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Gender disinformation: analysing hoaxes on Maldito Feminismo

Desinformación de género: análisis de los bulos de Maldito Feminismo

Desinformação de gênero: análise das notícias falsas é a plataforma Maldito Feminismo

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Abstract

Information disorder (satire or parody, false connections, misleading content, false context, imposter content, manipulated content or fabricated content) is a social problem that is causing collective damages. Women, in particular, are becoming victims of hostilities on the digital scenario. This problem is currently known as “digital sexism” and “gender disinformation”. In this context, verification journalism, a trendy format, aims to reduce the effects of hoaxes introducing the fact-checking process in its professional routines. However, this is still a minority task. In order to contribute to the study of the disinformation phenomenon in relation to online messages about women, this research has developed a systematic tool to classify hoaxes that have been refuted by the platform [Maldita.es](https://maldito.feminismo.org/), specifically, on its sections Maldito Feminismo (N=71). This tool, inspired by the taxonomies created by Derakhshan & Wardle (2017), Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2018) and Molina, Sundar, Le & Lee (2019), allows you to categorize fake news according to the type of information disorder, the agent, the message and the interpreter.

The results of this study (internal validity) show that hoaxes detected by Maldito Feminismo are misleading content that expect to damage feminism (this is the main topic of fake news) and have a political purpose. These information disorders are displayed in text format and are mainly created and distributed on social networks. Moreover, although users collaborate and participate detecting and reporting hoaxes, the platform Maldito Feminismo identifies, locates and denounces most of the fake news.

Key Words: *Feminis; Fact-checkin; Hoax; Disinformation; Gender; Fake news*

Resumen

El desorden informativo (sátira o parodia, conexión falsa, contenido engañoso, contexto falso, contenido impostor, contenido manipulado o contenido fabricado) es un problema social que empieza a demostrar sus daños colectivos. De forma particular, las mujeres están siendo víctimas de hostilidades en el escenario digital, lo que se conoce como “sexismo digital” y “desinformación de género”. En este contexto, el periodismo de verificación, un formato tendencia y aún minoritario, trata de paliar los efectos de los bulos introduciendo, entre sus rutinas profesionales, el desmentido

de esos contenidos. Para contribuir al estudio del fenómeno de la desinformación, en relación con los mensajes que circulan en Internet sobre las mujeres, esta investigación propone una herramienta de clasificación sistemática de los bulos desmentidos por el medio [Maldita.es](https://maldito.feminismo.es) en su sección Maldito Feminismo (N=71). Esta herramienta, inspirada en las taxonomías de Derakhshan & Wardle (2017), Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2018) y Molina, Sundar, Le & Lee (2019), permite clasificar las noticias falsas según el tipo de desorden informativo, el agente, el mensaje y el intérprete.

Los resultados de este estudio (que tienen una validez interna) revelan que los bulos detectados por Maldito Feminismo son noticias falsas de contenido engañoso, que buscan dañar el feminismo (ya que este es el tema principal de la mayoría de bulos analizados) y tienen un propósito político. Estos desórdenes informativos se crean y distribuyen, principalmente, a través de las redes sociales en formato texto. Normalmente, es la propia plataforma -Maldito Feminismo- quien identifica, localiza y delata la mayoría de noticias falsas.

Palabras clave: Feminismo; Verificación; Bulo; Desinformación; Género; Noticias falsas

Resumo

A desordem informativa (sátira ou paródia, conexão falsa, conteúdo enganoso, contexto falso, conteúdo impostor, conteúdo manipulado ou conteúdo fabricado) deve ser considerada um problema social enquanto os danos coletivos que provoca e que ameaçam à sociedade digital começam a ser descobertos. Particularmente, as mulheres são vítimas de hostilidades nos espaços de interação virtuais. Esse fenômeno é conhecido como “sexismo digital” e “desinformação de gênero”.

Neste cenário, o jornalismo de verificação (ou fact checking journalism em inglês), um formato que é tendência, tenta paliar os efeitos das calúnias ou difamações a introduzir nas rotinas profissionais a prática de desmascarar essas calúnias. Contudo ainda é um trabalho pouco expandido. Para contribuir ao estudo do fenômeno da desinformação em relação com as mensagens que circulam na Internet sobre as mulheres, esta investigação propõe uma ferramenta de classificação sistemática das calúnias desmascaradas pela [Maldita.es](https://maldito.feminismo.es) na seção Maldito Feminismo (N=71).

Os resultados deste estudo revelam que as calúnias detectadas pela seção Maldito Feminismo são notícias falsas de conteúdo enganoso. Esses conteúdos têm a

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intenção de prejudicar ao feminismo (este é o assunto principal da maior parte das calúnias analisadas) com um propósito político. Essas desordens informativas são criadas e distribuídas principalmente pelas redes sociais na forma de texto. Embora os usuários colaboram e participam na detecção e denúncia dessas calúnias, é a plataforma Maldito Feminismo à que frequentemente identifica, localiza e desmascara a maior parte das notícias falsas.

