillar of GE: gender-based violence (EIGE, 2022a), and the third pillar related to PE politics is not addressed. In addition, holistic analysis has not been developed on the PE and the three pillars of GE, neither at the theoretical nor at the empirical level. This is not only characteristic of gender equality analysis in the platform economy, but it is a limitation that is present in most analyses on gender equality in other areas.

To overcome this limitation in the literature, the chapter proposed a holistic analytical framework of gender and feminist qualities of the platform economy. The perspective is aligned with recent ecological models of GE that integrate distinct aspects into holistic frameworks (Dahlberg & Krug, 2022; Di Napoli et al., 2019). This is particularly relevant in terms of gender-based violence, which tends to be investigated as an isolated dimension (see, i.e., EIGE's Gender Equality Index) or not investigated at all (see, i.e., UNDP's Gender Inequality Index; Dahlberg & Krug, 2022; Di Napoli et al., 2019).

Beyond and to integrate the three pillars of gender equality, future research would have covered more extensive research on the three pillars of gender equality at PE. It involved making a substantial effort to cover the large literature gap on gender-based violence and PE and to develop the pillar of equal participation further.

Second, regarding PE models, for-profit business models take precedence in far too many studies, Uber being an example (Srnicsek, 2016). This leaves aside successful non-profit models (Fuster Morell & Espelt, 2019; Laukkanen & Tura, 2020). To overcome this limitation in the literature, empirical research on alternative non-profit models of PE could be developed, both at the case study level and at the micro level of the non-profit sphere or social market. According to social economy studies, alternative models tend to degenerate networks between them. Then, at the theoretical level, a review and revision of the same definition and characterization of the literature of what platform economy is could be developed. For example, the definition of platform economy adopted by the European Commission is as a two-sided market, "Platform work

is a new means of matching supply and demand for paid labor” (XXX), which is only applicable to market-oriented and for-profit cases.

Thirdly, regarding policies, even though the PE is at the forefront of policy agendas and represents significant challenges in multi-governance (Codagnone et al., 2016), there is a lack of analysis, particularly gender analysis, of the integration of local to global policies. In order to overcome this limitation, further research could be developed in order to create a gender analysis of platform economy policies, an analysis of how far there is an integration between platform economy policies and gender equality policies, and if the platform economy adapts or challenges gender equality policies, particularly regarding the digital sphere and technological base of the platform economy. In addition, these analyses could be at all policy levels and overcome the centralization of studies at the city level. Furthermore, it could cover a much lacking global-to-local integrated framework considering all levels of policy applied to a particular territory.

On the other hand, the paper provides an analytical framework of gender and feminist qualities of digital platforms. This chapter, through an integrative narrative literature review and departing from the gaps identified in the literature around gender equality, diverse platform models, and platform policies, defines a holistic, intersectional, and interdisciplinary perspective on “digital gender equality” to analyze gender equality in a digitally mediated phenomenon, such as the platform economy, but also relevant for other digital fields like artificial intelligence or metaverse.

This set of dimensions serves to characterize and analyze the gender equality of digitally mediated economic activity. While economic analysis on platform economy tends to consider only the social axes to characterize economic models (from more profit to more socially oriented), the application of these dimensions will allow the characterization of economic activity based on its alienation or not to gender equality (from more patriarchal to more gender and feminist egalitarian). The initial

set of gender equality dimensions to consider is to investigate how they take form and operate in the socio-technical settings of a digital platform concretely are (1) economic mission and value system (2) work-life care balance; (3) favoring fair treatment and non-gender-based violence on platforms; (4) favoring equal inclusion and participation of women at all levels; (5) intersectional access and impact; (6) contributing to equal access and empowerment of women and the reduction of privileges for men; (7) performativity; (8) gender neutral technology.

Future research would require the empirical application, testing, and operationalization of the framework of dimensions of gender and feminist qualities of digital platforms into case studies. In this way, the empirical application of the framework might assist its validity as an empirical, analytical resource and favor an empirically based framework.

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Section 2: Deconstructing Masculinity, Stereotypes, Disinformation & Bias

Capítulo 6.

Tercera Brecha Digital de Género y Sexismo Digital en la Infancia

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1. INTRODUCCIÓN

La denominada generación Alfa¹ ha (con)vivido con las TRIC (tecnologías de relación, información y comunicación) y ha gestionado sus identidades y relaciones a través de estos canales tecnológicos. De hecho, los últimos estudios indican que el acceso al mundo tecnológico digital se ha adelantado a edades cada vez más tempranas; por ejemplo, situando en los 3 años de edad el acceso a dispositivos como la Tablet (Haenlein, et al., 2020; Delgado, et al., 2024; Brush, et al., 2023; Maraver-López & Marín-Gutiérrez, 2017). Concretamente, los últimos estudios inciden en que desde los 5 años las y los menores comienzan a utilizar videojuegos, y que, a partir de los 8 años, y especialmente a partir de los 11, están totalmente integradas e integrados en las redes sociales, siendo las más usadas WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok y YouTube (Delgado, et al., 2024;

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1. La generación Alfa se refiere a las personas nacidas a partir del año 2010. Es una generación caracterizada por el temprano acceso al mundo digital y uso de diferentes dispositivos digitales desde la primera infancia (Simental & Ríos, 2023; Ramírez-García, et al., 2022).

Haenlein, et al., 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2020; Kennedy, 2020; Observatorio Vasco de la Juventud, 2020).

Para analizar la presencia digital en la infancia no solo debemos mirar datos cuantitativos, sino también atender cuestiones cualitativas, como los códigos, normas y conductas que se están mimetizando en las interacciones digitales de las niñas y los niños. Así, diferentes investigaciones evidencian que los códigos de género quedan representados en las relaciones digitales de estas edades, estableciéndose una tercera brecha digital de género². Se trata, pues, de una brecha en la que los comportamientos, usos, códigos, esquemas y relaciones se dan en categorías y posiciones desiguales por razón de género; y que se transfiere en los canales digitales más utilizados, tales como YouTube, videojuegos y/o redes sociales (Gobierno Vasco, 2013; Merchan, 2014; Linares, et al., 2019; Montes-Vozmediano, García-Jiménez, & Menir-Sendra, 2018; García & López, 2016; Lovelock, 2019; Aran-Ramspott, Fedele, & Tarragó, 2018).

Con respecto a los videojuegos, los estudios recogidos plantean que dentro de los mismos se dibuja un escenario sexista, en el que la mayor parte de la audiencia es masculina, y cuyo acceso se sitúa a una edad muy temprana (Ståhl, 2016; Kondrat, 2015; Black, Korobkova, & Epler,

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2. Hasta ahora, los estudios centraban su foco en dos brechas digitales: la primera, entendida como la desigualdad en el acceso a las TIC, es decir, un problema de equipamiento estructural que corresponde al capital económico de cada país, llegando a generar una brecha transnacional donde las mujeres de países con menor desarrollo tecnológico se ven más excluidas que los hombres; y la segunda brecha digital, que se refiere a la desigualdad existente entre mujeres y hombres en cuanto a la intensidad, las habilidades y las capacidades en el uso de las nuevas tecnologías, dificultando la integración de las mujeres en el mundo tecnológico. Esta segunda brecha es uno de los principales retos de democratización tecnológica en los países tecnológicos, ya que la primera está superada (Observatorio e-Igualdad, 2011; Merchán, 2014; Castaño, 2008).

2014). Concretamente, a nivel de España, el estudio del Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2022) afirma que el 26.4% de los chicos realiza un uso excesivo de los videojuegos, mientras que en el caso de las chicas es el 6.6%. Asimismo, el mismo estudio señala que el 85% de los videojuegos que son comercializados incluyen contenido violento. Dentro de estas plataformas se distribuyen y explicitan mecanismos patriarcales e ideales vinculados a la masculinidad hegemónica (Connell, 1995), reproduciendo esquemas de género y un sexismo explícito e implícito en el que se evoca un ideal masculino vinculado a la violencia y a la agresividad (Merchán, 2014:81; Kondrat, 2015). Es más, la dominación y la agresividad se convierten en ejes centrales y fines mismos de los videojuegos más comercializados; y es que como Carnagey, Anderson, y Bushman (2006) plantean, además de atender a una realidad sexista, se produce una transversalización de intereses capitalistas que hacen que los más vendidos sean aquellos que contienen una alta carga violenta. Esto, en palabras de López (2010:310), provoca una insensibilidad a la violencia, y especialmente, a aquella ejercida hacia las mujeres ya que este tipo de juegos –basados en la cultura patriarcal– cargan especialmente contra ellas. A modo de ejemplo, encontramos que en muchos juegos se pueden ver violaciones y agresiones, y se utilizan palabras denigrantes contra las mujeres.

A todo lo mencionado anteriormente, se debe añadir la integración que están teniendo los videojuegos on-line. La Asociación Española de Distribuidores y Editores de Software de Entretenimiento (aDeSe) (2011) explica que existe una tendencia creciente en el uso de este tipo de videojuegos que permiten generar conexiones on-line entre hombres videojugadores, generando espacios principalmente masculinos, y en los que se avala la violencia y la dominación. No obstante, cada vez son más chicas las que rompen los mandatos tradicionales de género y se adentran en estos espacios, aunque tal y como confirman Jingjing (2010) y Merchán (2014), las niñas cada vez integran esquemas más flexibles y se acercan con mayor naturalidad a estos mundos masculinizados; si bien es cierto que las chicas prefieren juegos no sexistas, debido a –según

los argumentos de las autoras antes mencionadas– su trama, relatos y escenarios de fantasía.

En cuanto al acceso a los canales multimedia, se halla que los canales más seguidos por la infancia son los relacionados con el consumo de vídeos de YouTube o TikTok. A pesar de que existe una amplia oferta de contenidos y canales (humor, viajes, música, política, etc.) y que pueden tener un importante potencial para generar mensajes transformadores y transgresores, los estudios realizados siguen afirmando que existen diferencias en el consumo que realizan las niñas y los niños. Mientras que las chicas ven contenido relacionado con belleza, bailes y maternidad, los chicos se centran en el consumo de deportes y videojuegos, configurándose así visiones binarias (Linares, et al., 2019; Merchan, 2014; Montes-Vozmediano, García & López, 2016; Lovelock, 2019; Aran-Ramspott, Fedele, & Tarragó, 2018; Ahern, Sauer, & Thacker, 2015). Cabe especificar que algunas investigaciones revelan que dentro de la red se tiende a generar un espacio sexualizado y basado en códigos binarios. Esto es, mientras que los vídeos realizados por mujeres se caracterizan por ser diseñados siguiendo esquemas tradicionalmente considerados como femeninos (maquillaje, belleza, moda y música), los de los chicos siguen normas tradicionalmente masculinas (bromas, acción y videojuegos) (Morris & Anderson, 2015; April, 2016; Aran-Ramspott, Fedele, & Tarragó, 2018).

Sobre esto último, en el estudio de April (2016) se asegura que se han generado canales específicos en YouTube y en otras plataformas como Twitch para hablar únicamente de videojuegos. Sin embargo, como se muestra en el estudio, la mayoría de los YouTubers, así como los seguidores de estos canales son hombres. Como la autora menciona “a male narrator overall would be evaluated as more credible to discuss gaming than a female narrator would be” (April, 2016: 53). Además, se constata que dentro de estos canales se vierten videos y contenidos con un importante arraigo machista y sexista, y así, se pueden detectar videos relacionados con la pornografía y violencia contra las mujeres (Montes-Vozmediano, García-Jiménez, & Menir-Sendra, 2018). Más concretamente, Thelwall y Mas-Bleda (2018) mencionan que dentro de la red hay

una mayor tendencia a arrojar comentarios sexuales contra las mujeres. Algunas investigaciones mencionan que, dentro de este mundo visual, se transversalizan intereses capitalistas (Montes-Vozmediano, García-Jiménez, & Menir-Sendra, 2018; Aran-Ramspott, Fedele, & Tarragó, 2018). Phelps-Ward y Laura (2016) aseguran que estos vídeos comerciales también se han convertido en un medio de consumo y comercialización de marcas hegemónicas y, por tanto, se estructura un modelo simbólico de “deber ser” que interfiere en los imaginarios y en la propia autoimagen.

Entre las marcas y las imágenes del cuerpo se configura un ideal pro-consumista blanco que, por una parte, hipersexualiza y cosifica los cuerpos femeninos, y por la otra, establece un continuum de la hegemonía blanca y capacitada. Ello, en suma, estructura una violencia simbólica que daña especialmente a las chicas más jóvenes, generándoles ansiedades por sus cuerpos (odiándolos y queriéndolos modificar) (Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016). Por ello, Philips (2013) afirma que en estos canales se configura una “matriz de dominación” donde se dan arraios hegemónicos por cuestión de racialidad, género, sexualidad, clase e identidades sexuales, reproduciéndose un imaginario hegemónico donde las narrativas de los Vídeos y discursos excluyen sistemáticamente a toda persona que no queda dentro de los marcos binarios hegemónicos.

Si bien se dan estas dominaciones y opresiones sobrevenidas del mundo *off-line*, como apuntan Philips (2013), Lovelock (2019), Acevedo-Callejas (2015) y Eckstein (2016), dentro de este canal se han creado resistencias propias de combate contra estas. Por ejemplo, Kendrat (2014: 37) señala que cada vez son más las mujeres que son creadoras de contenido; de hecho, de 2007 a 2013, era 5 veces mayor la presencia de mujeres, aún siendo parcialmente algo más alta la de los hombres (42% mujeres, 58% hombres). Asimismo, como apuntan las fuentes mencionadas en el párrafo previo, se pueden ver alianzas entre colectivos y alteraciones subversivas en sus narrativas. De hecho, su impacto ha generado que se creen dentro de esta plataforma sinergias sumamente complejas e interseccionales que transgreden los mandatos hegemónicos de género, racialidad, identidad sexual, sexualidad y capacidad.

Por esta realidad sumamente compleja y ambivalente que se nos presenta, resulta particularmente trascendente seguir explorando esta vía y cómo estas realidades convergen en la infancia. El marco metodológico permite comparar y dar respuesta a algunas cuestiones aquí planteadas.

2. METODOLOGÍA

Este capítulo encabeza el objetivo principal de: ahondar en los esquemas y códigos de género digitales que se están representando en la vida virtual de la infancia y que generan la denominada Tercera Brecha Digital de Género. En relación con este interés se especifican los siguientes objetivos específicos:

1. Concretar los canales digitales más utilizados por niñas y niños entre 6 y 12 años de Euskadi
2. Identificar estereotipos y códigos de género que se dan en los contenidos y usos de los videojuegos más usados entre los 6 y 12 años, y en concreto vinculados al ideario masculino
3. Visibilizar contenido (hetero) sexista que convive en el mundo digital de la generación Alfa
4. Averiguar posibles estrategias de afrontamiento ante los sesgos de género y el sexismo digital

Para la consecución de estos se presenta una metodología cualitativa, basada en grupos de discusión, que nos permite ahondar en el mundo virtual de las y los menores, analizando qué códigos de género se proyectan en lo que hacen, ven y siguen, además de identificar el posible contenido sexista. Hay que señalar que el análisis del contenido se realiza desde una perspectiva interseccional.

Para atender a este criterio y contar con una muestra heterogénea y que nos permita profundizar en factores complejos derivados del prisma interseccional, en la selección de la muestra se ha optado por colegios que puedan representar diferentes diversidades, y pertenezcan a distintos ámbitos socioeconómicos y culturales.

Específicamente, para el presente capítulo se recogen los datos obtenidos de cuatro colegios de Euskadi: uno concertado, dos públicos y uno privado. Estos colegios quedan distribuidos en base a criterios rural/urbano y tasas de migración y/o exclusión social. Se cuenta con la participación de 12 grupos de discusión con menores de 6 a 12 años, un total de 28 niñas y 54 niños. Para recoger la participación de la muestra se elabora la siguiente tabla de representación muestral:

Tabla 1. Tabla de representación de la muestra³. Elaboración propia

Sexo/ género	Tipología de colegio			Rural/Urbano		Edad				Ciclo escolar			Racializadas
	Público (2)	Privado (1)	Concertado (1)	Rural (2)	Urbano (2)	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	1º-2º	3º-4º	5º-6º	
Niñas 28 (34%)	18 (22%)	5 (6%)	5 (6%)	12 (15%)	16 (19%)	2 (2%)	9 (11%)	14 (17%)	3 (4%)	5 (6%)	8 (10%)	15 (18%)	8 (25%)
Niños 54 (66%)	37 (45%)	8 (10%)	9 (11%)	26 (32%)	28 (34%)	8 (10%)	8 (10%)	27 (33%)	11 (13%)	9 (11%)	13 (16%)	32 (39%)	15 (19%)
Total (100%)	55 (67%)	13 (16%)	14 (17%)	38 (47%)	44 (53%)	10 (12%)	17 (21%)	41 (50%)	14 (17%)	14 (17%)	21 (26%)	47 (57%)	23 (44%)

3. La mayor participación de niños que de niñas en los grupos de discusión viene explicada por la realidad demográfica de las aulas y los cursos seleccionados, donde había más chicos que chicas. También hay que indicar que no ha participado ninguna menor que se identifique como no-normativa.

Teniendo en cuenta la edad de las y los participantes, en los grupos de discusión se implementaron dinámicas de grupo adaptadas a la edad (dibujos y representaciones visuales) que guiaron el debate en torno a cuatro dimensiones previamente delimitadas y que responden a los objetivos planteados: infancia y acceso al mundo digital, tercera brecha digital de género, contenido cibersexista y mecanismos de afrontamiento.

3. RESULTADOS

El análisis de los resultados obtenidos se realiza a través de un método deductivo e inductivo basado en la categorización de las cuatro dimensiones antes mencionadas: infancia y acceso al mundo digital, tercera brecha digital de género, contenido cibersexista y mecanismos de afrontamiento.

3.1. Infancia y Acceso al Mundo Digital

Al igual que se recogía en el apartado teórico, la generación Alfa que ha participado en esta investigación ha crecido y convive con una infinidad de instrumentos tecnológicos. Sus relaciones más estrechas, incluso las vinculadas con su propia identidad y con sus dinámicas familiares y escolares, están mediadas por los instrumentos digitales. El mundo digital es parte de su ser, y de su forma de ver y observar el mundo.