Palavras chave: *Feminismo; Verificação; Calúnias; Desinformação; Gênero; Notícias falsas*

1. Introduction

The disinformation phenomenon, according to the European Commission (2018), is defined as “false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (p.10), and it generates 213 million euros in advertising revenue annually through 20,000 domains identified as potentially risky due to their disinformation content (Global Disinformation Index, GDI, 2019). Moreover, falsehood jeopardizes democratic processes and political values, as the CE denounces: “eight out of ten citizens consider that it is a general problem for democracy” (Eurobarómetro, 2018, p.4). Disinformation is also compromising sectors like health, science, education or economy, by prioritizing emotions over facts and evidence. In this context, citizens are beginning to show their concern in the face of hoaxes: with 79% of Spaniards stating that they often find different sorts of misleading information on the Web and, even more worrisome, only half of them consider themselves capable of distinguishing fake contents from truth. Therefore, as Pal & Banerjee (2019) suggest, it seems logical to continue researching disinformation thoroughly and acknowledging this phenomenon as a social problem, since it implies collective damages affecting the digital society.

Among the most serious threats today is the dissemination of information that is incorrect or deliberately intended to lie, or information with concealed ideological motivations and, specifically, attacks against women’s issues, which are gaining strength (Lewis & Marwick, 2017). At the beginning of the Third

Wave feminism back in the 60's, activist Gloria Steinem's (2016) memoirs detailed how, even then, women had to debunk media manipulation: "that is to say, we all were «white middle-class»" (p. 93). Occeñola (2018) describes this kind of direct attacks against women's identity as "gender disinformation". Sobieraj (2018) refers to it as "digital sexism" (p. 1702) and expounds the fact that women face gender-based digital abuse on Internet; as well as extreme hostility, in interaction spaces, where a wide range of comments can be poured. Occeñola (2018) points out the case of the Philippines, where the non-profit organization Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) condemned the violent harassment against female journalists and politicians, after the 2016 elections, through Jamela Alindogan's statements, an Al-Jazeera correspondent in Manila: "I think women are vulnerable to all sorts of rumours but often they are vilified for their physical appearances and their personal lives". As well as the declarations of the female vice-president of the Philippine government, Leonor Robredo: "Women in politics are constant targets of sexual harassment, moral attacks, and criticisms against their families. Most of the things that have been said about me are attacks against me as a woman".

On the other hand, Pardy (2018) also offers other examples of prominent women in society (in this case a Muslim activist), who have been defamed by the media, becoming victims of setups, manipulations and all sorts of distortions of their image and words. In her article in *Refinery29*, Pardy (2018) states that "misogyny is both the input and output that keeps the fake news industry afloat". The report by the Dutch cyber-security company Deeptrace confirms that there is a trendy format that is growing rapidly within this market that moves millions of dollars: faking videos where an existing person is replaced by someone else by using artificial intelligence, with women as the main victims. These formats are called *deepfakes* and they are dedicated fundamentally to pornography (Ajder, Patrini, Cavalli & Cullen, 2019).

Regarding the Spanish case, the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC) published the first report about fake news on the Internet and gender discourse in 2018, where it was proven, by analysing 12 types of information, that women are suffering from the construction of a narrative, on the Internet,

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that damages their image: including ad hoc false contents, manipulation and distribution of satirical content. However, this report also reveals that fact checking on information about women, because of their condition as females, happens to a lesser extent. Among the ideas embedded in misleading information, the view of women as weaker than men and questions about gender policies abound. On the other hand, this study warns that these messages are finding an echo in public opinion, who share them, creating a situation that, in the longer term, could favour the emergence of “cyber-ghettos” (Johnson, Bichard & Zhang, 2009, p.60).

Hence, the CAC proposes education as a way of confronting this phenomenon. During the 2017/2018 year, an initiative to help teachers, students and their families to spot fake news was launched within the eduCAC Programme. In this case, Pal & Banerjee (2019) define this phenomenon as a social problem that affects women and they advocate for the important role of specialized media in verifying false or misleading contents.

With the intent to contribute to the study of disinformation, this research intends to study the information disorder (Derakhshan & Wardle, 2017) in relation to the messages circulating in the internet about women as a class.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the hoaxes debunked by the specialized media platform Maldita.es, specifically, those published in the section entitled Maldito Feminismo. Thus, this study intends to provide an answer to the following research questions:

- RQ_1: What type of information disorder affects messages about women in the Internet?
- RQ_2: Who are the agents involved in the information disorder of messages about women circulating in the Internet?
- RQ_3: What are the characteristics of hoaxes about women published on the Internet?

1.1. Fact-checking as a format

Fact-checking is a systematic process for the verification of data and facts (Echevarría, 2016). Some studies have already proven that, although this format is not a genre for every kind of public, it helps users become better informed (Nyhan & Reifler, 2015). In recent years, numerous journalistic initiatives have emerged, focused on verifying political discourse and attempting to “enhance the welfare of their community while improving the transparency of their administrations” (Magallón, 2018, p.280). The last report on this kind of fact checking confirms that there are 210 platforms dedicated to this task: Maldita.es, Chequeado, Bolivia Verifica, Reverso, Verificado Uruguay, Namibia FactCheck, GhanaFact, Verify-Sy, Metafact, India Today Fact Check, etc. (Stencel & Luther, 2019). However, most traditional media platforms have created their own specialized newsrooms aimed at unmasking fake stories, like EFE news agency, TVE, Le Monde or BBC, among others. Nonetheless, not all these platforms approach it in the same manner, since there are different verification methodologies, ways of presenting how facts have been confirmed, narratives and business models (non-profits); but all these platforms converge in the emergence of a new type of journalism: fact-checking journalism.

However, the origin of verification is not rooted in the Internet, but in the analogue media of the 20's; in American magazines like *Time*, where those in charge of the verification process were, fundamentally, women. This is set out in the article published by Merrill Fabry (2017), where she describes the scrupulous verification process carried out by her female journalistic colleges before publishing news: based on a system of dots and colours. It was conducted as follows: a dot would be placed over each word once its accuracy was confirmed (red ones for facts obtained from authoritative sources like reference books; black dots when a statement was sourced to a newspaper and finally green dots for uncheckable words or phrases that the checker accepted due to the author's authority). In this process, it is worth noting the verification sources and materials used: the New York Public Library, a copy of *Who's Who* and the *World Almanac*, some of Hadden's own books, a dictionary, a thesaurus and a Bible, along with relevant newspaper clippings (Fabry, 2017). The activity carried out back then has no relation to

the what is done today. Nowadays, fact-checking has turned into its own genre, which consists in compiling information about the mistakes that someone else has made, whereas in the past this activity was aimed at avoiding possible publishing mistakes. Fabry (2017) shows a reflection by Lucas Graves, principal researcher at the Reuters Institute: “What’s different is the mission”. In this sense, Echevarría (2016) wonders whether the media are responsible for monitoring public representatives’ statements or whether they should steer part of their activities towards verifying and explaining online hoaxes in digital spaces.

Graves’ (2017) work supports media verification as a prestigious activity that defends the ideals of the journalistic profession (Graves, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2016), but it is necessary to detach this task from party-political or ideological purposes that may influence the editorial line as well as economic interests. In a previous study, Graves (2013) stated, for example, that Media Matters, a liberal medium, monitors and fights republican politicians’ and experts’ statements; whereas News-Busters, a conservative group, monitors liberal leaders’ assertions. In any case, Graves (2013) points out some key tasks journalists must perform to confirm the facts: choosing claims to check; contacting the speaker; tracing false claims and working with experts.

On the other hand, there is a complementary way of fulfilling the verification role: using artificial intelligence software applications when identifying intentionally misleading content in online news (Conroy, Rubin, & Chen, 2015). This sort of software enables the detection of features suggestive of falsehood: eye-catching headlines, expressions with a humorous tone, lack of sources, fraudulent web sites, trolls, obscene language, spelling mistakes or doctored images. Moreover, due to the speed and the vast amount of deceitful contents published and spread over the Internet, these automatized tools facilitate journalistic routines (Brandtzaeg *et al.*, 2016; Hermida, 2015).

1.2. Feminism and verification activism

Since its inception, feminism has been considered an “impertinent” movement (Valera, 2013), in other words, it disturbs and irritates. For that reason, as Valera

(2013) describes, when people use the word feminism, it is common for “the other person to frown, show their disapproval, begin to get defensive or, directly, begin a confrontation” (p.13). Similar to other activist actions, feminism is an expression of civil disobedience (Bedau, 1961; Rawls, 1979; Magaloni, 1990; Habermas, 2002; Thoreau, 2002; Marcone, 2009), since it arises within a social frustration context with the purpose of reclaiming the value of women as “human beings, owners of their destiny, capable of thriving on their own, and enjoying their lives regardless of their condition” (Mastretta, 2004, p. 54).

The concept of *civil disobedience* is usually misunderstood, and it is often perceived as a social phenomenon that aims at destabilizing the democratic system. However, civil disobedience is not an anarchist manifestation, but a non-violent method for opposition used by citizens when they need to express their disapproval in the face of social injustice. Hence, feminism, as a civil disobedience movement, is not only a civic participation mechanism, but also a lawful expression of citizen power; in other words, any democratic state must support the rights of women and men to be allowed to protest against any injustice (Habermas, 2002).

Notwithstanding the above, feminism is still presented as a current dispute waged between two sides. Antagonists conceive feminism as an anti-male movement, and sympathisers understand it as a necessary struggle to reduce inequality between men and women (Carreón & Garza, 2016). The demonization of feminism is not new (De Miguel, 2008). Diverse authors (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2007; Lazar, 2009; Hammer & Kellner, 2009; Press, 2011; Wichels, 2019) have suggested that denial has always accompanied feminist activism since its origins. The main difference between then and now is that, nowadays, the dissemination power of information technologies has amplified the echo of voices that vilify feminism while reinforcing anti-feminist mindsets of cyber-ghettos by spreading disinformation. Pal & Banerjee (2019) reckon that hoaxes have become a prominent social problem in the digital landscape, since disinformation is partly liable for the vilification of feminism. According to Watts & Rothschild (2017), the alt-right movement is responsible for manipulating information regarding matters related to feminism: an amalgam of white supremacists, white nationalists, trolls, anti-feminists, men's rights defenders, anti-immigration activists, bored young people, among others.

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Against this backdrop, a mosaic of activist counter-movements has emerged on the Web aimed at identifying and revealing hoaxes and fake information related to feminism and other political or social matters. This sort of *verification activism* seeks to educate society by promoting collective awareness while maintaining the critical spirit alive. In this vein, *verification activism* is similar to *media activism* (Rovira, 2013; Barranquero & Meda, 2015; Domínguez, 2015), since both are alternative forces alongside traditional media. Nevertheless, the main difference that characterizes verification activism is that it focuses exclusively on checking suspicious messages and combating disinformation, although it displays practices that are specific of journalism. Moreover, verification activism monitors traditional media publications and political statements in order to spot fake news and to inform about the truthfulness of facts.