Como se aprecia en sus discursos, su convivencia familiar queda interferida por una infinidad de instrumentos digitales, tales como móviles, ordenadores, Tablets, SmartTV y videoconsolas. De forma directa o indirecta, desde la infancia temprana, especialmente a partir de los 4 años, niñas y niños cuentan que han tenido una alta exposición al mundo digital;

“A los cuatro tenía Tablet, a los cinco ya, móvil”. (Niño, 9 años, C. público)

Yo suelo ver la Tablet con mi padre, pero para ver como vídeos de que un chico fue a África para grabar a los animales y ver como un vídeo de animales. (Niña, 6 años, C. concertado)

Yo tengo móvil, pero lo uso cuando mis padres se van de compras y lo dejan para hablar con ellos, y cuando tengo el móvil en casa me dicen qué estás jugando y les enseño pues ese juego solo a... ¿cómo se llama? a FIFA y Brawl Stars. (Niño, 10 años, C. público)

Utilizo el móvil de mi madre porque sé su contraseña. Mi padre no se lo cojo; lo cojo, pero no lo consigo. Y también se lo pongo en la cara a mi padre para desbloquear. Para desbloquearlo. (Niña, 7 años, C. concertado)

Yo, depende, porque a la Play Cuatro juego con mi padre; a veces juego con mis amigos, el móvil, le enseño cosas a mi hermana, a mis padres y así. La Tablet es de la familia, es de todos, de toda la casa. El ordenador es compartido en casa, pero el Chromebook es mío. Yo tengo un Chromebook para mí solo. (Niño, 11 años, C. público)

En casa están el ordenador, la habitación, la televisión y la Tablet. La Xbox yo tele tengo mi cuarto y a veces la veo y ahí tengo la Switch. Y luego en la sala tengo la Xbox y también la televisión y la tabla y la tele en la sala, la Play en la sala, el proyector en la habitación de mis padres y a veces en la sala. Y la Wii en la habitación de mi hermano. (Niña, 11 años, C. privado)

Yo tengo ordenador y reloj con Internet. (Niño, 6 años, C. concertado)

También su desarrollo académico queda condicionado por los instrumentos tecnológicos. Cuentan que todas sus aulas están equipadas con diferentes dispositivos, como SmartTV y ordenadores y, en los colegios con mayores recursos económicos, Tabletas personales. Mencionan que la dinámica escolar requiere de la utilización de plataformas digitales propias. En sus palabras:

Usamos Classroom, Matefic, multiplicación navideña, Google para buscar cosas, 'automultiplicación navideña'. (Niña, 8 años, C. privado)

Necesitamos los ordenadores para los deberes. Y tenemos WhatsApp de clase, también nuestros padres para pasar los deberes y cosas de clase. (Niño, 11 años, C. público)

La Tablet de clase la usamos para ver noticias, para seguir los deberes, para el classroom... (Niño, 7 años, C. concertado)

En clase utilizamos los ordenadores y las Tablets. Hacemos los deberes desde ahí, sobre todo matemáticas. Tenemos todos nuestros deberes en el 'Room'. (Niña, 10 años, C. privado)

El análisis de la información obtenida en los diferentes grupos nos indica que el acceso a estos dispositivos queda condicionado por la edad y el estatus socioeconómico de las familias. Es decir, los primeros contactos con el mundo digital (0-3 años) son a través de SmartTV y, en los casos con mayores recursos económicos, de las tabletas digitales. Su principal uso es el de ver vídeos. Posteriormente (5-6 años), acceden a canales, dispositivos y plataformas relacionados con videojuegos, y en las familias con mayores recursos económicos, está siendo una tendencia generalizada la compra relojes inteligentes.

Con 8-9 años, se observa que aquellas familias con menores recursos económicos y migrantes, por motivos laborales –tener horarios que impiden la atención y el cuidado de las y los menores— suelen tener un móvil, ya que, en sus palabras, este les ayuda, por un lado, a tener contacto con sus familiares en el extranjero, y por el otro, a avisar a sus familiares cercanos ante cualquier eventualidad; por el contrario, las y los menores no tienen teléfono propio hasta los 10 u 11 años.

En cuanto a los canales digitales que más visitan las niñas y los niños, se observa que, desde la primera infancia, acceden al canal de YouTube y a otras plataformas relacionadas con vídeos, videojuegos y plataformas de redes sociales, principalmente TikTok. Estos datos confirman y complementan los aportes teóricos realizados por Haenlein, et al. (2020), Delgado, et al. (2024), Brush, et al. (2023), y Maraver-López & Marín-Gutiérrez (2017).

3.2 Tercera Brecha Digital de Género

Si bien niñas y niños conviven en el mundo digital, no siendo significativa una brecha de género en cuanto al acceso –como se veía en el apartado teórico–, en sus discursos se detecta que los usos que realizan y el contenido que visualizan contienen sesgos y patrones de género. Sumamente representativa se considera la diferencia del uso de videojuegos en chicas y chicos; en el análisis comprobamos que, si bien al inicio chicas y chicos acceden a este mundo, a medida que crecen, este escenario se va masculinizando, tanto en participación como en contenido.

Es más, los videojuegos se acaban convirtiendo en espacios de escenificación de la masculinidad hegemónica (Connell, 1995). Tal y como se observa en sus discursos, estos juegos digitales se convierten en su entretenimiento favorito. Se puede afirmar, por tanto, que sus relaciones quedan mediadas por estos lugares digitales, en los que, además, la figura femenina o no tiene presencia, o en el caso de tenerla, queda condicionada por imagen cosificada y de segundo plano:

Yo antes veía Instagram, pero ya no me gusta, ahora me gusta más jugar al Brawl o a FIFA. (Niño, 10 años, C. público)

A mí me encanta el FIFA, GTV... Juegos de matar, y juego, además, con mi aita. A veces él está trabajando y nos conectamos para jugar. (Niño, 6 años, C. concertado)

Yo tengo el Fortnite, el Just Dance, el FIFA, el Mario y el Minecraft. Y juego con mi hermano. Casi todos los juegos son de matar, o de deporte. (Niño, 10 años, C. público)

Pues que, si muere y la otra persona se salva, es una supervivencia, o si no, matar a tu compañero. (Niño, 9 años, C. privado)

Pues el GTAV [Grand Theft Auto V] va de robar coches y matar a personas, y hay prostitutas. (Niño, 11 años, C. público)

Se pueden encontrar putas por ahí, en el videojuego y hay un puticlub. (Niño, 11 años, C. público)

Puedes hacer de todo, modificar tus carros, hablar con amigos y muchas cosas. Y juego al Call of Duty cómo se llamaba... y a Roblox, que son de guerra. (Niño, 8 años, C. privado)

Pues a mi padre o a mi hermano. Pero cuando quiero jugar al GTA, tiene que jugar conmigo mi hermano. Porque el GTA solo es de para 18 años. (Niño, 7 años, C. concertado)

Ahondando en sus códigos masculinos, se evidencia que desde edades tempranas quedan expuestos a contenidos con alta carga violenta y también vinculados con el deporte. Ello supone que el imaginario masculino quede aún vinculado en términos de fuerza, violencia y agresividad.

En cuanto a los contenidos que visualizan, desde la más temprana infancia tienen un amplio acceso a vídeos y contenidos digitales. Se observa que, en la primera infancia, tanto los niños como las niñas prefieren dibujos, juegos y canales infantiles y, en la mayoría de los casos, controlados y gestionados por sus referentes adultos. Sin embargo, según avanza la edad, observamos ya diferencias en las preferencias de niños y niñas. Mientras que las niñas optan por visualizar vídeos relacionados con música, dibujos, moda y maquillaje; los niños prefieren los videojuegos. He aquí algunos ejemplos:

Yo vídeos de fútbol, de terror y de terror. (Niño, 8 años, C. privado)

Cuando estoy aburrido voy al canal GAMER, y sobre todo veo vídeos de Fortnite. (Niño, 9 años, C. privado)

Cuando mi aita me enseña fútbol para que aprenda a jugar algunas jugadas y alguna cosa mejor, pues me enseña y luego vemos más cosas que nos pueden aparecer. (Niño, 10 años, C. público)

Yo veo en YouTube la serie la Reina, a una chica que hace rutinas de maquillaje y moda, pero sobre todo de maquillaje y cómo cuidarte la piel. (Niña, 11 años, C. público)

A ver, nuestras YouTubers son más de moda y cosas así, pero en clase la mayoría de nosotras vemos videos de música, videoclips. (Niña, 12 años, C. público)

Para las chicas, y especialmente a partir de los 8-9 años, TikTok se convierte en un canal sumamente presente en su cotidianidad. A pesar de que señalan que ven contenido diverso, se observa que existe una fuerte presión por la imagen y la representación corporal, siendo estos resultados congruentes con los hallazgos de investigaciones anteriores (Morris & Anderson, 2015; April, 2016; Aran-Ramspott, Fedele, & Tarragó, 2018). En definitiva, desde pequeñas comienzan a interiorizar códigos normativos corporales que reflejan roles estereotipados de género. Según nos cuentan:

Yo con 6 años tenía Instagram y TikTok, sobre todo para ver música (Niña, 9 años, C. privado)

Yo tengo TikTok y mi hermana también, lo utilizo para cómo mandar fotos para los pasteles o hacer algo, unos vídeos, eso. (Niña, 10 años, C. privado)

Yo veo el TikTok de mi ama para ver vídeos. Yo pues lo cojo y veo vídeos de skincare. (Niña, 8 años, C. concertado)

Utilizo TikTok para todo lo de rutina, lo de skincare, lo de cosas así. (Niña, 11 años, C. público)

Yo utilizo el móvil de mi madre porque tiene TikTok que puedo hacerme filtros y, por ejemplo, ponerme con una foto ponerme en el pelo de una chica y me hago una foto también vídeos puedo hacer. (Niña, 7 años, C. privado)

Yo tengo TikTok donde tengo vídeos y fotos subidas, y la gente me las ve y me comenta y me dicen que estoy guapa o que bailo bien. (Niña, 9 años, C. público)

En TikTok veo a Lola, Lolita, a mi prima, a una cuenta que se llama by horse, otra que se llama las tres amazonas, a María Navarro, todas que hacen contenidos de cosas de sus vidas, pintarse, vestirse.... Consejos. (Niña, 11 años, C. público)

Por último, sobre las plataformas didácticas, o aquellas encomendadas por el propio colegio, hay que comentar que no se identifican diferencias en cuanto a chicas y chicos, aunque bien es cierto que especialmente los chicos las definen como plataformas “aburridas” o de “poco interés”.

3.3 Contenido cibersexista en la infancia

Además de los sesgos de género, en los discursos de las niñas y los niños se detalla que, cuando acceden al mundo digital, también se exponen a contenidos nocivos, y muy expresamente a imágenes y vídeos (hetero)sexistas, y algunos casos con connotaciones pornográficas. Esta exposición, tal y como queda reflejada en las citas que se muestran a continuación, se da en los diferentes tramos de edad. Ellas y ellos no buscan este contenido, sino que es un contenido sobrevenido y que no pueden controlar que no les llegue:

Me aparecen igual memes y de repente sale el logo de ‘PornHub’ y al final parece otra cosa, ¿entiendes? Como un meme que estás entrando en ‘Pornhub’ y te sale también Netflix. (Niño, 11 años, C. público)

A veces aparecen personas desnudas, semidesnudas, siempre chicas. (Niña, 9 años, C. público)

Es que yo estoy haciendo como mis deberes Classroom y entonces se me pone una foto de una chica, y pues lo quito. (Niña, 7 años, C. concertado)

La ‘Ps Gamer’ cuando quiero cargar algo, pues que me sale algo malo. De fotos malas... (Niño, 8 años, C. concertado)

Mi primo está haciendo un TikTok, y le aparecen videos de chicas desnudas. (Niño, 8 años, C. privado)

Algunas veces como que buscas una serie y hay veces que me ha pasado que en otro país esa serie es de otra cosa y tiene el mismo nombre, pero es otra cosa. Y siempre es como mujeres desnudas, haciendo ‘cosas’. (Niña, 11 años, C. público)

Las reacciones de chicas y chicos son distintas. Son especialmente los chicos los que mayor normalización otorgan a estos contenidos, y para aquellos que mantienen una masculinidad más hegemónica (“los líderes de aula”) validan este contenido como “divertido”, y alardean de ver este contenido o expresan abiertamente que se lo muestran a compañeros de clase:

Hay uno en clase que nos enseña videos de ‘haciendo el amor’, pero para hacer la gracia, y los chicos dicen ‘mira esa tiene chocho’, ‘mira ese culo’, ‘como se le agarra con la mano’ ... (Niña, 12 años, C. público)

Yo tengo un sticker de una chica que se quita la toalla y enseña el culo, y otro de un sneaker que dice:¡tranquilo! Cómete un sneaker, y tiene forma de pene. Es que es un pene. Es un pene dentro de un ‘sneaker’ (los chicos del grupo se ríen). (Niño, 11 años, C. público)

Yo tengo un videojuego que puedo ver a ‘chochos’, puedo decir que se desnuda una chica (el resto de los chicos ríen). (Niño, 10 años, C. privado)

¿Os acordáis en mi casa que apareció un vídeo de muchos haciendo ‘cosas’? Lo quitamos muy rápido, ¡qué asco! (Niña, 10 años, C. privado)

Estas expresiones apuntan que el ideal de masculinidad hegemónica (Connell, 1995), aun siendo en una edad muy temprana, se estructura en base a la hipersexualización y cosificación del cuerpo femenino, y que incluso la violencia a las mujeres puede estar dentro de “lo normal”. Si bien no son la mayoría de los niños los que normalizan este contenido, estos discursos muestran que en la red digital la infancia se expone a este tipo de imágenes que, de no trabajarse adecuadamente con ellos y ellas, pueden tener efectos directos en su identidad.

3.4 Mecanismos de afrontamiento

La realidad nos proyecta un escenario donde persisten los mecanismos de género. Un sexismo que interpela a niñas y niños y que dibuja patrones sesgados, y que quedan estrechamente relacionados con inte-

reses capitalistas. No obstante, es preciso visibilizar que ante tal amasijo de interacciones sexistas, también —y a la par— se generan resistencias y mecanismos de afrontamiento. Primero, es necesario mencionar que todas y todos los participantes en los grupos de discusión han recibido desde el ámbito escolar talleres relacionados con el uso y el manejo de las tecnologías, siendo en muchos casos un contenido transversal del curso escolar. Tal y como se lee en sus palabras, aprenden a acceder a la red con seguridad y a manejar distintas plataformas de forma segura:

Un señor que vino a darnos un taller nos dijo que los videojuegos son como para mayores de, por ejemplo, el FIFA, para más de siete años. El Brawl Stars para más de 9 o 10. (Niña, 8 años, C. privado)

Tenemos muchos talleres de cómo usar tecnologías, incluso algunos son iguales que los anteriores, nos ayudan a reforzar. (Niño, 12 años, C. público)

Nos han venido a hablar de los derechos que tiene cada uno, pero hay que algunos todavía tendríamos que fortalecerlos un poco porque en mi clase los chicos aún tratan mal, o se ríen de videos. (Niña, 10 años, C. público)

Nosotros tenemos carteles en los ordenadores que pone: si no te funciona el ordenador dale a esto. No te metas en cosas, no uses la cámara del ordenador. A X le pusieron como un cartelito... (Niña, 7 años, C. concertado)

También cuentan que a nivel familiar se plantean cuestiones relacionadas con el uso responsable y respetuoso, y, muy especialmente, la evitación de contenido *indebido*:

Yo quiero ver películas, pero solo puedo ver películas que tengan por lo menos más de siete años. Mis amigos ven videos de 14 años, pero mis aitas me dicen que tengo que ver los videos con ellos. (Niño, 7 años, C. concertado)

Mi padre a veces nos dice: “poneros aquí para que yo os vea lo que hacéis”. Siempre vigila qué vemos, y dónde entramos. (Niño, 8 años, C. concertado)

A mí antes de darme de alta en algo, o antes de instalarme las aplicaciones, aparte de porque tengo el control parental, siempre tengo que pedir permiso a mi madre; si no, no puedo descargármelo y aparte pues me explica que tengo cuidado, que puedo hacer tal... (Niña, 11 años, C. público)

Me han dicho que si hay una pestaña que no me dejan que la quite y cosas así. Cuando ellos no están, que yo estoy solo con el ordenador, pues me ponen como un papelito ‘no te metas en esta pestaña y cosas así. No te metas en estas cosas’. (Niño, 9 años, C. privado)

A pesar de estos importantes hallazgos, es preciso incidir en que todas las estrategias, especialmente las educativas, quedan vinculadas más al uso técnico que a la gestión emocional y ruptura de estereotipos, y que incluso son sus propios referentes adultos los que en algunos casos normalizan estos sesgos y estereotipos de género, ya que como se ha podido evidenciar en discursos anteriores, muchos padres juegan con ellos a videojuegos violentos, y las madres dan a sus hijas sus dispositivos para que sigan cuentas de maquillaje y belleza en TikTok.

4. CONCLUSIONES

Los datos obtenidos en el desarrollo del estudio nos indican que las y los participantes de los diferentes grupos de discusión han estado presentes en el mundo digital desde que nacieron. Ahora bien, si ahondamos en los datos desde una perspectiva interseccional, no solo hallamos que los usos de los dispositivos varían según los recursos económicos familiares, sino que también se instauran diferencias de género que merecen ser analizadas.

Desde la primera infancia se comienza a estructurar la denominada Tercera Brecha Digital de Género. Es decir, todo aquello que las niñas y los niños ven y consumen queda condicionado por los patrones de género. Más concretamente, las niñas consumen contenidos relacionados con moda y maquillaje; mientras que el mundo virtual de ellos queda vinculado con el deporte y los videojuegos. Es preciso subrayar la presencia e importancia que tienen la “imagen” y la “corporalidad” en ellas. Desde que son muy pequeñas van interiorizando esta importante influencia, lo que puede llegar a generar en las niñas distorsiones sobre su propia percepción de la imagen, especialmente a través de redes como TikTok.

Asimismo, la investigación incide en la necesidad de seguir ahondando y trabajando en los parámetros masculinos, y muy especialmente en los vinculados al uso de los videojuegos, ya que estos aún siguen estando vinculados con la violencia, agresividad y la utilización del cuerpo femenino como objeto. Se observa que desde que son muy pequeños muchos de los chicos quedan expuestos a estos contenidos, y en algunos casos se llega incluso a normalizarlos.

Tampoco se puede obviar la accesibilidad que tienen al contenido sexista en la red, caracterizado por cuerpos e identidades femeninas que quedan objetivados y sexualizados, convirtiéndose en mecanismo de aval masculino y sostenimiento del sistema heteropatriarcal digital. Son, pues, estructuras machistas digitales que se interiorizan en los esquemas de pensamiento y comportamientos de las y los niños, y que, sin duda, necesitan de su análisis y trabajo de reflexión más profundo.

En cuanto a las resistencias y defensas que se articulan ante este fenómeno, se aprecia que desde los espacios formales e informales se están generando estrategias de afrontamiento pero que, para ser más efectivas, necesitan de una intervención más estructurada y coordinada. Por ello, las actuaciones preventivas y educativas que se desplieguen tanto por las familias como por la comunidad educativa deben plantearse desde un posicionamiento feminista e interseccional, donde se encuadren estrategias de afrontamiento más completas que no oculten el trasfondo sexista que se estructura en los usos y realidades digitales de la infancia.