From the perspective of feminism, the role of verification activism is framed as one of the tasks of the so-called *Fourth Wave feminism* or *cyber-feminism* (Fernández, Corredor & Santín, 2011; García Aguilar, 2015; Núñez Puente, 2016; Moghaddam, 2019; McAdam, 2020). In this sense, this new cyber-feminist movement brings out a new sexual revolution for women (Plant, 1998), which also entails shifting the struggles for gender equality and women's empowerment to the digital ecosystem.

Regarding the Spanish context, one of the main verification activism platforms is Maldita.es. There are multiple works that support the importance of continued research on the consequences of disinformation in today's society. Among this is Coromina & Padilla's (2018) work analysing disinformation debunked by Maldito Dato (specifically, those disproved through their Twitter account) related to the incidents that took place on October 1st, 2017 in Catalonia. Moreover, Molina & Magallón's (2019) study focused on examining the tweets of Maldita Migración (@m_migracion). Therefore, in the present study, we have considered it relevant to analyse hoaxes spotted by Maldito Feminismo. The main purpose is to ascertain, through a holistic perspective, the main features and intentions displayed by fake news related to feminism.

2. Method and materials

The main objective of this study is to analyze the debunks on Maldita.es in its section Maldito Feminismo. It specifically seeks to answer the following research questions:

- RQ_1: What kind of informational disorder affects messages about women on the Internet?
- RQ_2: Who are the agents involved in the information disorder in messages circulating about women on the Internet?
- RQ_3: What are the characteristics of hoaxes about women published on the Internet?

To this end, this quantitative and qualitative study proposes a tool for the systematized analysis of content, for “classification and summary” purposes (Fox, 1981, p.709), of debunks published in Maldito Feminismo (N = 71). The design of this method allows inferences to be made about the contents (Bardín, 1991). This procedure was carried out in three phases, as proposed by the author:

- 1st Pre-analysis: research objectives and hypotheses are formulated; hoaxes are selected (eliminating broken links and those labeled erroneously) and the instrument for content analysis is designed (preparation of the code book and classification sheet).
- 2nd Exploitation of the material: messages are coded using the categories and subcategories defined in the classification sheet.
- 3rd Treatment and interpretation of the results: the obtained data are unpacked.

2.1. Design of the Instrument for Analysis

To carry out the analysis of hoaxes, we developed an instrument inspired by the taxonomic method: a classification sheet (based on the theory of Derakhshan & Wardle, 2017, Tandoc, Lim & Ling, 2018 y Molina, Sundar, Le & Lee, 2019) containing the units of analysis, the categories and subcategories where the hoax can be cataloged (Table 1). This was compiled, in turn, in a code book.

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To assess the reliability of the instrument, coders proceeded to classify the information by administering the analysis sheet. On this first test, Krippendorff's alpha (2018) was calculated, obtaining 100% reliability. As Bardin (1991, p.27) explains, for the analysis to be valid, two different coders must arrive at the same results. In this case, the three experts classified the information equally.

CLASSIFICATION SHEET						
Forms of information disorder						
Satire / parody	False connection	Misleading content	False context	Imposter content	Manipulated content	Fabricated content
Elements of information disorder regarding the AGENT						
TV	Press	Social Media	Radio	Anonymous	Individuals	Collective
Elements of the information disorder regarding the MESSAGE						
Topic	Gender-based violence	Feminism	Personalities	Interesting facts	Women in the history	Rights and legislation
Format	Text		Video (<i>talking head</i> , video montage, <i>deepfake</i>)		Images (photo montage, memes, misleading photos)	
Purpose	Political, Cultural, Religious, Humorous, Personal, Financial, Advertising					
Elements of the information disorder regarding the INTERPRETER						
Under the initiative of the media			User collaboration			

Table 1: Hoax classification sheet

Source: Compilation based on Derakhshan & Wardle (2017), Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2018) & Molina, Sundar, Le & Lee (2019)

2.2. The code book (items)

The units, categories and subcategories, collected in the analysis sheet, were defined in the code book and are inspired by the taxonomies of Derakhshan & Wardle (2017), Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2018) and Molina, Sundar, Le & Lee (2019), as well as recognized and endorsed by the scientific community for their precision and flexibility. These authors refer to “fake news” as an information disorder with

different formal characteristics and intentions.

Forms of information disorder

- Satire or parody: humorous information about a real event, which can become erroneous information when the message is misinterpreted by the public. It is not intended to cause harm.
- False connection: when the headlines, images or captions do not confirm the content.
- Misleading content: deceptive use of information to incriminate someone or something.
- False context: when genuine content is broadcast with false context information.
- Imposter content: when genuine sources are substituted.
- Manipulated content: when genuine information / content or images are manipulated to deceive.
- Fabricated content: new content, which is predominantly false, designed to deceive and harm.

Elements of the information disorder regarding the agent: the agents who created, produced and distributed the hoax, with the intention of doing harm.

- Television: the hoax has been created, produced or distributed on television.
- Press: the hoax has been created, produced or distributed by a digital / print newspaper, magazine or agency.
- Social networks: the hoax has been created, produced or distributed from an account on a social network.
- Radio: the hoax has been created, produced or distributed by a radio broadcaster.
- Anonymous: the hoax does not have an identified agent.

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- Individuals: the hoax has been created, produced or distributed by an identifiable person.
- Collective: the hoax has been created, produced or distributed by a social group.

Elements of information disorder regarding the message: What type of message was it? What format did it have? What were the characteristics?