En esta línea, se considera vital que se generen líneas de investigación e intervención, no solo con menores, sino también con sus referentes adultos, ya que, como este capítulo refleja, estos también proyectan y transfieren expectativas y normas de género, llegando a normalizar patrones nocivos como la violencia en el caso de los sesgos masculinos, y la violencia simbólica en las corporalidades femeninas. Al igual que sucede en todas las investigaciones, y más en las de corte cualitativo, el presente análisis no queda exento de limitaciones concretas y tanto el

análisis, como las conclusiones expuestas representan una realidad determinada acotada a un número concreto de participantes de Euskadi.

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Capítulo 7.

How Sportswomen Are Portrayed in Spanish Media

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1. INTRODUCTION

This analysis examines how female soccer players of the Spanish national team were portrayed by *Marca* –a major specialized newspaper— during the Euro 2022 to understand whether there was any discursive sexism or stereotyping. Examining women’s sports coverage can reveal broader patterns of discrimination against women, including, for example, a) existing salary disparities (Wicker et al., 2021); b) unequal media coverage (Cooky et al., 2013); and sexist commentary (Ayhan Demir, 2022). That is, sexist journalistic treatment of women can be an indication of a deeper problem, a reflection of an attitude that permeates all spheres, including female sports. Meanwhile, *Marca* is the most-read and influential sports newspaper in Spain (AIMC, 2023); therefore, it plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of female athletes. Critically analyzing *Marca*’s content can hold the publication accountable for biased or sexist reporting, track improvements in gender equality coverage over time, and provide concrete evidence to push for more equitable and respectful representation.

Sports journalism is a predominantly male territory, where gender inequalities and sexist prejudices have been legitimized (Gómez, Medina, and Ramón, 2017) in comparison to other types of journalism. Concretely, this study speaks of a) an underrepresentation of women in the coverage of sports compared to men, creating a quantitative inequality, and b) a generalized qualitative bias against women athletes using stereotypes and gender marks.

Female athletes occupy very little space in the sports press; this contributes to creating the impression that female athletes do not exist or have little value compared to men. That is, women's images and the information available are not enough to turn them into media references for girls and adolescents, thus reinforcing the absence of female athletes in the collective imagination (Gómez, Medina, and Ramón, 2017: 795). Besides, sports journalism typically uses sexist language that reinforces gender stereotypes and traditional roles, so women athletes rarely appear as protagonists of the news (Rojas, 2010). That is why sports journalism has been demanded to use a less stereotyped discourse. Recent studies on the presence and treatment of female athletes in the media point out that, although positive changes are seen with respect to previous studies in terms of visibility, women are still not the source of their own information, being their identification, with name and surnames, still lower than that of men. Furthermore, stereotypes and discursive biases remain, although examples of good use of language are also beginning to be seen (Sainz de Baranda, 2018).

Martínez and Perrino (2020) analyzed the sports section of a local newspaper in Spain, where they did not detect manifestly sexist treatment towards female athletes since the news usually focused on the sport itself, without using erotic expressions, undervaluing women or derogatory expressions related to gender. On the other hand, other studies on the presence and treatment of female athletes in the media point to gender inequality increasing in the coverage of sportswomen in specialized press in recent years (e.g., Sainz de Baranda, 2018). The Euro Cup in July 2022 in England, or EURO 2022, generated unprecedented

interest in women's football (UEFA, 2022). The final of the tournament, England versus Germany at Wembley Stadium, brought together 87,192 people, breaking the attendance record for a match (UEFA, 2022). This tournament was the most watched in history, breaking the attendance record for a game in both a women's and men's final, with an audience of 365 million worldwide (*Marca*, 2022).

The data prove that the following of women's football has grown. However, the sports press seems to be resistant to offering female athletes the same visibility as their male counterparts. In addition to making them invisible, sports media continues to be criticized for the dissemination, through language, of stereotypes, prolonging gender inequalities. This study uses an innovative framework that measures inclusiveness, balance, and fairness to find out to what extent *Marca* –the leading sports newspaper in Spain— uses sexism.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Methodological Strategy

The methodology is based on a cross-sectional, non-experimental design (Hernández, 2014). The study relies on quantitative and qualitative data obtained through a content analysis supported by a systematic and replicable reading, combining observation and data production (Andréu, 2001: 2). Specific variables employed to analyze the potential sexist treatment of sports practiced by women have been measured through an analysis sheet structured into categories (i.e., indicators of linguistic biases, discourse and gender stereotypes), criteria and consequences in *Marca* during Euro 2022.

The main objective is to analyze the information treatment of female athletes in a leading sports newspaper in Spain to discern whether it can be considered *sexist*. The specific objectives are a) to detect the

presence of linguistic or discursive sexism in the informative treatment of female athletes and b) to identify sexist stereotypes. These issues in media reflect and perpetuate wider societal sexism.

2.1.1. Sample

The context is the UEFA Women's EURO 2022, between July 6 and 31, 2022. The reasons for this choice are the pertinence, proximity, and emotion that make the event newsworthy and relevant. Besides, *Marc*a is the most-read and influential sports newspaper in Spain (AIMC, 2023).

Of the sixty-four pieces of information published by the newspaper during that period, the sample size was determined based on the following criteria: a) Genre: the pieces are news, reports, chronicles, or opinion articles published in the Women's Euro Cup section. Interviews or press conferences were not included since it was the players themselves or the coach who spoke, and short pieces lacked depth. b) Prominence: the information in the piece must relate to the national team or its players, as well as its coaching staff. c) Date: the information must have been published between July 6 (the start date of the tournament) and July 22, the day on which, after the elimination of Spain, the newspaper stopped publishing articles about the national team. The number of news contents analyzed was, therefore, 36 journalistic pieces (see Annex). Each piece is assigned a unique number for identification throughout the study.

2.1.2. Data Collection Tool

Category, criteria, and consequences structure the variables that help analyze potential sexism. The following indicators are established

for each category: a) Linguistic biases indicators: words or structures that are discriminatory towards women (Guerrero, 2012). b) Discursive biases indicators: discourse that offers a distorted or unfocused prominence of athletes and their achievements (Guerrero and Núñez, 2008). c) Gender stereotypes indicators: discourse about female athletes that employs sexist stereotypes (CSD, 2011). Table 1 gathers the indicators and is used as an analytical framework.

Table 1: Indicators of sexist treatment of sports information in the press

Category	Criterion		Consequence
Linguistic biases indicators	Generic masculine	Masculine to refer to women or people in general	Generate ambiguity, lacks informative clarity, and hides women and their achievements
	Stereotyped adjectivation	Adjectives that emphasize aesthetic or personal qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About beauty: e.g., “beautiful,” “handsome” • About physical attributes: e.g., “exuberant,” “spectacular” • About personality: e.g., “nice,” “shy” 	Maintain and promote traditional female gender stereotypes
	Incorrect attribution	Application of masculine nouns for female professionals, athletes, or technical professionals	Women may seem alien to sporting activity
	Masculine lexicon	Use of masculine sports jargon with no correspondence in the feminine	Consolidate the idea that sport is a field reserved for men and make the representation of women difficult

Category	Criterion		Consequence
Linguistic biases indicators	Colloquialisms	Derogatory or offensive terms to talk about female athletes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insults to offend or humiliate • Words or expressions that offend modesty, good taste, or religiosity • Use of old proverbs that pass moral judgement, advice or learning and could be derogatory • Use of old sayings that can express discrimination using humor or expressing a moral advantage • Use of lexicon concerning genitals: dysphemism related to male or female genitalia 	Propagate gender stereotypes, create offensive content, or incite violence
	Rhetorical figures	Use of the poetic function of language through lexicon or stereotyped expressions to attract and entertain the audience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphor: comparing two or more objects with no apparent relationship, giving them the same meaning • Metonymy: designating one thing by the name of another due to the relationship of contiguity or inclusion between the meanings of both • Hyperbole: intensify the obvious to decrease or increase the meaning, exaggerate, strengthen or make the facts funnier • Simile: Explicitly comparing two different objects 	Trivialize information about women athletes or transform successes into anecdotal facts
	Infantilization	Use of diminutives and nicknames that present women as girls	Deny maturity and present women as incapable of assuming the appropriate social role

Category	Criterion		Consequence
Linguistic biases indicators	Nameless women	Use of terms that homogenize and invisibilize women; refer to individual women as a homogeneous group. For example: "The athlete," "the athletes," "the player," "the players"	Make it impossible for the audience to discern individual women; send the message that women are incapable of individual success
	Gender identification	Terms that refer to athletes' gender to name them. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Women's soccer," "women's category" • "Female referee," "female athletes" • "The girl," "the girls" • "The lady," "the ladies" 	Present athletes as women rather than as professionals and strengthen the male group as the holder of the universal values of the profession
Discursive biases indicators	Condescending expressions	Phrases or words with paternalistic, indulgent or disparaging connotations to refer to female athletes	Consolidate the idea that women are <i>allowed</i> to be in sports out of pure consideration and not because they have the qualities to do so
	Presentation order	Present the man first when referring to the two sexes	Reinforce the idea that the male sex is a priority and has a privileged place in the sports field
	Exceptionality	Transmit female achievements as exceptional or extraordinary events	Promote androcentrism that governs sports information where men are the protagonist; greatness can only be <i>normal</i> in men
	Familiarity	Name professional athletes only by their first name or colloquially <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No last name • Article: add the article "<i>la</i>" ("<i>the</i>") to the proper name, which indicates familiarity 	Reduce women's social standing and add inappropriate familiarity

Category	Criterion		Consequence
Discursive biases indicators	Dependence	Name or show female athletes as dependent on men (e.g., fathers, coaches, boyfriends)	Represent athletes by their relationship with other men, subordinated to them
	Property	Name or show athletes as if belonging to the audience	Represent athletes as non-individual beings; objectify them
Gender stereotypes indicators	Androcentric gaze	Taking the male figure or the characteristics associated with men as a sports model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Making comparisons: establishing a simile with the sport practiced by men · Male referents: use male figures as referents 	Reinforce the idea that the universal reference in sport is men
	Beauty stereotypes	Discourse that emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of athletes or that presents them as sexual objects	Reinforce the idea that, in the patriarchal society, women's main worth is their body
	Sexist references	Highlight uninteresting aspects of the athletes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Anecdotes, accidental or minor events · Surprising or funny events · Fights, controversies, confrontations, or discussions · Rivalries emphasizing enmity between female athletes · Unpleasant or cruel information instigating morbid curiosity 	Disfavor women in media representation as professional athletes; instigate the idea that all women are enemies among themselves competing for male attention
	Identification	Cite athletes for their relationships, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Love relationship: "wife of," "girlfriend of" · Personal or family life: "mother of," "daughter of" 	Downplay the main reason the athlete should be the protagonist of the news

Category	Criterion		Consequence
Gender stereotypes indicators	Gender role assignment	Mention information about the athletes' family responsibilities, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about what was experienced within the home or the family • Information on private life 	Set aside or minimize the professional expectations or sporting achievements of female athletes and keep them within the limits of the private world and family role; family is most important

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on CSD (2011), Sainz de Baranda (2018), and Guerrero (2017).

CSD (2011), Sainz de Baranda (2018), and Guerrero (2017) offer a structured set of indicators that allows for a nuanced analysis. These indicators' presence in the stories denotes a lack of gender perspective and inclusive language and, therefore, contributes to the invisibility and incorrect representation of women in sports. To quantitatively measure the indicators and determine the degree of sexist treatment of each story, a score of 0.5 is assigned to each of them, giving them all equal weight (see Table).

Table 2: Scoring scale for sexist treatment indicators

Indicators			Score
Linguistic biases	1.	Generic masculine	0,5
	2.	Stereotyped adjectivation	0,5
	3.	Incorrect attribution	0,5
	4.	Masculine lexicon	0,5
	5.	Colloquialisms	0,5
	6.	Rhetorical figures	0,5
	7.	Infantilization	0,5
	8.	Nameless women	0,5
	9.	Sexual identification	0,5

Indicators			Score
Discursive biases	10.	Condescending expressions	0,5
	11.	Presentation order	0,5
	12.	Exceptionality	0,5
	13.	Familiarity	0,5
	14.	Dependence	0,5
	15.	Property	0,5
Gender stereotypes	16.	Androcentric gaze	0,5
	17.	Beauty stereotypes	0,5
	18.	Sexist references	0,5
	19.	Identification	0,5
	20.	Gender role assignment	0,5
Maximum Score			10

The sum of the indicators in each story is assigned a value that ranges from 0 to 1.9 (very low), to 10 (very high), 2 to 3.9 (low), 4 to 5.9 (neutral), 6 to 7.9 (high) and 8 to 10 (very high) to establish whether a journalistic story has a low, low, neutral, high or very high sexist treatment of female athletes.

Contrary to what is standard, here we have chosen to sometimes leave the examples in Spanish in the text (highlighting the relevant parts in bold) while offering their translations into English in endnotes. We provide the original citations in Spanish, allowing the observation of sexist language due, for example, to its grammatical gender system, which clearly marks masculine and feminine forms; whenever necessary, we offer the translation into English. The authors elaborated tables and figures.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Language Use Analysis

Here, the use of language is analyzed in detail employing the indicators in Tables 1 and 2.

3.1.1. Linguistic Biases Indicators

When feminine nouns are used, or references are made to feminine subjects, there is often a lack of grammatical gender concordance. For example, on several occasions, masculine adjectives are used to refer to the national teams, although the words “*selección*,” “*España*” and “*Finlandia*”¹ are feminine in Spanish, as in “*España y Finlandia serán los encargados [...]*”² (Story 6). Generally, in Spanish, words ending in -a are grammatically feminine, and in -o, masculine, and need to agree with adjectives. The correct term is “*encargadas*”. When mentioning the record of the Euro Cup, Story 2 says it has a “*dueño indiscutible*”.³ The same thing happens when mentioning champions (2 and 20). In other pieces (2 and 33), the English team is noted as the tournament’s “host” instead of “hostess”.

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1. “Selection,” “Spain” and “Finland”.
 2. “Spain and Finland will be in charge [...]”. Other examples include “*El resto de los integrantes de dicho sector son Alemania y Dinamarca [...]*” (in story 6) (“The rest of the members of said sector are Germany and Denmark [...]” (6); “[...] no quieren hablar de favoritos” (3), “[...] they do not want to talk about favorites” (3); “[...] España, favorito para las casas de apuestas y elogiado por sus rivales” (2), “[...] Spain, favorite for the betting houses and praised by its rivals” (2); and “*España y Alemania se ven emparejados*” (14), or “Spain and Germany look paired” (14).
 3. “Indisputable owner”

Masculine gendered terms are also used to refer to female athletes. For instance, “*la centrocampista defensivo*” (23)⁴. Likewise, instead of using adequate feminine pronouns, the use of masculine pronouns is observed to designate the athletes; for example, “*le mantuvo alejada*” (29)⁵ and “*el empate les mete en cuartos*” (27)⁶. Besides, the use of the masculine form is applied to groups or unidentified individuals in the audience, such as “*informados*” (6), “*aficionado*” (9), “*fisios*” (23), “*espectadores*” y “*seguidores*” (35)⁷.

The use of a stereotyped adjective is observed to describe athletes. For example, about player Sheila García, Story 22 says “*la menuda futbolista*”⁸. This reference to her physical appearance is unnecessary when what is intended to be highlighted are her abilities or her performance on the field.

The presence of the saying “*los mejores perfumes se guardan en frascos pequeños*” (13)⁹, referring to the small size of the soccer player Aitana Bonmatí, stands out as a colloquialism. Although the intention is to praise, stating that qualities can be hidden in physical smallness, the allusion to her physical appearance results in a stereotypical representation that emphasizes aesthetics and reinforces the idea that athletes must maintain their feminine characteristics (i.e., small, unthreatening) and fit into the male ideal of beauty. The saying was the introduction to a series of comments focused on the athlete’s body, including her size (“she is only 161 centimeters tall”) and the fact that she had to undergo a physical change to be able to compete.

4. “The “defensive midfielder” (23).

5. “She kept him away” (29).

6. “The tie puts them in the quarterfinals” (27).

7. “Informed” (6), “aficionado” (9), “physicians” (23), “spectators” and “followers” (35).

8. “The petite soccer player” (22). This is also a pun, as changing the word order it can mean “what a player!”.

9. “The best perfumes are kept in small bottles” (13).

Three examples of the use of metaphors that reinforce gender stereotypes are found in the analysis. The first case, “Spain is now a depressed patient who needs medication to be herself again” (10), refers to the emotional state of the team, which is to be in “a pit”. Lexical analysis is a component of an ideological analysis of discourses (Van Dijk, 2000). This metaphor disparages the team’s emotions by comparing it with a mentally disturbed woman, another stereotype. It also suggests women are not suitable for sports since they cannot control their emotions in the same way as men (Salido, 2021). The representation of athletes as patients with depression presents them as weak, too.

The second case, “the Cinderella of the group” (10), uses a metaphor based on the female stereotype of the poor and helpless woman who, by changing and improving her appearance (dress, hairstyle, and ornaments), manages to conquer the prince. On this occasion, the expression is used to refer to a weaker team that can make a splash.

The last example compares the athletes of the Spanish team with angels: “*España saca las alas ante Inglaterra*” y “*La futbolista del United es una ‘diabla’ dentro del campo [...] pero un ángel fuera de él*” (32)¹⁰. The metaphor takes advantage of the term “devils,” the nickname by which the Manchester United players are known,” the team where Ona Batlle plays, to whom the speech refers. Batlle is supposed to be an angel in her private life.

Sometimes, the players are mentioned by a hypocoristic name –a diminutive, abbreviated, or childish form—which is used as an affectionate, familiar, or euphemistic designation (RAE, 2023). These include “Mapi” (stories 3, 4, 7, 11, 21, and 33), which comes from María Pilar; “Misa” (3 and 4), instead of María Isabel; “Tere” (5), in place of Teresa; and “Patri” (15), instead of Patricia.

10. “Spain puts out its wings against England” and “The United soccer player is a ‘devil’ on the field [...] but an angel off it” (32).

Naming people by nicknames can infantilize them (Altés, 2004), suggesting they are incapable of assuming an important social role. For Bach and colleagues (2000), identifying people incorrectly in stories implies a lack of journalistic rigor and an implicit way of expressing opinions, suggesting irrelevance. This treatment insinuates women are like minors, undeserving of respect (Bach et al., 2000). The same could be said about male players (e.g., “Pedri” or “Rodri”), although it is not the focus of this investigation.

Childish terms are also observed in the information to refer to the athletes, such as “pupils” (5) or “the little one” (25). In the first case, the term is used to emphasize that female athletes obey a (male) teacher or leader; the second case refers to the youngest member of the national team. This abbreviation, which means little or young girl, can cause a cognitive effect of undervaluation due to paternalism and condescension (Guerrero, 2017).

Instead, the use of first and last names should be constant in the coverage of events where women and men participate (CSD, 2011). Lledó (2009) indicates that, no matter how young athletes are, they should be treated with respect.

Unnecessary gender identification is frequent, including references to the “Women’s Euro Cup” (stories 2, 5, 6, 7, 19, 31, and 35), “women’s competition” (18 and 20), and “female competitions” (35). The cases of “Spanish women’s team” (18), “women’s red team” (24), and “women’s team” (35) denote a precision that is not seen when the media talks about men’s teams. Meanwhile, “Spanish women’s sport” (18), “women’s sport” (18), and “women’s soccer” (20 and 35) accentuate the idea that men practice the football of reference.

3.1.2. Discursive Biases Indicators

Stories speak of how the team overcame hardship to be able to participate (e.g., Story 5) in reference to injuries suffered by some players

at the beginning of the competition. However, journalists often underestimate the mental and physical conditions of the athletes who face the tournament. Women can be, just like men, competitive and resilient without the need for extraordinary motivation.

This bias is observed in news items about the audience record numbers for Euro 2022. The androcentrism present in the sports discourse is perceived by the portrayal of the tournament's popularity as an exception. "RTVE has bet on women's soccer competitions for some time now, and the strategy is paying off, as the audience is getting hooked" (Story 20). The story suggests that RTVE trusted an event that nobody believed; the competition is presented as a disrupter within the sports field.

Likewise, headlines such as "New record for women's football on RTVE: 2.4 million viewers (23.3%) watched Spain-England" (35) emphasize the same idea and contribute to presenting the achievements of women's sport as a surprise or a bet, almost inconceivable.

Marca repeatedly mentions athletes only by their first name. When athletes are named only by their first name, without surnames, positions, or attributions, their social standing is reduced (Altés, 2004). Again, this is a common practice for some male players (e.g., "Raúl" or "Nacho"), but it seems to happen consistently for female players.

This is what happens in the following examples: "Mapi" (stories 3, 4, 7, 11, 21 and 33); "Misa" (3 and 4); "Mariona" (5, 7, 9, 16, 23 and 33); "Leila" (7, 19 and 23); "Lucía" (7, 9, 16 and 21); "Sheila" (7, 16, 21, 23 and 33); "Athenea" (7, 16, 17, 28, 33 and 34); "Alexia" (8, 15 and 36); "Irene" (9, 15, 34 and 36); "Aitana" (12 and 23); "Laia" (23); "Ona" (23); "Esther" (27, 28, 30, 33 and 34); "Olga" (28 and 31); "Marta" (29), and "Amaiur" (33). The cognitive effect that is produced is that the acceptable feminine sphere is the family or intimate sphere.

Other times, *Marca* echoes the coach's words, like in the case of "Tere" (Story 5). While this familiarity may reflect closeness between coach and player, journalists could choose to reproduce the coach's words while adding the full name in parentheses.

The athletes are often referred to by the phrase “*las de*” before the name of the coach, “Vilda’s” players (Story 17) or “his players” (36), representing them as dependent on a male figure, projecting a relationship of inferiority and professional dependence. Another way of establishing relationships of dependency between the players and the coach is using terms such as “pupils” (5).

The possessive pronoun “our” is often used to refer to the national team (stories 10, 15, 16, 24, 27, 30 and 33). This use involves representing the athletes as belonging to the audience. The use of expressions such as “our female Red” (Story 24) or “our goalkeeper” (24) is also observed, highlighting ownership.

3.1.3. Gender Stereotypes

There is one occasion where the story compares women’s with men’s sports: “She idolizes Ángel Di María, a soccer player with whom she shares a physical profile and performance [...]” (Story 22). The writer uses a male soccer player as the reference, the standard. For CSD (2011), stereotyping exists when an athlete is defined based on their physical characteristics repeatedly, reinforcing and strengthening gender stereotypes that focus on physical features. This happens in Story 13, which repeatedly insists on referring to the player’s smallness.

Sometimes, athletes are presented as sexual objects. For instance, the uniforms “[...] have been adapting to the women’s bodies, with more open collars, shorter pants, tighter tracksuits or appropriate tops” (Story 26). This adaptation implies lower necklines and the use of tops instead of t-shirts, too.

This sexist bias is found in three stories that deal with irrelevant facts about rivalries, anecdotes, and controversies. The first magnifies a misunderstanding between two players (María León, from FC Barcelona, and María Isabel Rodríguez, from Real Madrid) (Story 4). In this story,

the two athletes are represented as adversaries, contributing to the stereotype that women are, by nature, enemies of each other.

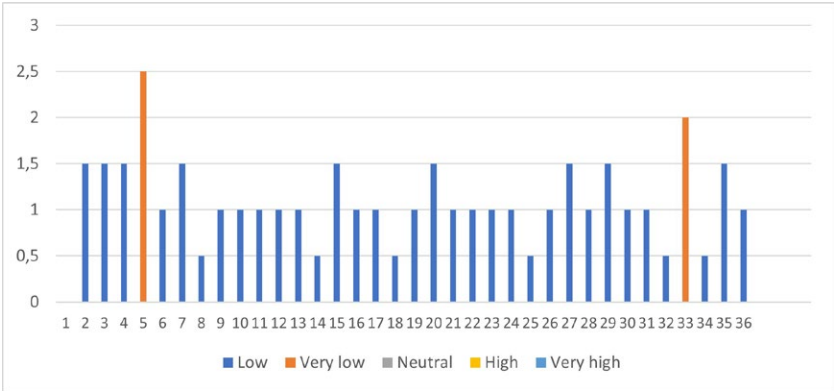
The second sexist reference arises from a news story about the celebration of a goal (Story 12). Instead of focusing on Aitana Bonmatí, the player who scored it, the technicalities of her strategy, or its consequences for the match, the news story focuses on how she celebrated it, disadvantageously portraying her. For Alfaro, Bengoechea, and Vázquez (2010), the scarcity of news about women’s sports activity turns an anecdote into a category.

Finally, a news item focuses on the impracticality of wearing white shorts when players menstruate (Story 26). Although a worthy topic, this event is not significant in the context of the European competition.

3.1.3. Quantitative Results

As Figure 1 indicates, there are indicators of sexist treatment in 35 of the 36 news stories (97.2%).

Figure 1: Degree of sexism

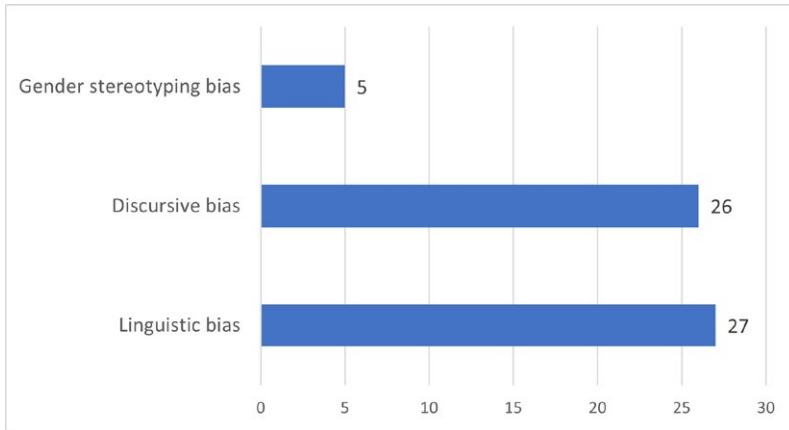


All the articles present a degree of sexism; however, it is low, ranging from 0.5 points (8, 14, 18, 25, 32 and 34), 1 point (6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 31 and 36) and 1.5 (2, 3, 4, 7, 15, 20, 27, 29 and 35). Only two pieces overcome 2 points (33 and 5), exhibiting a low degree of sexism. These results indicate that, in the observed sample, none of the stories offer more than five indicators of sexism.

The worst score obtained is for Story 5, signed by the initials DLP, in which language biases (infantilization and gender identification) and discursive biases (condescending expressions, familiarity, and dependency) are found. This story is an example of the typical biases found in the sports press. On the other hand, only Story 1 lacks any indicator of sexism. Authored by David Menayo, it focuses on Alexia Putellas' decision to remain in training with her teammates despite her injury and withdrawal from the tournament.

Figure 2 identifies the indicators that appear most frequently in sports information. A more significant presence of linguistic biases is observed (27), followed by discursive biases (26), and finally, a much lower presence of transmission of gender stereotypes (5). In future research on the treatment of sports practiced by women, it would be interesting to analyze the categories that the results of this study indicate as the most common, giving greater importance (score) to their indicators when establishing the degree of sexism.

Figure 2: Most common sexist categories



The most frequent type of sexism in sports reporting is the linguistic bias, followed by the discursive bias; stereotyping is less recurrent.

In the category of linguistic biases, the most repeated indicator is the generic masculine (16%). The lack of concordance stands out. In second place is gender identification (13%). This is followed by infantilization of female athletes (12%). Next, within the use of rhetorical figures (3%), the metaphor appears as *Marca*'s favorite resource to convey gender stereotypes. Finally, stereotypical adjectives and colloquialisms are used in 1% of the stories. Incorrect feminizations, masculine lexis without feminine correspondence, and unnamed women are three indicators that do not appear in any of the stories.

In discursive biases, excess familiarity appears in 29% of the stories. Next, the property indicator (9%) and dependency (4%) stand out. There is one story using condescending expressions. The exceptionality can be seen in 3% of the stories. The presentation order indicator was not found in any of the information analyzed.

Gender stereotyping was observed in 4% of the stories exhibiting sexist references. Although minor, stereotyping was varied, as it is ex-

pressed by highlighting the rivalry between players, using anecdotal events as if newsworthy, and stressing controversy. The beauty stereotype is also present in 3% of the stories. The androcentric gaze is found on one occasion. The sexist identification and gender role assignment do not appear in any of the journalistic pieces.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The informative treatment of the female soccer players by *Marca* confirms the existence of language that invisibilizes athletes, uses sexist terms, and devalues their achievements. That is, the representation of female athletes cannot be compared to that of their male counterparts, even during the highest-level competitions.

This study corroborates others that confirm the Spanish sports press offers women unequal coverage (Gómez, Medina, and Ramón, 2017). This asymmetry (Rojas, 2010) makes it essential that when women appear in the media, they are treated appropriately. However, women in sports are reported as extraordinary exceptions, suggesting that men's sports are the norm. Salido (2021) emphasizes that elite sport requires attributes associated with masculinity, such as a calm mind and rationality, something that is often underestimated in female athletes.

Although Real Academia Española –an institution whose mission is to ensure the stability of the Spanish language— admits the use of the *generic masculine* (RAE, 2024b), this position is increasingly disputed (Gutierrez and Boselli, 2008). Its employment in a competition where women have the leading role contributes to making the athletes and the fans invisible (Alfaro, Bengoechea, and Vázquez, 2010; Guerrero, 2017). In a competition full of female protagonists, this use is at least ambiguous. A more inclusive option is the use of the double form (e.g., “*informados e informadas*”) or, to avoid repetitive language, a collective noun, as RAE recommends (2024a).

Excess familiarity and infantilization contribute to reducing women's importance and make it difficult for the audience to recognize individual female leaders. Women are called by their first name at ages when men are already recognized by their last name (Alfaro, Bengoechea, and Vázquez, 2010). Although some male players are indeed known by their nicknames, *Marca* exhibits an excess of familiarity with female players. This familiarity, added to the invisibility of women's sports, makes it difficult for people to identify female frontrunners (Sainz de Baranda, 2018). Some players are exceptions; for example, Alexia Putellas is often referred to by her full name. This decision could indicate that contenders of international eminence deserve treatment reserved for male athletes (Alfaro, Bengoechea, and Vázquez, 2010). However, sports journalism should make women visible as professionals (Sainz de Baranda, 2018).

Gender identification is employed to avoid an incorrect association with the male tournaments. Nevertheless, these competitions never happen at the same time; therefore, the clarification is unnecessary. When the media talks about simply "the national team," it is assumed that it is the men's. Besides, clarifying it is the women's team reinforces the idea that the female variety is an exception. Guerrero (2017) notes that while the masculine grammatical gender in Spanish is employed as universal, the feminine only has a specific use. Alfaro, Bengoechea, and Vázquez (2010) point out that the cognitive effect is that athletes are seen, rather than professionals, as women. These are superfluous terms that contribute to strengthening the historical supremacy of men in soccer (Bengoechea and Calero, 2003).

Female players are sometimes represented as dependent on men; for instance, when they are introduced as a man's "pupils," establishing a relationship of subordination that prevents athletes from being perceived as independent professionals. Showing female athletes as dependent on men is a common feature in news stories. This is also common when the athletes are men; however, because the coaches are usually men, the

dependence of women on men is more problematic (Sainz de Baranda, 2018).

The level of sexism in Marca's stories is low, but its mere presence indicates that the problem is perverse and challenging to eradicate.

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6. ANNEX

#	Date	Title	URL
1	6/7/22	Alexia Putellas seguirá en Inglaterra como parte del grupo	https://acortar.link/oQIcH4
2	6/7/22	La Eurocopa sale a escena en el ‘teatro de los sueños’	https://acortar.link/3vIgUN
3	7/7/22	España Fútbol Club	https://acortar.link/g1U6LL
4	7/7/22	Mapi–Misa y la intrahistoria de un vídeo que encendió las redes	https://acortar.link/pigarX
5	7/7/22	Jorge Vilda: “cuando pasó lo de Alexia, la concentración era casi un funeral”	https://acortar.link/U2uBLM

#	Date	Title	URL
6	8/7/22	España–Finlandia: horario y dónde ver hoy el debut de la selección en la Eurocopa femenina 2022	https://acortar.link/sIZEJE
7	8/7/22	España vuelve a sonreír	https://acortar.link/nF8x1G
8	8/7/22	Sin reina, buenas son guerreras	https://acortar.link/LtECCC
9	8/7/22	Una para todas y todas por Alexia	https://acortar.link/zsna6d
10	8/7/22	España lo tiene claro: con todo y contra todo	https://acortar.link/dYulf3
11	8/7/22	Un mural de Mapi León, protagonista en las calles de Londres	https://acortar.link/CZG8Ic
12	8/7/22	Aitana le dedicó el gol a Alexia Pustellas... que llevaba el '14' de Virginia Torrecilla	https://acortar.link/PEXZqt
13	10/7/22	Aitana Bonmatí: en la mente de una MVP	https://acortar.link/TRtUda
14	11/7/22	España sabe ganar a Alemania	https://acortar.link/tlj6pJ
15	12/7/22	España saca músculo ante Alemania	https://acortar.link/8uo8N3
16	12/7/22	Los errores condenan a España	https://acortar.link/L6ndFP
17	12/7/22	Estas son las cuentas para ver a España en cuartos	https://acortar.link/jmaUp7
18	12/7/22	Las Embajadoras de Iberdrola visitan a la selección española femenina de fútbol	https://acortar.link/zjhQnD
19	12/7/22	No todo puede ser culpa de Jorge Vilda	https://acortar.link/qSOC5Z
20	13/7/22	España engancha a la audiencia	https://acortar.link/Gfpk4n
21	13/7/22	España vuelve a perder 1221 días después	https://acortar.link/BYcBc2
22	14/7/22	Sheila García toma el mando	https://acortar.link/howZyA
23	14/7/22	Laia Aleixandri entrena al margen a dos días de la final contra Dinamarca	https://acortar.link/bB-WxXm
24	14/7/22	A mí sí que me gustó España	https://acortar.link/5I3nuc
25	15/7/22	Claudia Pina, la 'peque' pide paso	https://acortar.link/MqeIn8

#	Date	Title	URL
26	15/7/22	El blanco se pone a debate por la regla	https://acortar.link/RBvsow
27	16/7/22	A España no le vale sólo pasar ante Dinamarca	https://acortar.link/eowKk1
28	16/7/22	Cardona desatasca un partido en el que España tuvo que remar	https://acortar.link/vdn9Gg
29	18/7/22	Dos llamadas que cambiaron la vida de Marta Cardona	https://acortar.link/DLQRgQ
30	19/7/22	España necesita los goles de Esther	https://acortar.link/OtDHKa
31	20/7/22	Inglaterra-España: horario, canal y dónde ver hoy en TV y online la Euro-copa Femenina 2022	https://acortar.link/NowLEe
32	20/7/22	España saca las alas ante Inglaterra	https://acortar.link/Z5SpFK
33	20/7/22	España se despide de la Eurocopa con la cabeza alta	https://acortar.link/KLBcLI
34	21/7/22	Si hay que perder, que sea así	https://acortar.link/yffEj6
35	21/7/22	Nuevo récord para el fútbol femenino en RTVE: 2,4 millones de espectadores (23,3%) vieron el España-Inglaterra	https://acortar.link/ThR2SO
36	22/7/22	Este equipo quiere más	https://acortar.link/Q5iYB5

Capítulo 8.

Desinformación Digital en la Era de Deepfakes. Propuestas Legales y Ciudadanas para Reducirla

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1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Los organismos europeos, a nacionales e internacionales, han puesto en marcha diferentes iniciativas para combatir la desinformación y promover el libre acceso a la información. Hasta 2025, cuando entre en vigor el nuevo Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083 del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo, de 11 de abril de 2024, por el que se establece un marco común para los servicios de medios de comunicación en el mercado interior y se modifica la Directiva 2010/13/UE (Reglamento Europeo sobre la Libertad de los Medios de Comunicación), las recomendaciones no siempre se convierten en obligaciones, son muy variadas y a veces, locales. Hasta el momento, no se han introducido suficientes mejoras para mejorar la dinámica periodística y el conocimiento de la información pública por parte de los ciudadanos.

Al mismo tiempo, las plataformas sociales y la aparición de noticias en las cuentas de los medios, junto con las de los periódicos digitales, han complicado la situación. Aunque el valor percibido de la suscripción a periódico es insignificante en muchos casos, el público prefiere informarse gratis en plataformas, con los peligros que ello entraña para la desinformación.

Esta propuesta es el resultado de un proyecto competitivo I+D, auspiciado por la Comunidad de Madrid, y coordinado entre España, Portugal y Reino Unido, para estudiar la trazabilidad de la información

europea y combatir la desinformación de la ciudadanía. Teniendo en cuenta todas estas circunstancias, el equipo de este proyecto ha estudiado y analizado las iniciativas ciudadanas europeas en las plataformas sociales para encontrar espacios comunes de actividad que propongan y fomenten la comunicación contra cualquier forma de desinformación. Se hace especial énfasis en los vídeos, fotos, audios y *deepfakes*, que atacan a mujeres tanto famosas como anónimas. Los *deepfakes* engañan, transmiten mensajes que las protagonistas de las imágenes nunca han pronunciado y facilitan la desinformación. En tiempos de agitación política y desconfianza en los dirigentes, estos vídeos encuentran un público política o ideológicamente polarizado, deseoso de compartir y reenviar archivos audiovisuales. Una ciudadanía crítica y cívica sólo puede lograrse mediante una alfabetización digital completa y cívica en el acceso, consumo y síntesis de la información.