Information disorder topic

- Gender-based violence: the content affects female victims of some type of sexual, physical, verbal, psychological, intellectual attack, injury or sexual assault, among others, due to their condition as women.
- Feminisms: information affects the social movement to discredit it or to defame those who practice, defend and belong to it.
- Personalities: the main character of the message is a prominent figure in society.
- Women in history: the hoax is about a famous woman in history, usually with the intention of damaging her image, smearing her or questioning her role.
- Rights and legislation: the content deals with rights, regulations or laws that affect women due to their condition.

Information disorder formats

- Text: the hoax responds to a written text. It can be a phrase taken out of context, a full text, a tweet, a comment on Facebook, etc.
- Video: the hoax is presented in audiovisual format. It can be a video montage of false images, or it can contain false data and overlay information. It may include a voiceover, or it may feature a talking head. It can also be a *deepfake* (a fake video where the main character's face is modified using artificial intelligence technology and algorithms).
- Images: the hoax can respond to a manipulated photograph, a photo montage, a meme or a decontextualized image.

Information disorder purpose

- Political: the hoax has a propagandistic or ideological purpose. It aims to mobilize public opinion or destabilize a system.
- Cultural: the hoax seeks to cause harm or defame a person or group due to their social class, way of life, traditions, ethnicity, knowledge, etc.
- Religious: the hoax has religion as its central theme, normally to harm or defame a group for their beliefs.
- Humorous: the hoax has a playful intention and seeks to entertain the public.
- Personal: the hoax is intended to damage the public image of a person or obtain a particular benefit from deception.
- Financial: the hoax has a commercial intention or lucrative purposes with effects on the consumer / user.
- Advertising: the hoax has a commercial intention or lucrative purposes while also seeking to defame or cause damage to the reputation of a brand, company or business.

Elements of the information disorder regarding the interpreter

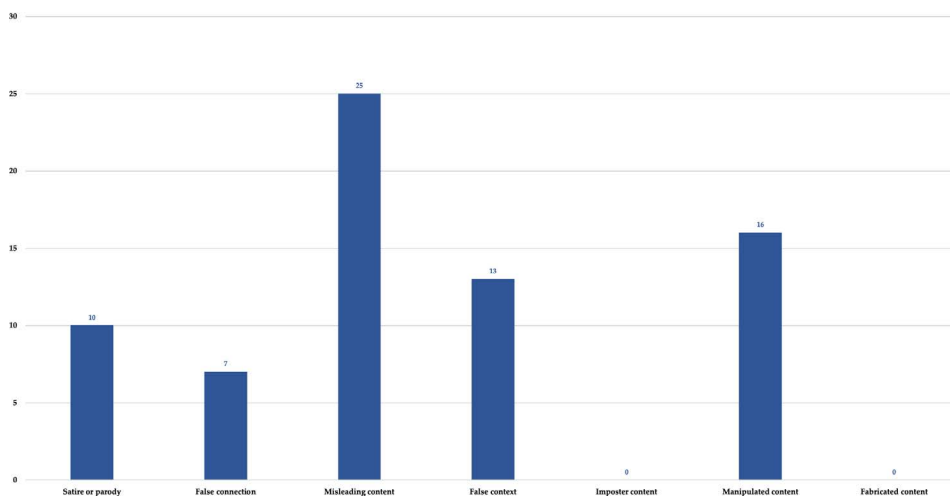
- Under the initiative of the media that finds false content and debunk it.
- User collaboration: the media echoes a complaint from a user about a hoax and debunk it.

3. Results

The main results obtained from this study are representative of the study universe of $N = 71$ hoaxes analyzed in Maldito Feminismo. In no case should these results be interpreted as values to be extrapolated to other fake news. Therefore, and considering the internal validity of this study, a significant number of hoaxes with misleading content (35.2%) related to feminism were detected, such as one attributing the statement “family is the defeat of women” to former Health

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Minister Carmen Montón (PSOE). As shown in Graph 1, manipulated content was also identified to a lesser extent (22.5%) -stating that the bridge that collapsed in Florida was built only by women. In terms of false context (18.3%) -the hoax consists of a video where a man appears explaining that the female victims of gender violence represent “less than 5%” in Madrid-; satirical information (14.1%) -such as one that affirms that Saudi scientists said that women are mammals, but not human- and hoaxes with a false connection (9.9%) - like the hoax where a photo of the Court for Gender Violence was used, where a safety net was installed, to claim that it prevents those arrested for gender-based violence from jumping off the window. Of the cases analyzed, no news was identified with impostor or fabricated content.