Los *deepfakes* o mentiras profundas (en castellano) son archivos de vídeo, imagen o voz manipulados mediante un *software* de inteligencia artificial. Parecen auténticos y reales, por la calidad de las máscaras que generan y cómo éstas son insertadas en otro archivo original, con otros protagonistas distintos. Aunque los *deepfakes* existen desde finales de 1990, cobraron interés internacional en 2017, cuando un usuario de Reddit publicó material pornográfico falso con los rostros de varias actrices famosas y puso a disposición el *software* que permite hacer cualquier montaje. Desde entonces, las investigaciones académicas se han centrado especialmente en sus peligros, pues atenta contra la imagen, construyendo un imaginario falsificado y perverso, muy difícil de detectar; aunque no ha sido suficiente para frenar el fenómeno (Cerdán y Padilla, 2019; Cano Fernández, 2024; Garriga, Ruiz y Magallón, 2024; Montesinos García, 2024; Sánchez-Esparza, Palella-Stracuzzi y Fernández-Fernández, 2024; Trujillo Cabrera, 2024).

El problema es que la gran mayoría de la pornografía deepfake está dirigida contra mujeres. Un estudio de Deepttrace Labs revela que el 96% de todos los videos *deepfake* en línea eran pornográficos y no consensuados, y que las mujeres eran las protagonistas (Romano, 2019). En

los sitios web dedicados a exclusivamente a la pornografía *deepfake*, el 100% de los videos estaban dirigidos a mujeres (Romano, 2019). Otro estudio algo más reciente de Home Security Heroes indica que el 98% de todos los videos *deepfake* en línea son pornográficos, y el 99% de ellos estaban dirigidos a mujeres (Hao, 2021). Estos datos muestran que las mujeres son víctimas de la pornografía *deepfake*, lo que subraya la naturaleza de género de esta forma de abuso facilitado por la tecnología.

El origen del término *deepfake* se remonta a la década de 1990, aunque su conceptualización y desarrollo como técnica específica no se atribuye a un individuo en particular. No obstante, su diseminación y popularización se produjo a partir de un evento concreto en 2017, cuando un usuario o usuaria anónima de la plataforma Reddit, que adoptó el seudónimo “Deepfakes”, publicó una serie de contenidos audiovisuales manipulados (Cole, 2017; Cerdán y Padilla, 2019). Esta persona empleó técnicas de inteligencia artificial (IA) para superponer los rostros de celebridades internacionalmente conocidas, como Gal Gadot, Maisie Williams o Taylor Swift, en cuerpos de actrices de la industria pornográfica, generando así material audiovisual de carácter sexual, aparentemente protagonizado por dichas figuras públicas (Cole, 2017; Cerdán y Padilla, 2019).

Este hecho puso de manifiesto la accesibilidad y potencial de difusión de esta tecnología, suscitando debates éticos y legales en torno a la manipulación de contenido audiovisual y sus implicaciones en la era digital. La rápida propagación de estos vídeos manipulados y la subsiguiente atención mediática contribuyeron significativamente a la popularización del término *deepfake* y a la concienciación sobre las capacidades y riesgos asociados a esta tecnología emergente. El evento marcó un punto de inflexión en la percepción pública de la manipulación audiovisual basada en inteligencia artificial, iniciando un discurso más amplio sobre sus aplicaciones, implicaciones éticas y posibles medidas regulatorias. La nueva herramienta ganó tantos adeptos que “Deepfakes” creó un *subreddit* sólo para este tipo de vídeos. Dos meses más tarde, contaba con 15.000 suscriptores. Esta comunidad extendió

internacionalmente el uso de la palabra *deepfake* para referirse a todos los vídeos creados y manipulados con IA (Cerdán y Padilla, 2019; Padilla, García y Cerdán, 2020).

Para complicar la situación, otro usuario de Reddit, identificado como “Deepfakeapp”, creó una aplicación llamada *FakeApp*, para que cualquier persona, sin experiencia en informática, pudiera hacer sus propios vídeos mediante IA. Esta *app* de escritorio estaba basada en el algoritmo de “Deepfakes” (Cole, 2017). Sirve para hacer cualquier tipo de vídeo, aunque, desde el principio, la gente parece más interesada en seguir creando pornografía falsa. Todas las herramientas que se necesitan para hacer uno de estos vídeos son gratuitas y están disponibles, desde entonces, junto con un tutorial para principiantes (Beamonte, 2018).

Para entender la expansión de los *deepfakes*, hace falta reconocer esa naturaleza de Reddit. Esta plataforma es una gran comunidad en línea, donde los usuarios pueden participar en discusiones, compartir contenido y votar sobre las publicaciones y comentarios de otros usuarios (Brustein, 2023; Flesch, 2023; Hurtado y Ttito, 2024). Fue fundada en 2005 por Steve Huffman y Alexis Ohanian (Cerdán y Padilla, 2019) y su característica distintiva es una estructura original, basada en subforos temáticos llamados *subreddits*. Cada uno de ellos se centra en un tema específico y los usuarios pueden publicar contenido relacionado, participar en discusiones y votar sobre la relevancia y la calidad de las contribuciones.

El concepto y las tecnologías subyacentes, como el aprendizaje profundo (*deep learning*), han evolucionado a lo largo del corto periodo de tiempo que ha pasado desde 2017, gracias a los vertiginosos avances en IA. El término *deepfake* ha ido desplegándose, como lo hacían el *deep learning* (aprendizaje profundo) y las *fake news*, saliendo de Reddit para referirse ahora a cualquier contenido multimedia, de vídeos o de imágenes, que utilice algoritmos de aprendizaje profundo para crear resultados realistas y convincentes.

De hecho, el término “profundo”, derivado del latín *profundus*, denota una cualidad de hondura, bajeza o abismalidad, implicando una dirección o movimiento hacia el fondo o el interior de algo hasta alcanzar su límite (Cerdán y Padilla, 2019). Esta connotación de profundidad no se circunscribe exclusivamente a una orientación descendente, sino que puede aplicarse también a dimensiones elevadas, como se evidencia en la expresión “alta mar”. En el contexto audiovisual, el concepto de *deepfake* o mentira profunda se erige como una metáfora que trasciende la mera manipulación superficial, adentrándose en los confines más recónditos de la recreación de la realidad. Esta profundidad conceptual se manifiesta cuando la percepción convencional se ve incapaz de discernir entre lo auténtico y lo falaz, desafiando los límites de la verosimilitud y planteando interrogantes fundamentales sobre la naturaleza de la verdad en la era digital (Cerdán y Padilla, 2019; Padilla, García y Cerdán, 2020; Sánchez, Palella y Fernández, 2024; Trujillo Cabrera, 2024).

La creación de *deepfakes* ha sido tristemente impulsada por la disponibilidad de grandes conjuntos de datos (*big data*), el aumento en la potencia computacional y el desarrollo de algoritmos avanzados de aprendizaje profundo. Si bien las tecnologías subyacentes han estado en desarrollo durante muchos años, el término *deepfake* y su popularización han crecido a medida que estas técnicas se utilizaron más ampliamente en la manipulación de contenido multimedia pornográfico; el más preocupante, perverso y misógino.

La tecnología *deepfake*, caracterizada por la manipulación y generación de contenido audiovisual mediante inteligencia artificial, ha suscitado un creciente interés en diversos ámbitos de la sociedad contemporánea. Esta técnica, que abarca desde la sustitución facial en vídeos hasta la síntesis de voces y la creación integral de material visual y sonoro, ha encontrado aplicaciones notables en el contexto español, particularmente en el sector publicitario. Destacan ejemplos paradigmáticos, como las recreaciones póstumas de figuras emblemáticas de la cultura española, entre ellas Lola Flores y Salvador Dalí, realizadas con

el consentimiento expreso de sus herederos, lo que ha permitido explorar nuevas fronteras en la comunicación comercial.

Asimismo, la industria cinematográfica y televisiva ha incorporado esta tecnología para la producción de efectos especiales de vanguardia, ampliando las posibilidades narrativas y estéticas del medio audiovisual. En un plano más cotidiano, los denominados *cheapfakes*, una variante menos sofisticada y deliberadamente menos verosímil de los *deepfakes*, han emergido como un fenómeno cultural en el ámbito de la comunicación interpersonal, principalmente en forma de memes. Estos últimos representan una manifestación más accesible y lúdica de la manipulación digital, cuyo propósito primordial es el entretenimiento y la sátira, en contraposición a la búsqueda de realismo y persuasión característica de los *deepfakes* más elaborados. Este espectro de aplicaciones ilustra la versatilidad y el potencial transformador de estas tecnologías en diversos contextos sociales y creativos. Sin embargo, los *deepfakes* y *cheapfakes* en comunicación interpersonal o en redes como WhatsApp, merecen un estudio aparte, que ahora no tiene cabida por su enjundia y valor necesarios.

Para combatir la proliferación de *deepfakes*, se han propuesto diversas estrategias, como la educación digital para mejorar la alfabetización mediática, la cobertura mediática que expone y critica los vídeos falsos durante campañas electorales, y las restricciones institucionales que prohíben el uso de estas tecnologías por parte de empresas, universidades y gobiernos (Padilla, García y Cerdán, 2020; González San Juan, 2023; Ballesteros-Aguayo y Ruiz del Olmo, 2024; del Barrio y del Barrio Fernández, 2024). Inicialmente, la principal inquietud se centraba en la pornografía no consentida. No obstante, en los últimos tiempos, la atención se ha desplazado hacia las implicaciones políticas de esta tecnología, ya que la desinformación generada por *deepfakes* se ha convertido en una preocupación creciente y representa una amenaza potencial para la integridad de los procesos democráticos (Gonzalo, 2024; Valle de Frutos, 2024).

El estudio de las tecnologías *deepfake* es crucial para comprender y abordar las disparidades de género en el ámbito tecnológico, ya que estas herramientas a menudo perpetúan y amplifican los sesgos existentes contra las mujeres.

2. METODOLOGÍA

Los *deepfakes* inducen a error, transmiten mensajes no pronunciados y facilitan la desinformación. En tiempos de desazón política y desconfianza en los dirigentes, estos vídeos encuentran un público político o ideológicamente polarizado y ávido de compartir y reenviar archivos audiovisuales. Por ello, este capítulo aborda los *deepfakes* en TikTok desde un enfoque novedoso y optimista, examinando los progresos en el ámbito legal y social, que fomentan una lucha informada y educativa contra estos vídeos manipulados.

Se persiguen dos objetivos principales: 1) Analizar y comentar en profundidad el Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083 del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo, de 11 de abril de 2024, con el fin de comprender su alcance, implicaciones y potencial impacto en el panorama de los medios de comunicación en la Unión Europea; y 2) Examinar y sintetizar las mejores prácticas y recomendaciones para la detección de *deepfakes*, utilizados en desinformación política, a través del estudio de contenido creado por *TikTokers* especializados.

Para la consecución del primer objetivo, se ha empleado una metodología basada en el análisis documental y la interpretación jurídica. El análisis incluye el examen detallado del texto completo del Reglamento: exposición de motivos, estructura, considerandos, artículos y anexos. La interpretación se refiere a la consideración de su coherencia interna y su relación con el marco jurídico existente, o inexistente, de la UE. Tanto el análisis, como la interpretación, seguirán una línea teleológica (valorando cómo siguen los objetivos declarados del Reglamento y cómo se reflejan en sus disposiciones específicas) y una línea prospectiva (iden-

tificando potenciales áreas de impacto en la práctica periodística, la pluralidad mediática y la libertad de expresión).

Para llevar a cabo el segundo objetivo, se ha utilizado una metodología mixta, que combina elementos de los enfoques cuantitativos y cualitativos. Como primer paso, se realizó un análisis exhaustivo de cuentas de TikTok, distinguiendo una muestra curada de 20 *TikTokers* que ofrecen orientaciones de alta calidad para identificar *deepfakes* en el contexto de la desinformación política. Esta selección abarca contenido en inglés y en español, asegurando una perspectiva lingüística y culturalmente diversa. La recolección de información se llevó a cabo a finales de septiembre de 2024, proporcionando una instantánea temporal del fenómeno. Aunque esta captura representa un momento específico, ofrece una visión panorámica valiosa del desafío que suponen los *deepfakes* en Europa y de las estrategias potenciales para contrarrestarlos. Teniendo esa muestra curada de cuentas, se examinaron detalladamente los vídeos de las cuentas seleccionadas, con un enfoque especial en las recomendaciones y técnicas propuestas para la detección de *deepfakes*.

Este análisis permitió identificar patrones, tendencias y estrategias comunes entre los creadores de contenido. Se observaron similitudes en las técnicas recomendadas, la frecuencia de ciertos consejos, y la evolución de las estrategias de detección. Basándose en el análisis de los vídeos, se elaboró una lista exhaustiva de las recomendaciones más frecuentes y relevantes para la detección de *deepfakes*. Esta compilación sintetiza las mejores prácticas identificadas en el conjunto de datos, incluyendo técnicas visuales, auditivas y contextuales para identificar contenido manipulado. Se categorizaron las recomendaciones según su complejidad, efectividad percibida y frecuencia de mención entre los creadores de contenido.

Esta información se interpretó en el marco de cómo estas recomendaciones se alinean o contrastan con las disposiciones del Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083, analizado en el primer objetivo. Este enfoque permitió evaluar la adecuación del marco regulatorio frente a las realidades

prácticas de la detección de *deepfakes*, identificando posibles brechas o áreas de mejora en la legislación. La integración de estos hallazgos con el estudio del Reglamento europeo puede ayudar a identificar sinergias potenciales entre las prácticas emergentes en la detección de *deepfakes* y los objetivos legislativos, así como posibles desafíos en la implementación efectiva de las medidas regulatorias.

3. RESULTADOS

3.1. Propuestas Legales contra la Desinformación Digital en la Era de *Deepfakes*

La evolución legislativa que culminó en la aprobación del Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083 del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo representa un hito significativo en la regulación de los servicios de medios de comunicación en el mercado de la Unión Europea. Este proceso legislativo, caracterizado por su complejidad y duración, refleja los desafíos inherentes a la formulación de políticas en un entorno mediático en rápida evolución. La génesis de esta iniciativa legislativa se remonta a varios años atrás, durante los cuales se desarrollaron numerosos debates, consultas y revisiones. Este prolongado período de gestación estuvo marcado por avances y retrocesos, evidenciando la complejidad de alcanzar un consenso en un ámbito tan sensible como la regulación de los medios de comunicación y la lucha contra la desinformación.

Un aspecto particularmente desafiante del proceso fue la necesidad de adaptar el marco regulatorio a un panorama tecnológico en constante cambio. La velocidad de la innovación en el sector de las comunicaciones digitales a menudo superaba el ritmo de los procedimientos legislativos europeos, lo que requirió una continua reevaluación y ajuste de las propuestas normativas. Finalmente, el 17 de abril de 2024, la Comisión Europea aprobó el Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083, estableciendo un marco común para los servicios de medios de comunicación

en el mercado interior y modificando la Directiva 2010/13/UE. Este Reglamento, conocido como el Reglamento Europeo sobre la Libertad de los Medios de Comunicación, representa un esfuerzo comprensivo por abordar los desafíos contemporáneos en el ámbito de la libertad de prensa, la desinformación y la trazabilidad de la información en el contexto digital. La adopción de este Reglamento marca un punto de inflexión en la política de medios de la UE, proporcionando un marco jurídico actualizado que busca equilibrar la protección de la libertad de expresión con la necesidad de combatir la desinformación y garantizar la transparencia en el ecosistema mediático europeo.

Desde su preámbulo, ofrece una perspectiva crítica y multifacética sobre el papel de las plataformas digitales en el ecosistema mediático actual, particularmente relevante en el contexto de la desinformación y los *deepfakes*. La observación subraya cómo estas plataformas han alterado fundamentalmente la dinámica de distribución y consumo de contenidos mediáticos, actuando como intermediarios omnipresentes entre los productores de contenido y las audiencias. Asimismo, subraya la tendencia de estas plataformas a favorecer contenidos polarizadores y desinformativos, lo cual es especialmente preocupante en el contexto de los *deepfakes*. Estas tecnologías de manipulación audiovisual avanzada, como ya se ha comentado, pueden amplificar significativamente el potencial de desinformación, aprovechando los algoritmos de las plataformas que tienden a priorizar contenido sensacionalista o controvertido.

El preámbulo también aborda el impacto económico de estas plataformas en los medios tradicionales, señalando cómo la redistribución de los ingresos publicitarios ha afectado la sostenibilidad financiera del sector mediático. Esta situación podría potencialmente comprometer la capacidad de los medios para invertir en verificación de hechos y detección de *deepfakes*, elementos cruciales en la lucha contra la desinformación. A la vez, la Comisión Europea reconoce la necesidad de que los servicios mediáticos alcancen una escala significativa para mantener su competitividad y responder a las necesidades de la audiencia. En el

contexto de los *deepfakes* y la desinformación, esto podría interpretarse como una llamada a la consolidación de recursos para desarrollar tecnologías y prácticas más robustas de verificación y detección de contenidos manipulados.

Unas líneas más adelante, el Reglamento añade otro problema de desinformación, reconociendo la injerencia de algunos países sobre el trabajo de los medios e incluso, el espionaje:

(...) el buen funcionamiento del mercado interior de los servicios de medios de comunicación se ve puesto en peligro por prestadores, incluidos los controlados por determinados terceros países, que practican de forma sistemática la desinformación, o la manipulación de información y la injerencia (Comisión Europea, 2024).

Esta cita pone de manifiesto una preocupación crítica generalizada, sobre la integridad del mercado interior de servicios de medios de comunicación en la Unión Europea, destacando las amenazas que representan ciertos actores, particularmente aquellos bajo control extranjero. El texto identifica tres prácticas problemáticas principales: la desinformación sistemática, la manipulación de información y la injerencia, presentándolas como estrategias deliberadas que socavan el ecosistema informativo europeo.

La mención específica a terceros países sugiere una dimensión geopolítica en esta problemática. Un aspecto especialmente alarmante es el abuso de las libertades del mercado interior, donde estos actores aprovechan las estructuras diseñadas para fomentar la libre circulación de servicios y la competencia justa, pero con fines perjudiciales. Esto no sólo distorsiona la competencia, sino que también amenaza la integridad del espacio informativo europeo, obstaculizando el correcto funcionamiento de las dinámicas del mercado, como argumenta el Reglamento. En el contexto más amplio de la desinformación y los *deepfakes*, esta observación subrayaría, al mismo tiempo, la complejidad del desafío que enfrentan las autoridades reguladoras y los legisladores, quienes deben abordar los aspectos técnicos de la manipulación de contenidos,

y considerar cualitativamente cómo estas prácticas se entrelazan con las estructuras económicas y legales.