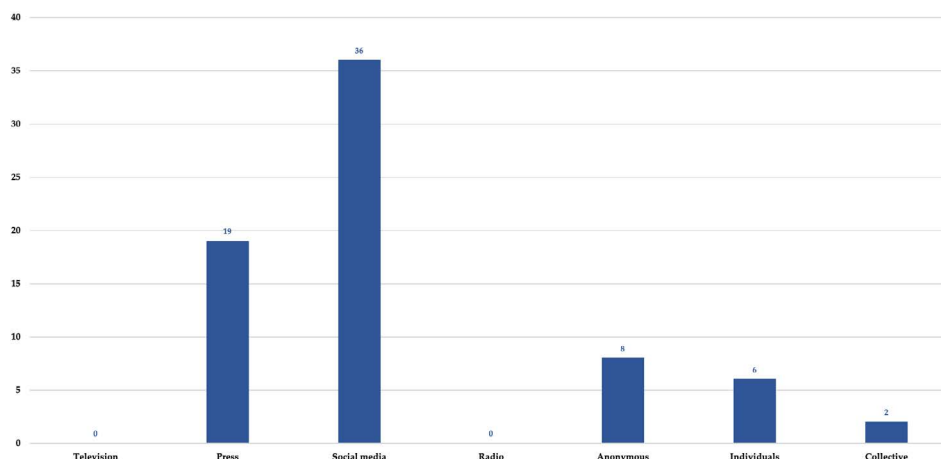


Graph 1: Types of information disorder

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In relation to the agent who created or distributed the hoax, it was found that social media was the most prominent agent (50.7%) -like Putin’s video, in which he allegedly spoke about feminism, which went viral in Facebook-, followed, by a wide margin, by the press (26.8%) - such as the hoax published by the newspaper Mediterráneo digital, where it warned that “feminazis guarrindongas” [slutty feminazis] were going to simulate an abortion in a church in Valladolid. Anonymous broadcasters were also present in the sample (11.3%) - such as one that included

some alleged statements by Marie Curie, in which she purportedly said: “I have never believed that because I am a woman I should have special treatment”. Private examples (8.4%) - such as the statements by the President of the Professional Association of Criminologists of Spain, Carlos Cuadrado, where he affirmed, without evidence, that 67 minors had been murdered by their mothers. This figure was later collected and disseminated by Fernando Sánchez Dragó, in his article in *El Mundo* newspaper. Finally, groups (2.8%) -like the hoax about a seminar of flat-earthers, from the feminist perspective, allegedly organized by a school of gender studies at the National University of Costa Rica. Moreover, as can be seen in Graph 2, no hoaxes created or distributed by television or radio were detected.

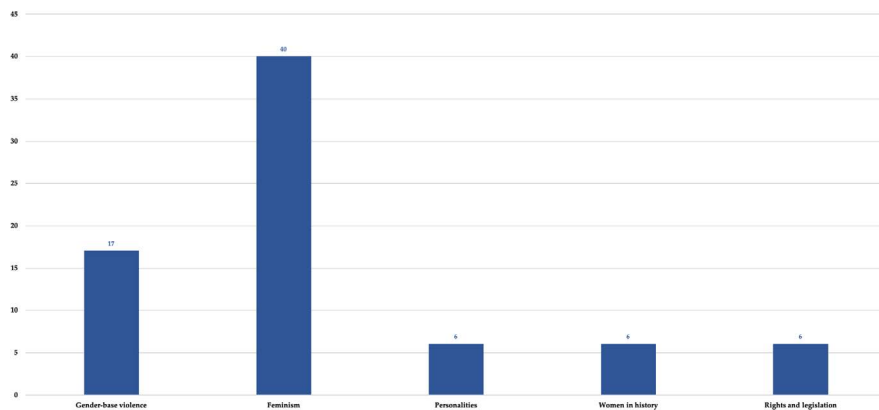


Graph 2: Elements of the information disorder regarding the agent

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In Graph 3, it can be seen that the topic feminisms¹ (56.4%) is the most representative in the hoaxes, although messages about gender-based violence² have also been recorded (24%); including prominent figures in society³ (8.4%); also rights, norms or laws that affect women⁴ (8.4%); and news that seek to defame or damage the figure of famous women in history⁵ (2.8%).

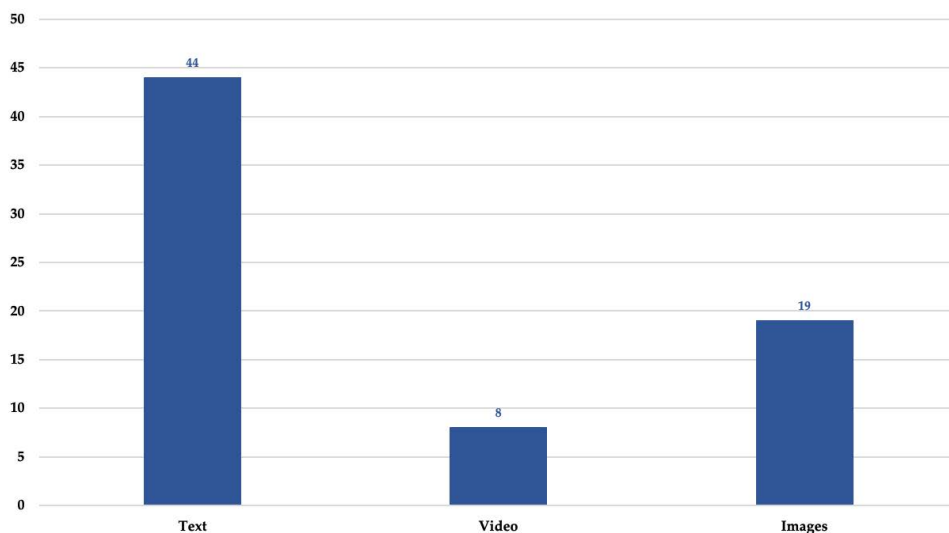
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Graph 3: Elements of information disorder regarding the message: hoax topic

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Text⁶ (62%) it is the most common format of hoaxes covered in Maldito Feminismo. Images⁷ (26.7%) and video⁸ (11.3%) have also been identified, but, as can be seen in Graph 4, these are less common formats in hoaxes related to feminism.