El punto 6 del preámbulo amplía estas ideas, destacando varios desafíos críticos que enfrenta el mercado interior de los servicios de medios de comunicación en la Unión Europea. Señala la insuficiencia de mecanismos de cooperación normativa entre las autoridades reguladoras nacionales, como un factor que podría afectar negativamente al mercado. Esta falta de coordinación se presenta como un obstáculo para combatir eficazmente la desinformación y la manipulación de información por parte de actores que operan en múltiples sectores mediáticos y jurisdicciones.

El texto también aborda la problemática de la asignación sesgada de recursos económicos, particularmente a través de la publicidad estatal, que puede funcionar como una forma de subvención encubierta a ciertos medios de comunicación. Esta peligrosa, pero habitual, práctica se identifica como especialmente perjudicial para el sector de la prensa, ya afectado por la disminución general de los ingresos publicitarios. Además, subraya los retos que plantea la transformación digital para las empresas mediáticas, especialmente para las más pequeñas, en los sectores de la radio y la prensa. Se destaca, en este punto, la dificultad que estas empresas enfrentan para competir en igualdad de condiciones con las plataformas en línea, que han asumido un papel predominante en la distribución de contenidos digitales. En el contexto de desinformación y *deepfakes*, esta argumentación proporciona un marco valioso para analizar cómo las estructuras del mercado y las disparidades regulatorias pueden exacerbar los problemas relacionados con la manipulación de la información. A la vez, subraya la necesidad de un enfoque coordinado a nivel europeo para abordar estos desafíos, destacando la interconexión entre las cuestiones económicas, regulatorias y tecnológicas en el panorama mediático contemporáneo.

En el punto 14, el Reglamento se centra en otro aspecto que se hace imprescindible en el marco de este trabajo: las noticias y los contenidos sobre cuestiones de actualidad, que

(...) pueden llegar a la audiencia en formatos diversos, como documentales, programas de variedades o de entrevistas, y pueden difundirse de diversas maneras, por ejemplo, subiéndolos a plataformas en línea” (Comisión Europea, 2024).

Este apartado reconoce la diversidad de formatos y canales, y subraya la necesidad de una comprensión amplia y flexible del concepto de *medios de comunicación* en la era digital, que ya se ha comentado en las primeras líneas del trabajo y en la motivación del proyecto financiado. El texto legal europeo resalta el papel fundamental de los servicios de medios de comunicación de calidad como baluarte contra la desinformación y la manipulación de información, especialmente frente a la injerencia de agentes extranjeros. Esta aserción resalta la importancia del periodismo profesional y ético en el mantenimiento de un ecosistema informativo saludable y resistente a influencias malintencionadas.

El texto también aclara que el derecho a la pluralidad de contenidos mediáticos no implica una obligación para los prestadores de servicios de medios de comunicación de adherirse a normas no establecidas explícitamente por ley. Esta precisión busca equilibrar la promoción del pluralismo con el respeto a la libertad editorial y la autonomía de los medios. En el contexto de esta investigación, y pensando de nuevo en desinformación y *deepfakes*, el Reglamento Europeo aquí proporciona un marco valioso para discutir la importancia de mantener un ecosistema mediático diverso y libre, aunque racional y maduro, como estrategia fundamental para contrarrestar la propagación de información falsa o manipulada.

El punto 15 se refiere a las solicitudes de cumplimiento de obligaciones de los prestadores de plataformas de intercambio de vídeos. Este apartado es muy relevante porque aborda directamente las plataformas de intercambio de vídeos, como un medio común para la difusión de

deepfakes, y establece un mecanismo de cooperación transfronteriza para hacer cumplir las obligaciones de estas plataformas, lo cual es crucial para combatir la desinformación a nivel europeo.

Siguiendo la misma idea, el artículo 16 fomenta el intercambio de mejores prácticas entre autoridades reguladoras, lo cual es esencial para abordar nuevas formas de desinformación como los *deepfakes*; y menciona específicamente la asistencia en aspectos técnicos, que son cruciales para la detección y manejo de las mentiras profundas, objeto principal de este trabajo. Igualmente, aborda la prominencia de los servicios audiovisuales de interés general, lo que puede ser importante para contrarrestar la desinformación con contenido verificado.

A continuación, el artículo 17, sobre Coordinación de las medidas relativas a servicios de medios de comunicación de fuera de la Unión, es particularmente relevante porque se centra en servicios de medios de comunicación de fuera de la UE, que pueden ser fuentes de *deepfakes* y desinformación dirigidos a audiencias europeas. Aborda específicamente los riesgos para la seguridad pública y establece el mecanismo para la coordinación de medidas entre Estados miembros, crucial para abordar amenazas transnacionales de desinformación.

Los artículos 18, 19 y 20 del Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083 son también muy útiles para este capítulo, especialmente al centrarse en el control de la transparencia, la gestión de contenido en plataformas de gran tamaño y las prácticas para combatir la desinformación en medios digitales. Concretamente, el artículo 18 introduce disposiciones fundamentales para la transparencia y responsabilidad editorial en las plataformas de gran tamaño (incluyendo redes sociales de gran escala como TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, etc.). Al exigir que los prestadores de servicios de medios (1.a–d) declaren que cumplen ciertos requisitos de independencia y responsabilidad editorial, fortalece el control sobre los contenidos y ayuda a diferenciar los medios serios de aquellos que puedan estar influenciados por terceros con agendas específicas.

Después, la restricción de contenidos generados por IA sin revisión humana (1.e) es fundamental para la detección de *deepfakes* y otros contenidos manipulados. Al prohibir la publicación de contenidos generados por IA sin supervisión editorial, se ayuda a garantizar que los medios que usan IA, como los *deepfakes*, tengan un nivel mínimo de control humano, una herramienta clave para reducir la propagación de desinformación automatizada.

Tras ello, el artículo otorga una estructura clara para que los prestadores de servicios de medios gestionen rápidamente las reclamaciones y restricciones que les afectan en estas plataformas. La obligación de notificación y derecho de réplica dentro de un plazo de 24 horas permite que los medios de comunicación defiendan sus publicaciones de forma expedita, reduciendo el riesgo de censura indebida. Esto es útil para la identificación de patrones de censura y para el desarrollo de políticas de moderación más equitativas. En el contexto de desinformación y *deepfakes*, puede servir para crear acuerdos sobre contenido cuestionable, proporcionando un mecanismo menos drástico que la eliminación total.

El artículo 19 aborda el diálogo estructurado entre plataformas de gran tamaño, medios de comunicación y sociedad civil. Este tipo de interacción es crucial para que las plataformas y medios discutan sus experiencias con la moderación y se desarrollen y compartan prácticas efectivas en el combate de la desinformación. A la vez, enfatiza en la independencia de los medios, para que los usuarios tengan acceso a contenido informativo verificado y neutral. En el contexto de desinformación y *deepfakes*, este apoyo es fundamental para fortalecer a los medios creíbles y debilitar la circulación de contenido falsificado o manipulado. A la vez, de nuevo promoviendo la autorregulación para proteger a los usuarios de desinformación y manipulación, anima a las plataformas a ser más proactivas en sus políticas internas contra la desinformación, para responder de manera más ágil y específica a los casos de manipulación digital.

Después, el artículo 20 fija la cuestión del derecho de los usuarios y usuarias a personalizar la oferta de medios en plataformas y dispositivos. Esta medida empodera a las personas, que pueden ajustar las preferencias de su experiencia en dispositivos y plataformas. Y teniendo en cuenta los objetivos y objeto de este estudio, puede ser sumamente útil en el contexto de desinformación, ya que permite minimizar la exposición a contenidos sospechosos o a fuentes no verificadas. A la vez, la obligatoriedad de que los dispositivos y plataformas muestren claramente la identidad de los prestadores de servicios de medios aumenta la transparencia, ayudando a que los usuarios diferencien el contenido proveniente de medios verificados del contenido potencialmente manipulado o no fiable.

Los siguientes artículos, hasta el 29, que es el último, abordan cuestiones de medición de audiencias y de concentración empresarial, sin detalles trascendentes para este estudio. No obstante, ha quedado bien reflejado cómo se aborda la perentoria cuestión de mitigar los riesgos asociados con la desinformación y los *deepfakes* en el contexto de los servicios de medios de comunicación en la Unión Europea. El texto enfatiza, en varios artículos, la importancia de establecer directrices que minimicen el potencial abuso de las funcionalidades mediáticas, particularmente por parte de prestadores de servicios implicados sistemáticamente en la difusión de desinformación, manipulación informativa e injerencia.

La mención específica a “prestadores de servicios de medios de comunicación controlados por determinados terceros países” subraya, en varias ocasiones, la dimensión geopolítica de esta problemática, reconociendo la existencia de actores extranjeros que podrían utilizar estas tácticas para influir en el panorama informativo europeo. Esta observación es particularmente relevante en el contexto de la proliferación de *deepfakes* y otras formas sofisticadas de manipulación de contenidos. El Reglamento Europeo propone un enfoque multifacético para abordar estos desafíos, sugiriendo la participación de diversos actores en el proceso de revisión y regulación.

3.2. Propuestas Sociales contra la Desinformación Digital en la Era de *Deepfakes*

Para esta sección, primero, se seleccionaron 20 cuentas de TikTok que ofrecen guías de calidad sobre cómo identificar *deepfakes* en desinformación política, incluyendo contenido en inglés y español, para captar diversidad lingüística y cultural. La recolección de datos tuvo lugar a finales de septiembre de 2024, brindando una instantánea del problema de los *deepfakes* en Europa. Se analizaron los vídeos de estas cuentas, identificando patrones y estrategias comunes en las recomendaciones para detectar *deepfakes*, y se compiló una lista de técnicas visuales, auditivas y contextuales, clasificadas por complejidad y eficacia. Finalmente, se compararon estas prácticas con las disposiciones del Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083, evaluando si el marco regulador europeo se alinea con las prácticas emergentes y destacando áreas de mejora en la legislación.

La lista de *TikTokers* proporciona una instantánea del fenómeno. Aunque esta captura representa un momento específico, ofrece una visión valiosa del desafío que suponen los *deepfakes* en Europa y de las estrategias potenciales para contrarrestarlos, que comparten estos divulgadores. De acuerdo al segundo objetivo del capítulo, los 20 más importantes en esta descarga, serían:

1. *@ac2ality*: Con más de 5 millones de seguidores, esta cuenta española, comenta las noticias del día con un tono cercano y un ritmo propio de la red social china. Entre sus vídeos más virales, varios se refieren a noticias de *deepfakes* y cómo combatirlos.
2. *@deeptomcruise*: Habla en inglés y tiene 5 millones de seguidores. Su propietario, Chris Ume, es un conocido creador de *deepfakes* de alta calidad y ha trabajado en algunos de los *deepfakes* virales más realistas de Tom Cruise. En su cuenta, explica cómo reconocer anomalías en expresiones y movimientos oculares que podrían delatar un *deepfake*. Tiene gran presencia en TikTok, Instagram y YouTube, y ha sido entrevistado en numerosos medios de comunicación.

3. @redunotv: Desde Bolivia, con 3,9 millones de seguidores, esta cuenta ofrece algunos de los vídeos más virales sobre detección de deepfakes, en tono cercano y divulgativo.
4. @tromepe: La cuenta oficial del diario *Trome*, de Perú, dice ser el diario en español más leído del planeta, con 3 millones de seguidores. Entre sus vídeos de más éxito, comentan noticias de *deepfakes* y dan consejos de cómo detectarlos.
5. @magicsingh: El ilusionista Magic Singh, en inglés, con más de 2,1 millones de seguidores, explica trucos de magia e ilusionismo, creados con tecnologías digitales.
6. @facttechz: La cuenta oficial del YouTuber indio, Rajesh Kumar, en inglés, atesora más de un millón de seguidores. Ofrece numerosos vídeos educativos sobre tecnología, y varios de ellos se refieren a la creación y detección de *deepfakes*.
7. @PolitiFact: Cuenta en inglés, con 205.000 seguidores. Comparte técnicas para identificar manipulación de medios en el contexto político.
8. @MediaWise: Cuenta en inglés, con 160.000 seguidores. Ofrece consejos prácticos para detectar *deepfakes* y desinformación política. Hecha por jóvenes, para jóvenes.
9. @dev_gabo: Gabriel Modia, en español, con más de 142.000 seguidores, analiza noticias sobre tecnología digital e IA, con un enfoque educativo y de creación de espíritu crítico.
10. @malditobulo: Cuenta en español, con 93.000 seguidores. Comparte vídeos educativos sobre noticias y anuncios que puedes ser falsos y manipular la opinión pública.
11. @fastcheckcl: Desde Chile, con 88.000 seguidores, esta cuenta se centra en verificar noticias de actualidad.
12. @Chequeado: Cuenta argentina, con más de 36.000 seguidores, que combina *fact-checking* con educación sobre *deepfakes*.

13. @fullfactorg: Organización británica, con más de 35.000 seguidores, que ofrece consejos para identificar manipulación de medios en inglés.
14. @newtraltiktok: Cuenta española, con 33.000 seguidores, centrada en *fact-checking* y alfabetización mediática.
15. @colcheck: Cuenta colombiana, en español, con más de 31.000 seguidores, especializada en verificación de hechos y detección de *deepfakes*.
16. @FactCheckOrg: Cuenta oficial de FactCheck.org, en inglés, con más de 17.000 seguidores. Esta ONG ofrece vídeos educativos sobre verificación de hechos, pensando en elecciones.
17. @fact_check5: Con más de 17.000 seguidores, esta cuenta en inglés ofrece pequeños consejos de verificación de noticias, incluidos *deepfakes*, en vídeos divulgativos.
18. @factous_es: Cuenta en español, con 16.000 seguidores. La periodista y politóloga española, Alba Moreno, es protagonista de los vídeos explicativos de esta cuenta, iniciativa de Fundación Maldita.es, sobre verificación de noticias.
19. @FactCrescendo: Cuenta en inglés, con casi 4.000 seguidores. Desde Sri Lanka, ofrece contenido sobre verificación de hechos, incluyendo *deepfakes*.
20. @VerificadoMX: Cuenta en español, con 1.817 seguidores. Este proyecto se centra en el impacto de *deepfakes* en el entorno político mexicano y educa sobre la identificación de estos vídeos falsos y su importancia para combatir la desinformación.

A partir del análisis detallado de los vídeos de las cuentas seleccionadas, se ha elaborado una lista exhaustiva de las recomendaciones más frecuentes y significativas en el ámbito de la detección de *deepfakes*. Esta recopilación incluye un conjunto de directrices que abordan múltiples aspectos tanto técnicos como observacionales, proporcionando

un enfoque integral para identificar contenido manipulado. Las recomendaciones no sólo consideran los elementos visuales y auditivos presentes en los *deepfakes*, sino también otros indicadores contextuales y metodológicos, que pueden mejorar la precisión en su detección. Estas guías ofrecen, así, una herramienta valiosa para quienes buscan fortalecer su capacidad de identificar manipulaciones digitales en un contexto de desinformación creciente.

- **Asincronía labio-fonética:** La discordancia entre los movimientos labiales y la emisión sonora puede revelar imperfecciones en la síntesis audiovisual de los *deepfakes* de baja calidad.
- **Rictus facial atípico:** Las anomalías en la dinámica expresiva facial, caracterizadas por una rigidez o artificialidad notoria, pueden indicar una generación artificial deficiente.
- **Discontinuidades cromáticas dérmicas:** Las transiciones abruptas o incongruentes en la pigmentación cutánea, particularmente en las zonas de unión facial y cervical, pueden denotar manipulación.
- **Ausencia de micro características faciales:** La carencia de elementos dermatológicos distintivos como nevus, cicatrices o variaciones en la textura dérmica puede sugerir una renderización facial simplificada o de poca verosimilitud.
- **Irregularidades en la frecuencia de oclusión palpebral:** La ausencia o atipicidad en los patrones de parpadeo puede indicar limitaciones en la replicación de micro movimientos faciales por parte de los algoritmos generativos.
- **Desalineación oculomotora:** La falta de coordinación en la orientación binocular o en relación con la estructura facial global puede evidenciar deficiencias en la síntesis de vídeo de la mirada.

- Anomalías en la refracción y reflexión óptica: La inconsistencia en la representación de fenómenos ópticos en superficies reflectantes, como cristales de gafas comunes, puede delatar una generación sintética.
- Degradación en la representación de ornamentos: La disminución de la resolución o coherencia en la representación de accesorios, joyas, pendientes o collares, puede indicar limitaciones en la integración de elementos periféricos realistas.
- Cinemática capilar anómala: Un cabello demasiado estático o con movimientos poco naturales puede ser indicativo de una manipulación.
- Imprecisiones en la línea de implantación capilar: La simplificación excesiva en la representación de la frontera trico facial puede indicar limitaciones en la síntesis de vídeo de estructuras capilares complejas y realistas.
- Incongruencia en la expresión emocional: La falta de coherencia entre las emociones expresadas facialmente y el tono de voz puede revelar un *deepfake*.
- Distorsiones anómalas: Vibraciones o distorsiones inusuales durante movimientos faciales también pueden ser un signo de manipulación digital.
- Discrepancias en la articulación fonética: Las inconsistencias entre los patrones de movimiento labial y las características fonéticas individuales conocidas pueden sugerir una síntesis de habla imprecisa.
- Heterogeneidad en la calidad de imagen: La presencia de áreas de vídeo con disparidad notable en la resolución o calidad de imagen puede indicar la inserción de elementos generados por *deepfake*.

5. CONCLUSIONES

Este análisis aborda la complejidad de los *deepfakes* como amenaza significativa en la era digital, especialmente en su capacidad de difundir desinformación y manipular la percepción pública en contextos políticos y sociales. El análisis del Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083 ha permitido evaluar los esfuerzos legislativos europeos para contrarrestar estos riesgos mediante un marco regulatorio que se adapta a los rápidos avances tecnológicos y promueve la transparencia en la generación y distribución de contenido mediático. Sin embargo, persisten áreas de mejora en la legislación, en particular, en la implementación práctica de medidas preventivas y en la coordinación entre entidades reguladoras para enfrentar las amenazas transnacionales de desinformación. La evolución constante de la tecnología *deepfake* presenta un desafío dinámico y multifacético para la sociedad europea.

En este contexto, plataformas como TikTok han trascendido su concepción inicial como meros espacios de entretenimiento, emergiendo como ecosistemas complejos donde confluyen información, desinformación y contenido manipulado. El estudio de las prácticas de detección de *deepfakes* difundidas por creadores de contenido en TikTok ha sido igualmente revelador. Las recomendaciones recopiladas demuestran la creciente sofisticación de las técnicas de identificación visual, auditiva y contextual que la comunidad en línea ha desarrollado y compartido. Estas estrategias, basadas en patrones como la asincronía labio-fonética, irregularidades en la expresión facial o anomalías en la refracción óptica, son una respuesta directa a las limitaciones actuales de la regulación para frenar eficazmente la propagación de *deepfakes*. Además, la colaboración entre los usuarios en redes sociales resalta el potencial de la alfabetización digital como herramienta crucial para mitigar el impacto de la desinformación.

Al integrar los hallazgos del análisis del Reglamento (UE) 2024/1083 y las prácticas ciudadanas de detección, se puede concluir que una aproximación conjunta, que combine esfuerzos legislativos y educación

digital, es esencial para enfrentar los desafíos de la manipulación mediática. La legislación, presente y futura, debe reforzar su adaptabilidad y capacidad de respuesta frente a los avances tecnológicos en desinformación, mientras que la ciudadanía debe continuar desarrollando habilidades críticas que les permitan identificar y rechazar contenido manipulado. Este enfoque dual ofrece una vía prometedora para fortalecer la resiliencia de la sociedad frente a las amenazas de los *deepfakes* y la desinformación en el entorno digital europeo.

Las debilidades han de ser vistas, entonces, como una ventana de oportunidad para la educación y empoderamiento del usuario final en la identificación de contenido falso. Es imperioso también reconocer que estas deficiencias en la tecnología *deepfake* son transitorias. La naturaleza iterativa del desarrollo tecnológico sugiere que futuras evoluciones o mejoras de algoritmos de *deepfakes*, probablemente, abordarán y superarán estas limitaciones actuales. Este progreso subraya la necesidad de un enfoque proactivo y adaptativo en la lucha contra la desinformación, pues todavía estamos en un punto donde el ojo humano puede detectar la mentira. Como en cualquier forma de desinformación, la resiliencia frente a la amenaza de los *deepfakes* no residirá únicamente en soluciones tecnológicas, sino en la cultivación de una sociedad informada, crítica y adaptable. Analizar críticamente el desarrollo y uso de los *deepfakes*, así como de su regulación, puede revelar patrones de discriminación de género en la tecnología, permitiendo así diseñar estrategias efectivas para mitigar estos desequilibrios y promover un ecosistema digital más equitativo.

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Capítulo 9.

Charting Pathways: An Intersectional Impact Assessment for Vision and Language Foundation Models

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of multimodal foundation models — large AI models that can process and understand multiple types of data, such as text and images — has significantly impacted the AI landscape. These models, particularly those designed for vision and language tasks, are pre-trained on vast datasets, often gathered from the internet, and are used to match images with corresponding text. This capability enables them to perform a variety of tasks. For example, they can answer questions about images (visual question answering), generate captions that describe a picture (image captioning), create images from text descriptions (text-to-image generation), and identify specific objects within an image (semantic segmentation).

As these models are increasingly integrated into everyday applications — such as search engines, tools for improving accessibility, and creative technologies — their widespread use raises important concerns about fairness and bias. In particular, intersectional bias, where multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., based on gender, race, or class) overlap, becomes a growing issue that must be addressed to ensure that these AI systems treat all users fairly and do not reproduce systemic oppressions. Too often, algorithms amplify anti-human rights, an-

ti-women, and anti-LGBTQ+ positions and views while simultaneously suppressing, undermining, and devaluing feminist voices. Antifeminist discourse, which emerges as a reaction to progress in gender equity, is increasingly prevalent in online content and also promotes stereotypes of women devoted to beauty culture or advocating a return to traditional domestic roles (“tradwives”) (Ging, 2019; Lacalle et al., 2023; García-Mingo & Díaz-Fernández, 2023). Since multimodal foundation models are trained on large, uncensored datasets often sourced from the internet, they risk incorporating and amplifying these harmful ideologies.

Vision and Language foundation models are trained on large and uncensored datasets with inherent biases – especially those sourced from the internet – that pose significant risks. These biases can perpetuate non-inclusive stereotypes, reinforcing existing inequalities and even generating new forms of discrimination. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, gender bias becomes evident when generative models consistently associate certain professions with a specific gender, even when the prompts used to generate the images are grammatically neutral. Addressing these risks is critical to ensure that AI systems respect and protect fundamental rights in contexts where automation is used.

Figure 1: Example of bias in Text-to-Image generation



As seen in Figure 1, the model has been asked to generate five images from the prompt “A photo of a nurse”. Although the prompt is grammatically gender-neutral, the output of the model clearly reflects common gender stereotypes.

In this study, we address social bias in AI, particularly in vision and language models, from an intersectional perspective. These biases can

emerge across several forms – computational, human, and systemic – and in any stage of the AI systems development lifecycle – data collection, annotation, model training, evaluation, and deployment. While existing research has proposed various bias assessment and mitigation strategies at different stages of AI development — for instance, algorithmic bias auditing typically focuses on model performance without thoroughly interrogating the training dataset — we aim to devise a tool that addresses the entire system holistically. We propose a comprehensive framework called “Intersectional Impact Assessment” (IIA), which evaluates the human, systemic, and methodological dimensions of AI systems.

Building on the foundation of previous AI fairness research, our IIA framework not only integrates existing bias assessment strategies but expands upon them by addressing biases holistically throughout the system’s entire lifecycle. This framework goes beyond merely identifying bias and aims to dismantle the underlying power imbalances that cause such disparities in the first place. Our IIA framework consists of three dimensions — Life-Machine, which focuses on human-machine interactions; Systemic-Political, which addresses structural and societal inequalities; and Methods-metrics, which highlights the importance of participatory and reflexive practices and suggests actionable metrics. Each dimension involves guiding principles, operational tenets, and an emphasis on ongoing stakeholder engagement to ensure that AI systems evolve with fairness and justice at the forefront.

The study is a first step towards the development of the IIA. It aims to provide a robust theoretical foundation and some practical considerations. It is still a work in progress toward an IIA that is implemented as part of a future vision and language AI project. While the framework discussed here is not yet empirically validated, it offers the groundwork for further testing and implementation, which will be addressed in future research.

2. ADDRESSING SOCIAL BIAS FROM AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Bias occurs when disproportionate emphasis is placed on specific pieces of data over others, leading to outcomes that favor or oppose a particular perspective. Bias can manifest both consciously and unconsciously through stereotyping, and it operates across multiple dimensions — psychological (Guilbeault, 2023), behavioral (Wynn and Carian, 2023), social (Buolamwini and Gebru, 2018), and political. For example, biases can influence how people interpret information (psychological), how decisions are made based on behaviors (behavioral), and how social structures or political systems reinforce particular perspectives (social and political). Statistically, bias refers to systematic errors in a system that lead to skewed outcomes, where predictions are either favored or unfairly disadvantaged.

Schwartz et al. (2022) identify three categories of AI bias: computational and statistical bias, human bias, and systemic bias. Systemic biases arise from institutional, political, or historical practices that disadvantage certain social groups, such as racial, gender, or age discrimination. Human biases, on the other hand, manifest when individuals make assumptions, like using a person's neighborhood as a predictor of criminal behavior. These biases are often implicit, emerging from how people interpret information, such as AI-generated outputs, to make decisions or fill in gaps. Human biases can appear at any point in the AI lifecycle, influencing institutional, group, or individual choices, and persist even after AI systems are deployed. An example is cognitive or perceptual bias, where human perception shapes how AI outcomes are understood and used.

Computational and statistical biases occur when the data used in AI systems is not representative of the broader population, leading to systematic errors in the model's predictions. These biases often emerge without intentional prejudice and typically arise when algorithms are trained on limited or skewed datasets, making them unable to gener-

alize effectively. These authors identify several contributing factors to these biases, including heterogeneous data, overly simplified mathematical models, and algorithmic issues like overfitting (when a model performs well on its training data but poorly on new data). Additionally, challenges in data cleaning or imputation (filling in missing data) can exacerbate these biases. All these factors significantly impact the reliability and fairness of AI applications. When these different forms of bias — computational, human, and systemic — combine, they can create harmful outcomes, primarily when AI systems are used without explicit guidance on managing these risks.

In AI systems, biases can emerge at multiple stages, including data collection, protocol design, data engineering, and within the algorithms themselves. However, current approaches to AI fairness often fall short of addressing more profound structural inequalities and fail to describe the sources of bias fully (Ovalle et al., 2023; D'Ignazio and Klein, 2023). In the particular scenario of vision and language foundational models, data itself becomes the primary source of bias. Key issues to consider include where, how, and by whom which data is collected. Deciding what is regarded as valid knowledge — what is to be found in a dataset — is in itself an act of power (Ovalle et al., 2023; Guerra et al., 2023). All data are created, and all models, algorithmic or otherwise, are simplifications of reality that inevitably introduce bias (Guerra et al., 2023).

Social bias often arises when the data used to train AI models fails to represent the socio-demographic, cultural, and economic diversity of the population. This lack of representation leads to skewed outcomes that mirror historical and political patterns of discrimination and various forms of oppression. For instance, an algorithm may penalize a particular group that historically has been excluded from an area through maintaining the systematic exclusion: “Algorithms don’t predict the future, they codify the past” (Civic, 2022:19). By statistically and descriptively measuring social bias, researchers can better understand how it manifests in AI systems. However, the root causes of social bias are often linked to more profound structural inequalities, unfolding in

subtle, more or less evident, and frequently invisible or blurred forms. For example, a recent study (Meister et al. 2023) found that even subtle visual cues—such as the average color tones of images, the positioning of subjects, or the context in which individuals appear—can become correlated with gender. As a result, AI models trained on these datasets may unintentionally learn to associate certain visual elements, like specific poses or settings, with a particular gender, reinforcing stereotypes and amplifying bias in tasks such as image classification or generation.

Emerging biases in multimodal foundational models can reproduce and amplify misogynistic and antifeminist content due to their reliance on uncensored internet data. As platforms increasingly deploy AI-driven systems, there is a risk that such technologies may contribute to the spread of new and harmful biases in subtle and emerging ways, such as through stereotyping, discrimination, cultural appropriation, or by reinforcing users' pre-existing biases within echo chambers. For example, generative models might reproduce or even amplify antifeminist narratives, shaping online discourse in ways that are difficult to detect. The complexity and novelty of these models mean that traditional fairness or bias detection methods may not be sufficient to identify these new forms of bias.

While current efforts to measure social bias in AI systems are valuable, they often fail to address the deeper roots of these biases (Ovalle et al., 2023), which are embedded in structural inequalities. D'Ignazio and Klein (2019) argue that focusing solely on bias overlooks broader concepts of justice, equity, and dismantling structural oppression. Additionally, relying on data-driven systems and algorithms as neutral or objective can reinforce systemic inequalities (Benjamin, 2019; Civic, 2022). These approaches may inadvertently sustain existing imbalances by placing responsibility on the outcomes of technological systems and individuals rather than addressing the political and structural roots of the problem. We concur that emphasizing individual responsibility neglects the systemic patterns of oppression and undermines communal

solidarity. Equally, we assert the importance of reinforcing the human dimensions within technological systems.

Therefore, we propose to adopt a feminist intersectional approach to design holistic impact assessment protocols for AI systems to address structural inequalities and promote social justice. Intersectionality, a framework developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw stemming from critical feminist and race theory, recognizes the interconnected nature of social categories such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, ability, and age, among others. This perspective highlights that these categories do not exist independently but intersect in complex ways, contributing to unique experiences of privilege and oppression. In the context of AI, understanding these intersections is crucial. It enables us to identify and address how AI systems might reinforce these overlapping inequalities rather than merely aggregating them under broader, more generalizable categories.

Intersectionality, however, goes beyond identity categories; it requires an understanding of the structural dimensions of power and inequality that contribute to systemic oppression. Ovalle et al. (2023) use the matrix of domination paradigm to critically examine how intersectionality is applied in AI fairness literature, highlighting significant gaps between its conceptualization and operationalization. Their review is grounded in six core tenets formulated by Collins and Bilge (2020): social justice, social inequality, relationality, social power, social context, and complexity. These tenets, along with Ovalle's actionable recommendations, must be at the core of an intersectional impact assessment for AI systems.

3. IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN AI

Impact Assessment has recently emerged as one of the main tools used to evaluate the fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency of AI systems alongside algorithmic audits. Algorithmic impact assessments,

which integrate both risk assessments and algorithmic impact evaluations (Ada, 2020), are a popular accountability and fairness method that is being promoted both by the AI industry and public actors. Impact assessment refers to the process of identifying the potential future consequences or effects of a proposed action, tool, or design. It aims to detect possible improvements and generate a set of recommendations that can help correct any negative impacts before implementation.

According to the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA, 2024), an impact assessment is “a structured process for considering the implications, for people and their environment, of proposed actions while there is still an opportunity to modify (or even, if appropriate, abandon) the proposals”. The European Commission (EC) also asserts that impact assessment promotes more informed and better-regulated decision-making (EC, 2021). The EC (2021; 2023) mandates the use of impact assessments for both legislative and non-legislative initiatives that may have significant economic, environmental, and social consequences.

Gender and environmental impact assessments have served for decades as valuable tools in the development of policies across various public bodies (EIGE, 2017; EP and CEU, 2011; Ajuntament, 2023). These assessments have become well-established practices at national, regional, and even local levels. The principle underlying both gender and environmental impact assessments is to ensure that any plans, programs, or legislative initiatives with the potential to impact the environment or gender equity significantly undergo thorough evaluation before they receive approval (Ruiz et al., 2023). These well-established practices serve as a strong foundation for integrating similar methodologies into the field of AI, ensuring that AI systems are developed and deployed responsibly.

Several countries are increasingly implementing mandatory algorithmic impact assessments as part of their strategies to regulate artificial intelligence and ensure its ethical use. We have reviewed a number

of public tools to inform the development of the Intersectional Impact Assessment proposal. For instance, Canada's 2020 Directive on Automated Decision-Making requires federal departments to conduct Algorithmic Impact Assessments before deploying AI systems that influence administrative decisions about individuals. The Canadian government also provides a guide for conducting these assessments.

Similarly, New Zealand's Algorithm Charter for Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa, 2020) incorporates an Algorithm Impact Assessment (Aotearoa, 2023 to ensure ethical AI deployment.). The European Union is adopting a more comprehensive approach with the Artificial Intelligence Act (EP and CEU, 2024), which mandates algorithm assessments for high-risk AI systems, particularly those that impact health, safety, and fundamental rights. Article 27 of the Act mandates a Fundamental Rights Impact Assessment for High-Risk AI Systems, stating:

Prior to deploying a high-risk AI system (...) deployers that are bodies governed by public law, or are private entities providing public services, and deployers of high-risk AI systems (...), shall perform an assessment of the impact on fundamental rights that the use of such a system may produce.

A further instance inspiring our proposal is UNESCO's Ethical Impact Assessment for AI systems. This tool fosters "the promotion and protection of human rights and human dignity, environmental sustainability, fairness, inclusion, and gender equality" (UNESCO, 2023:5).

Finally, the IA Risk Management Framework (NIST, 2024) offers another voluntary assessment tool to identify and mitigate various types of bias – computational, human, and systemic. Taking Schwartz et al. (2022) work into account, this tool exemplifies an approach that recognizes that bias issues must be addressed through sociotechnical methods. It provides several valuable recommendations, such as the use of quantitative and qualitative measures, involving stakeholders in decision-making, and examining cultural dynamics and norms that shape AI systems' outcomes (Kak and Myers West, 2023).

One significant challenge with impact evaluations is the risk of them becoming mere “checkbox” exercises, where the process of assessment is reduced to meeting formal requirements without truly addressing deeper issues (Kak and Myers West, 2023). In order to effectively meet justice and equity goals, the literature has already identified several advancements that impact evaluations must consider. Namely, there is a widespread call for greater stakeholder participation in the evaluation process, particularly involving affected communities (Ada, 2020; D’Ignazio and Klein, 2019; Kak and Myers West, 2023). Including these voices ensures that the evaluation process is grounded in the lived experiences of those who are most vulnerable to biased AI outcomes.

However, while stakeholder participation is essential, it also carries risks. There is a concern that this approach can be used superficially as part of what is known as “accountability-washing,” where organizations present the appearance of accountability without genuinely engaging in democratic practices or making meaningful changes (Kak and Myers West, 2023). It is essential to recognize this risk and ensure that stakeholder involvement is authentic and substantive rather than being used to check a box.

Finally, the concept of “context” presents both a challenge and a pivotal connection between the review of impact assessment tools and the foundations for the development of the intersectional impact assessment proposal in the next section. There is an increasing call that assessment methods must pay closer attention to the structural biases embedded in the social, political, and geographical contexts in which data is collected for system training (Kak and Myers West, 2023; Civic, 2022; Schwarz, 2022). Creating more equitable AI systems requires considering the sociotechnical environment in which the AI is developed and deployed — who is using it and who developed it — while confronting biases within the broader context of power imbalances and systemic oppression.

4. TOWARDS A HOLISTIC INTERSECTIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF VISION AND LANGUAGE SYSTEMS

Here, we lay the foundations for an Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) framework, intertwining techno-political perspectives and methodologies to identify and mitigate intersectional inequalities expressed through biases in vision and language AI systems. Our contribution builds on existing research by expanding on current tools, critically examining them, and highlighting areas where intersectional injustices may arise but remain unaddressed. At present, intersectionality has not been adopted as the central approach in any comprehensive AI impact assessment, a gap we seek to address by offering critical insights for future frameworks that can center intersectionality in their assessments.

Our goal is not to present a fully developed IIA but to establish the theoretical and methodological foundations upon which such a framework can be built; its objectives are:

- Provide contextual insights and a holistic diagnosis of key intersectional concerns that should be considered in AI development and deployment.
- Evaluate the anticipated impacts that AI models and data practices may have, particularly in terms of perpetuating or mitigating bias.
- Identify areas for future improvement and enhancement, focusing on fairness, accountability, and bias reduction in AI systems.
- Propose guiding principles for future frameworks to address harmful biases and reduce the potential for reinforcing existing inequalities.

Although the Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) is not intended to be a checklist, it should be as intuitive and straightforward as possible. We anticipate that the framework must evolve alongside practical technical projects, benefiting from empirical trial-and-error approach-

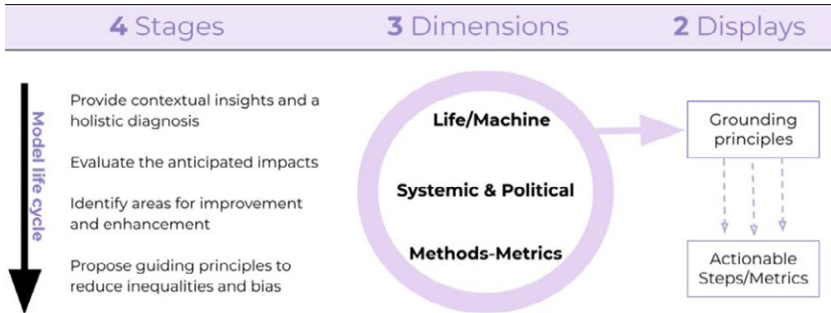
es, requiring input and collaboration from diverse sectors, including AI experts, social scientists, policymakers, and activists.