Graph 4: Elements of information disorder regarding the message: information disorder format

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Graph 5 shows that, in 52.1% of the cases analyzed, the hoax has a political or ideological⁹ purpose, like the one who claims that feminists are going to force women to stop waxing. It is also worth noting that 25.4% of false news have a cultural purpose¹⁰, that is, that they want to cause harm or defame a person or group due to their social class, lifestyle, traditions, ethnicity, knowledge, etc. An example of this is the hoax stating a woman has named her son 'Vagina' to fight gender stereotypes. Although less common, hoaxes related to feminism also displayed a humorous objective¹¹ (11.3%) -like one that was spread from a fake profile acting as a supposed feminist, who said that "tampax are a product designed by oppressive men". Religious¹² (5.6%) -such as the one that claims that a priest offers to perform exorcisms on feminists. Personal¹³ (4.2%) -such as the hoax about Vladimir Putin's speech where, supposedly, he speaks of gender ideology. Finally, economic¹⁴ (1.4%) -like one that affirms that the Government has allocated 630 million euros to help the development of feminist and LGBTI.

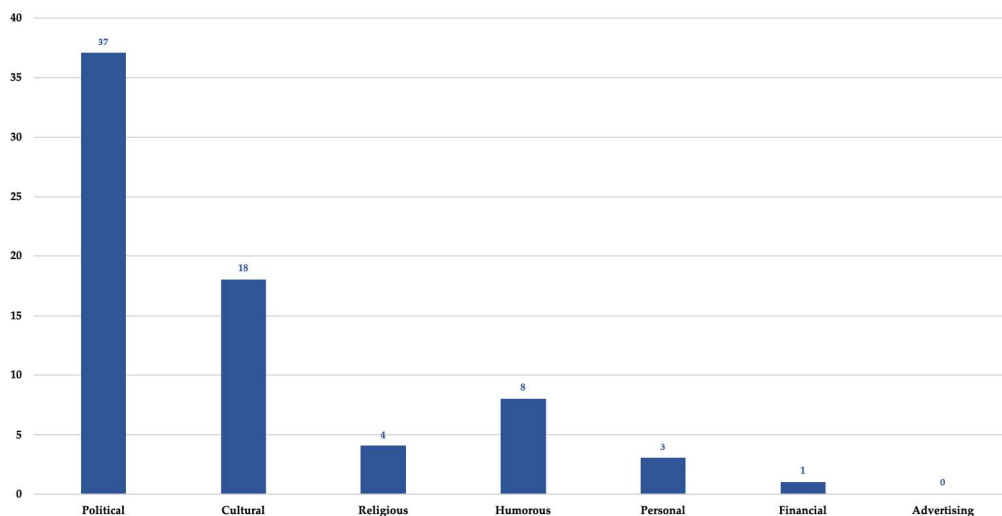
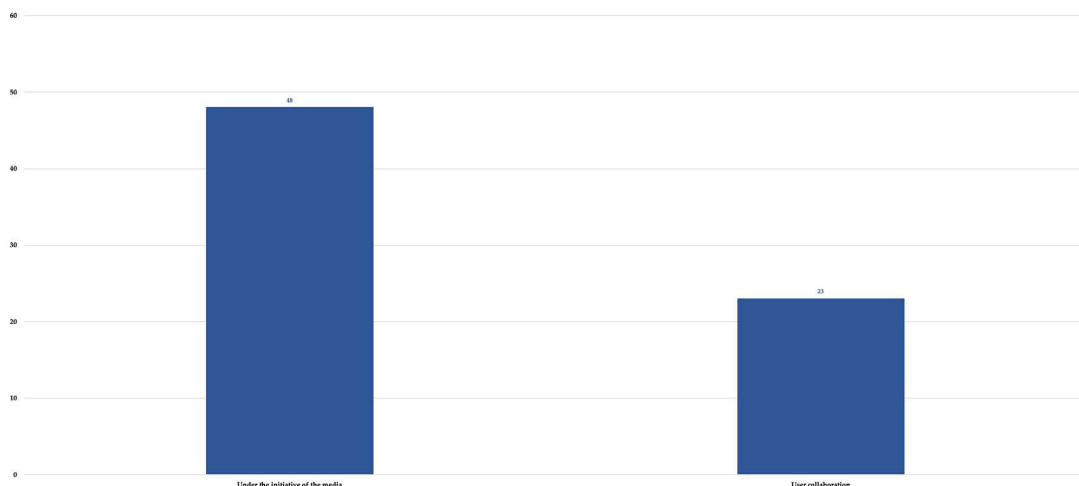


Gráfico 5: Elementos del desorden informativo según el mensaje: propósito de la noticia falsa

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

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Finally, it should be noted that, in 67.6% of the items, Maldito Feminismo finds false content and debunks it¹⁵. This means, as shown in Graph 6, that users have denied or reported 32.4% of the hoaxes that have been published on the platform¹⁶.



Graph 6: Elements of the information disorder regarding the interpreter

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In general, and aware of the limitations of the study, it can be inferred that the hoaxes detected by Maldito Feminismo are fake news with misleading content, which seek to harm feminism (since this is the main theme of most hoaxes analyzed) and have a political purpose. These information disorders are created and distributed mainly through social networks in text format. In addition, users collaborate and participate in the detection and reporting of hoaxes, although, usually, the Maldito Feminismo platform is the one that identifies, locates and reports the majority of fake news.

4. Discussion

The results of this work allow us to state that the information disorder that affects women displays some common characteristics. It mainly has an incrimina-

ting intention, thus answering the first research question (RQ1) and in accordance with the scientific definition of this type of content (Derakhshan & Wardle, 2017). It also expands and explains the results in Spain reported by the CAC (2018).

In addition, it is a disorder created, produced or distributed, primarily within social networks and, secondly, in digital media, which responds to the second research question (RQ2). It is not surprising that the vast majority of the hoaxes that have undergone the Maldita.es review have been spread on social platforms. The digital environment is the place where disinformation finds its natural habitat, given the ease of dissemination, the lack of a moderating agent controlling its veracity or how easily original sources disappear or are diluted in the networks. Therefore, on Twitter, Instagram or WhatsApp, to name a few platforms, delving into the information is far from straightforward. This is complicated by language that is distorted, making them ideal channels for the dissemination of hoaxes. These data remind us of the warning by Johnson, Bichard & Zhang (2009) about the impact that sharing this content can have on public opinion and that, in the long term, can build “digital ghettos” or “cyber-ghettos” (p.60).

In the case of hoaxes that are disseminated through the digital press, the most frequent scenario is relatively new native digital media, characterized by sensationalist content (often self-defined this way) who seek for this content —originally published on a website— to end up on social media, where they will find more echo. This type of press is very unique in that it is based on rumors. On the other hand, it also confirms the definition of the European Commission (2018) and that of the authors Derakhshan & Wardle (2017), Tandoc, Lim & Ling (2018) and Molina, Sundar, Le & Lee (2019), who suggest that fake news appropriate the appearance of real news.

In terms of the characteristics of the hoaxes about women published on the Internet (RQ3), we can say that these are also characterized by discussing feminism. The feminist movement is precisely the object of parody, disinformation or manipulation. Exaggerated and surprising statements are made about the relationship between men and women that are falsely attributed to feminist groups or to the women who represent them, coinciding with the statements by Steinem (2016)

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and Occeñola (2018). Similarly, content is often invented or manipulated to undermine the credibility and dignity of feminism.

Gender-based violence appears regularly in hoaxes, either to question its importance or to manipulate the figures of assaulted women or provide false reports of this type of violence. Other topics refer to current figures that are recognizable by the audience or related to legislative measures. These denials are consistent with the types of attacks denounced through the testimonies of journalist Jamela Alindogan and the Vice President of the Government of the Philippines, Leonor Robredo (Occeñola, 2018).

Another characteristic feature is that the largest number of hoaxes analyzed within this sample, are texts. It is understandable, since on many occasions they comprise easy phrases, immediate comments in which people or groups are quoted. Although a priori it may seem that images have are communicatively stronger, the written language is more damaging. The simplicity of text dissemination prevails over the manipulation of images, which requires more expertise and more time.

Finally, the purpose of the hoaxes about women, detected by Maldita.es, is mainly political, understood in a propagandistic or ideological sense: it aims to mobilize public opinion or discredit feminism. These lies, as revealed by the Eurobarometer (2018), put democratic political processes and values at risk. This is the most complex category of analysis, since one could understand that when it comes to women and their well-being, in a broad sense, everything is political. However, we have considered other categories that enrich the analysis. Thus, hoaxes referring to the identity, life or traditions of women have been coded and categorized as “cultural”, which are the most frequent after those of a political character.

Finally, more than half of the hoaxes were verified by Maldito Feminismo, compared to the rest, which were reported and detected by users in the community. This result reinforces the idea that verification activism is currently emerging timidly in the media and social landscape. Unlike verification journalism, which understands the fact-checking process as one more task within its professional journalistic routine, verification activism is a format in itself: it is an archetype of vindication (not a business model) that is not only focused on identifying and sig-

naling hoaxes, but also contextualizing, investigating and denouncing fake news, in order to educate society, to raise awareness of the dangers of misinformation and to encourage a critical and reflective attitude.

In short, verification activism seeks social welfare while denouncing injustices, just like any other form of protest. In this sense, verification activism combines some qualities of verification journalism and media activism, but it is increasingly evident that it is emerging as a booming autonomous movement. Likewise, in the case that concerns us, verification activism is manifested as one more practice, although still in its infancy, of the current Fourth Wave of feminism or cyber feminism (Fernández, Corredor & Santín, 2011; García Aguilar, 2015; Núñez Puente, 2016; Moghaddam, 2019; McAdam, 2020), as it represents a form of female empowerment on the online scenario.

However, Maldito Feminismo is still quite an incipient section and, therefore, the units of analysis for this research were limited to N=71 hoaxes. Despite its emerging nature, it is important to continue studying the evolution of false news on the platform, in order to discover changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the agents and the interpreter, as well as the possible transformations of the message (format, topic and purpose).

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Notas

- [1] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/2HLkj7>
- [2] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/38RoX9e>
- [3] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/39ZUTIE>
- [4] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/32mm5yC>
- [5] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/2PjfrUF>
- [6] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/2wyCHqX>
- [7] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/2vUqiRT>
- [8] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/2HPmeRI>
- [9] This hoax can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2ST5uiF>
- [10] This hoax can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2vWD6mQ>
- [11] This hoax can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/37SDqQT>
- [12] This hoax can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2vYyrki>
- [13] This hoax can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/39ZyTxA>
- [14] This hoax can be consulted at the following link: <https://bit.ly/2H0YXiP>
- [15] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/2PjT29t>
- [16] As, for example, the following hoax: <https://bit.ly/39Z5uUO>



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