To favor a holistic approach, we outline three essential dimensions that should guide the development of an IIA:

- **Life-Machine:** This dimension explores the relationship between humans and machines, focusing on how AI systems affect and interact with different communities, particularly marginalized ones.
- **Systemic-Political:** This dimension examines the broader social, political, and structural dynamics that shape AI systems, addressing how power imbalances and systemic inequalities may be reproduced or challenged through technology.
- **Methods-Metrics:** This dimension focuses on participatory AI practices and how evaluation metrics are generated. It emphasizes how these processes can incorporate intersectional principles to mitigate bias.

Together, they reflect a comprehensive analysis — integrating the human, political, and technical aspects of AI design, development, and deployment. Each dimension is explored through various theoretical and practical approaches. These grounding principles, in turn, unfold through operationalization tenets such as guiding questions, potential data sources, indicators, and metrics. These dimensions are interconnected, and many of the proposed principles are relevant across multiple areas.

Figure 2: Intersectional Impact Assessment map.



4.1 Life-Machine

This dimension emphasizes the interaction between life and technology, humans and machines, throughout the lifespan of an AI system — from design and development to deployment and use. It suggests a focus on human agency and participatory machine supervision, which the involvement of key actors and critical self-reflexivity should drive.

Iteration through the lifespan of the system - There is widespread agreement in the AI fairness literature, as well as intersectional feminist and institutional approaches, that the evaluation of bias or systemic harms should be addressed throughout the entire existence of the project (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2019; Ada, 2020; Ovalle et al., 2023; Collins & Bilge, 2020; UNESCO, 2023): from data collection and model design to performance evaluation. An Intersectional Impact Assessment should favor ongoing monitoring applied at the “full pipeline” (Ovalle et al., 2023). Social inequalities differ in terms of context, and there is a need to track real-world effects, identify unintended consequences, and address emerging social inequalities along the project.

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Integrate and adapt existing documentation protocols:** tools like Datasheets for Datasets (Gebru et al., 2018) and Model Cards for Model Reporting (Mitchell et al., 2019) can be adapted to document vision and language datasets, models, and benchmarks through an intersectional lens.
- **Ex-ante evaluations:** analyze the potential impacts of each component before deployment, forecast how it may affect various groups, and identify potential risks.
- **Ex-post and retrospective evaluations:** conduct evaluations after each component has been implemented, assessing whether the intended outcomes were achieved and examining any long-term effects.
- **Regular feedback loops:** Engage diverse stakeholders and actors – including groups most likely affected by AI bias – continuously to refine and adjust each component as new data and insights emerge, ensuring that biases and systemic harms are effectively addressed.

The Human Side of the Machine - Several key issues highlight the need for a thorough examination of the human elements involved in AI systems. These include critical questions about who designs the project, prepares the dataset, generates the algorithm, and deploys the system. It is equally important to consider the accessibility of the system and the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of both the development team and the target audience. In addition to ensuring diverse representation, it is crucial to address economic conditions affecting the project team, guaranteeing fair labor conditions, and tackling discriminatory practices such as intersectional pay gaps and labor segregation. A feminist digital labor agenda must acknowledge the unequal distribution of care work and the global gendered division of labor (James, 2022). Placing lived experiences at the center of AI design ensures that

technology better reflects real-world contexts, particularly those of groups in a vulnerable situation (Civic, 2022; Rode, 2011).

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Guiding questions:** Who is designing the system? Who has collected/annotated the dataset? Who is training the algorithm? Who has developed the evaluation framework?
- **Team diversity audits:** Assess the demographic and social makeup of the AI development team, ensuring diversity across sex/gender, race/ethnicity, class, caste, age, capabilities, and other intersectional axes, as well as the eradication of detected inequalities.
- **Placing people at the center:** Incorporate input from those communities most affected by structural inequalities early and throughout the design and deployment phases to ensure the AI system reflects a wide range of lived experiences.
- **Accessibility assessments:** Evaluate the accessibility of AI systems for groups in a vulnerable situation (e.g., providing multilingual support and interfaces that are user-friendly for diverse skill levels).
- **Labor practices review:** Ensure fair labor conditions for all team members, including subcontracted workers. This includes addressing intersectional pay gaps and ensuring equitable treatment regardless of role or position.

Critical Self-reflexivity – Critical self-reflexivity within AI project teams involves acknowledging who is operating at each task and phase and reflecting on the personal and systemic assumptions that shape the development process. This includes recognizing how systems of oppression – such as capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, and structural inequalities related to class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, ability, and age – affect both the AI system and the team itself. Critical reflexivity

requires teams to be accountable for their positionality and to strive toward dismantling power dynamics that may perpetuate inequality. Incorporating critical self-reflection enhances fairness by helping teams recognize and challenge their embedded biases (Civic, 2022). Interdisciplinary collaboration, combining technical and social perspectives, can strengthen the intersectional approach. Teams should be prepared to navigate the complexity of reflexive practices with patience, ensuring regular exchanges, training, and opportunities for collective learning.

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Guiding questions:** How might my background and biases influence the development of this AI model? How do power dynamics shape our team's decision-making processes?
- **Positionality statements:** Encourage team members to articulate their positionality and reflect on how their backgrounds (e.g., race, gender, class, or nationality) may influence their approach to the project.
- **Reflexivity workshops:** Implement periodic workshops to foster personal and collective reflection on biases and assumptions, focusing on systems of power and privilege.
- **Team composition and working conditions:** To ensure equitable participation and fair treatment, data on team diversity (e.g., sex/gender, race, origin) and working conditions (e.g., pay equity, interdisciplinarity) should be collected and analyzed. Additionally, attention to the distribution of care work and time organization (e.g., leaves, flexible schedules, part-time work) must be guaranteed. Teams include both technical experts and social scientists to provide diverse perspectives on ethical, cultural, and social dimensions.
- **Suggested Metrics:**
- **Intersectional and gender pay gap:** Measure the average salary difference between men, women, and non-binary employees, as

well as intersecting identity categories (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity).

- **Horizontal and vertical segregation:** Track the distribution of team members across different levels of responsibility (vertical segregation) and roles (horizontal segregation) within the project.
- **Composition diversity rate:** Calculate the proportion of team members from diverse identity categories (e.g., gender, race, disability status) relative to the overall team composition.
- **Work-life balance satisfaction:** Measure the satisfaction levels regarding work-life balance across different gender and intersectional groups.
- **Caregiving responsibilities:** flexible time arrangements, and parental leaves, may indicate systemic issues with the unequal distribution of work.

Sustainability and Environment - An Intersectional Impact Assessment must prioritize environmental equity as a core principle in the development and deployment of AI systems (Ren & Wierman, 2024). This involves considering the energy consumption, water usage, and carbon emissions involved in training AI models while also addressing the exacerbation of regional and social inequalities caused by environmental factors. Particular focus should be given to the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by vulnerable regions to avoid widening the gap between developed and underdeveloped areas. This requires a thorough evaluation of the long-term impacts on local ecosystems and a more comprehensive approach to sustainability. Moreover, this assessment should involve a rethinking of the relationship between humans, machines, and the environment, advocating for a shift from exploitation toward balance and reciprocity. A broader ethical framework must recognize the natural world as an active participant in technological progress, fostering a symbiotic relationship between AI and the environment (Lewis et al., 2023).

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Environmental impact audits:** Measure and document the energy consumption, water usage, and carbon emissions involved in training and deploying AI models. Set reduction targets.
- **Sustainable AI development:** Consider optimizing AI architectures for energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources.
- **Regional equity assessments:** Analyze the environmental impact of AI systems on vulnerable regions and communities.
- **Rethinking human-environment relations:** Develop ethical guidelines that treat the environment as an active participant in AI development.
- Suggested Metrics:
- **CO₂-equivalents (CO₂eq):** Quantifies carbon emissions during AI model training, adjusted for regional energy sources (Lacoste et al., 2019).
- **Electricity Consumption (FLOPS/W):** Measures hardware energy efficiency in floating point operations per second per watt (Lacoste et al., 2019).
- **Carburacy:** Balances model accuracy with environmental costs like energy use and carbon emissions (Moro et al., 2023).
- **Universal Sustainability Metrics:** Assesses lifecycle efficiency, including energy use during both training and inference phases (Lenherr et al. 2021).

4.2 Systemic & Political

This dimension suggests that AI systems operate within larger social structures and power dynamics; they are fully connected, and although they can be understood on their own, they are only for laboratory pur-

poses. It encompasses the broader political, social, cultural, and economic implications of AI technologies, addressing how biases, power imbalances, and systemic inequalities might be embedded in or exacerbated by AI systems. It explores how a set of grounding principles are to be operationalized in an intersectional impact assessment, namely Intersectionality, AI Fairness, and Data Feminism.

Implementing an Intersectional approach – The Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) adopts an intersectional feminist framework to ensure that bias in AI models is identified and does not perpetuate existing inequalities. Intersectionality analyzes how intersecting systems of power—such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability—mutually shape social relations and individual experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2020). It moves beyond individual identity categories, focusing on the structural dimensions of inequality and domination. Intersectionality serves as a crucial analytical tool to drive meaningful social transformation, mainly by applying the six core ideas described by Collins and Bilge (2020): social inequality, intersecting power relations, social context, relationality, social justice, and complexity.

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Identify sources of bias:** Apply an intersectional lens to determine the root causes of intersectional bias.
- **Widen conceptualization of fairness:** Move beyond “subgroup fairness” by focusing on how intersecting factors influence biases. Develop metrics that account for multiple overlapping social categories.
- **Contextual analysis:** Assess how social, political, economic, and cultural contexts influence AI systems and their outcomes, ensuring that AI models are not reproducing existing power imbalances.
- **Foster systemic change:** Use intersectionality as a framework to push for more profound structural transformations, aiming

for long-lasting social justice impacts rather than surface-level fairness adjustments.

Data Feminism - Data Feminism (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2019) highlights that data science is inherently laden with power dynamics. It is neither neutral nor objective and is shaped by specific cultural, geographical, and social contexts. Data Feminism promotes an intersectional and participatory approach to machine learning, acknowledging that data collection, interpretation, and use can reflect and reinforce existing inequalities (Suresh et al., 2022). The approach is guided by seven fundamental principles: examining and challenging power, valuing emotion and embodiment, rethinking binaries and hierarchies, embracing pluralism, considering context and situated knowledge, and making labor visible. Data Feminism enriches the Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) by examining how power dynamics shape AI models and their metrics. Besides, it challenges traditional categories such as gender and class, reframes the representation of race/ethnic origin, and emphasizes the inclusion of diverse voices—particularly from marginalized groups—in the creation and analysis of data (Civic, 2022; Kak and Myers West, 2023).

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Guiding questions:** Who controls the data? Who benefits from it? Who is excluded?
- **Examine power dynamics in data:** Assess how the collection, annotation, filtering, and interpretation of data reflect underlying power structures. Analyze the social, cultural, and geographical contexts of the data to avoid oversimplification and understand its implications.
- **Challenge traditional categories:** Move beyond rigid categorization – e.g., binary gender, class, race – introducing heterogeneous and more inclusive definitions that capture intersectional identities and experiences.

- **Ensure participatory data practices:** Engage communities with vulnerable positions in the creation and analysis of datasets.
- **Make labor visible and highlight care:** Acknowledge the contributions of data annotators and other laborers involved in data production. Take care work into account in all its dimensions.

4.3 Methods-Metrics

This dimension points to the need to establish reliable metrics and quantitative and qualitative methodologies for evaluating AI systems. Metrics are used to measure performance, fairness, bias, and impact, while methods encompass the approaches and tools needed for assessing these dimensions throughout the system's life cycle. It involves a more technical aspect of the evaluation framework, ensuring that the system can be evaluated accurately and systematically.

Participatory AI - Participation has already been explored in previous sections, highlighting the need for it to be strengthened. "Assuming technology as an artifact of collaboration" (Civic, 2022:8), participation is a guiding method of IIA. Both AI fairness research (Suresh, 2022; Civic, 2022; Ovalle, 2023) and intersectional literature (Collins and Bilge, 2020; Zárate, 2021; Ruiz et al., 2023) stress the need for promoting participatory approaches. These help to raise as many different voices as possible, to increase pluralism, and to shed light on overlapping oppression structures to the greatest extent. Thus, Participatory AI is central to IIA and should be mainstreamed along the project to ensure that a diverse group of stakeholders, including those from underrepresented groups and people at the margins or in positions of vulnerability, are involved in the AI development process. It is relevant that technical and social experts are invited to participate, but also people who usually do not develop knowledge, data, or models to amplify their views, proposals, and wisdom.

One of the critical challenges in stakeholder involvement is the issue of power imbalances, with large ICT businesses often reinforcing systems that disproportionately benefit the privileged. To counter this, mechanisms must empower marginalized stakeholders by redistributing decision-making through co-design workshops and iterative feedback loops. Regulatory frameworks should mandate meaningful participation, particularly from vulnerable groups, and ensure involvement is embedded throughout the AI lifecycle, holding corporations accountable for social and ethical impacts. Addressing cultural, economic, time, and mobility barriers is essential, with strategies to provide equal access, including financial support, technology, and care services to ensure the voices of vulnerable groups are heard. Co-developing and revising metrics in this Intersectional Impact Assessment will ensure stakeholders' concerns are reflected in social justice and intersectional equity measures.

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Stakeholder mapping:** Identify and involve diverse stakeholders from those communities that are more likely to be affected by bias in your system.
- **Co-design workshops:** Conduct participatory workshops that allow stakeholders—especially those at the margins—to share their concerns, insights, and proposals.
- **Cross-disciplinary collaboration:** Facilitate collaboration between technical experts and social scientists, as well as between developers and users.
- **Inclusive decision-making:** Establish decision-making processes that integrate different perspectives.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** Create ongoing feedback loops that allow for regular input from stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

Suggested Metrics:

- **Stakeholder Diversity Index:** Measure the diversity of stakeholder participation, including demographic representation (e.g., gender, race, socioeconomic status, ability).
- **Participation Equity Score:** Assess the distribution of decision-making power among stakeholders, ensuring that groups in vulnerable situations have meaningful influence.
- **Barriers to Participation:** Track the identification and mitigation of participation barriers (e.g., financial support, access to technology, care services) to ensure equitable involvement.
- **Stakeholder Satisfaction Index:** Measure the satisfaction of stakeholders with the participatory processes, focusing on how well their input is valued and acted upon.
- **Decision-Making democratic Score:** Assess how democratic and inclusive decision-making processes are, ensuring that all stakeholders understand how decisions are made and how their input influences outcomes.

Scales of Value and Knowledge.- The evaluation of fairness in AI systems has been the subject of growing research (Buolamwini et al., 2018; Suresh et al., 2019; Blodgett et al., 2020; Raj and Ekstrand, 2022; Corbett-Davies, 2023). Several vital metrics address different dimensions of fairness, bias, and social context. This grounding principle emphasizes the need to operationalize the Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) by addressing how metrics are generated, what is counted, and what is valued, as well as how those values are determined (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2019). These questions must be tied to epistemological concerns, particularly regarding who creates knowledge and defines the attributes considered in AI systems if we aim for them to contribute to social justice. The IIA should draw on both quantitative and qualitative approaches, employing inductive and deductive analyses while fostering a multidisciplinary dialogue as an enriching perspective. It must rec-

ognize that there is always more than one way of thinking, restoring situated and everyday knowledge—especially for those in vulnerable or historically excluded groups. Additionally, an in-depth scale of values and expertise must revive narratives of the past, embrace ancestral wisdom, and restore indigenous knowledge and value systems that have been dismissed as outdated (Civic, 2022; Ovalle et al., 2023).

Suggested Actionable Steps:

- **Participatory Design of Methods and Metrics:** Implement collaborative practices that engage community stakeholders to design methods and metrics that align with social justice goals and reflect diverse epistemologies.
- Suggested Actionable Metrics:
 - **Social Inequality Metrics:** Measure AI performance disparities across demographic groups (e.g., bias disparity, false positive/negative rates by group).
 - **Intersecting Power Relations Metrics:** Evaluate model fairness at the intersections of multiple demographic features, such as race, gender, and age (e.g., intersectional fairness, multidimensional fairness).
 - **Social Context Metrics:** Assess how AI models adapt to different social and cultural contexts (e.g., context-sensitivity scores, vision model context bias).
 - **Relationality Metrics:** Analyze relationships between social categories and how models handle co-occurring identities (e.g., relational bias, group-wise mutual information).
 - **Social Justice Metrics:** Track improvements in fairness and reductions in disparate impact on marginalized groups (e.g., fairness improvement, equity weighting).
 - **Complexity and Bias Metrics:** Ensure that increasing model complexity does not disproportionately affect certain groups

and that new bias patterns are identified (e.g., model complexity fairness, non-linear intersectional impact).

- **Fairness Metrics for Ranked Outputs:** Evaluate the fairness and relevance of ranked outputs in AI models, especially in retrieval tasks (e.g., Normalized Discounted KL-divergence (NDCG)).

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this analysis, we have outlined the core principles for assessing the intersectional impacts of vision and language foundation models, highlighting the urgent need for a holistic and critical approach to address bias in those systems. The devised Intersectional Impact Assessment (IIA) emphasizes the importance of considering human, political, and technical dimensions throughout the AI lifecycle. By integrating insights from intersectionality, data feminism, and AI fairness literature, this comprehensive approach aims to ensure that AI systems are not only evaluated for performance but also for their potential to perpetuate systemic inequalities.

We critically engage with existing literature to define the key dimensions that provide actionable steps that encourage continuous reflection, diverse stakeholder engagement, and context-aware interventions. Our work aims at charting pathways toward creating AI systems that are socially just. However, the successful implementation of such a framework comes with practical challenges: the overhead in terms of time, resources, and stakeholder involvement cannot be overlooked. Implementing IIA requires sustained advocacy and investment, raising the question of who will champion these efforts and who is willing to commit the necessary resources.

While not a fully developed solution, the IIA lays the groundwork for future iterations, urging interdisciplinary collaboration and continuous improvement. Future work should focus on refining these methods,

testing them in practical settings, and ensuring that they remain adaptable to emerging challenges.

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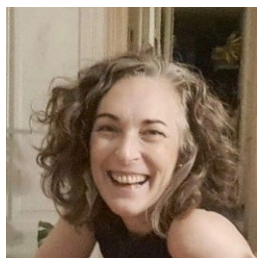


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