Popular feminism and the pact of whiteness: the institutional role of YouTube in promoting networks on female discourses

Feminismo popular e pacto da branquitude: o papel institucional do YouTube na promoção de redes sobre discursos femininos

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Resumo: *O artigo investiga campanhas institucionais da plataforma de vídeos YouTube para a formação de redes de discussões sobre direitos femininos. Parte-se de reflexões teóricas sobre a centralidade dos influenciadores digitais na cultura digital (KARHAWI, 2021) e suas práticas de influência, bem como o entendimento do YouTube como sistema cultural (BURGESS; GREEN, 2009). Foram analisadas qualitativamente, a partir da noção de “vetores” (GUTMANN, 2021), quatro campanhas (entre 2016 e 2018), subsequentes à chamada primavera feminista brasileira. Argumenta-se que tais esforços integram estratégias do YouTube para construir imaginários sobre a plataforma como espaço para pautas democráticas em contexto de “feminismo popular” (BANET-WEISER, 2018). Ademais, as campanhas fomentaram colaborações posteriores entre as participantes, indicando papel relevante institucional da plataforma no fortalecimento das redes. Contudo, a partir de olhar interseccional (COLLINS, 2015), destaca-se a preponderância de influenciadoras brancas, reforçando um lugar de privilégio da branquitude ao pautar tais questões.*

Palavras-chave: *YouTube; Feminismo; Influenciadores digitais; Redes de colaboração; Interseccionalidade.*

A R T I G O

Abstract: *The paper investigates institutional campaigns on the video plat-form YouTube aimed at forming networks of discussions on women's rights. The study begins with theoretical reflections on the centrality of digital influencers in digital culture (Karhawi, 2021), as well as an understanding of YouTube as a cultural system (Burgess; Green, 2009). Using the notion of "vectors" (Gutmann, 2021), four campaigns (from 2016 to 2018) were qualitatively analyzed, follow-ing the so-called Brazilian feminist spring. It is argued that these efforts are part of YouTube's strategies to construct imaginaries of the platform as a space for democratic agendas in the context of "popular feminism" (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Furthermore, the campaigns fostered subsequent collaborations among partic-ipants, indicating the platform's significant institutional role in strengthening these networks. However, from an intersectional perspective (Collins, 2015), the predominance of white influencers is highlighted, reinforcing a place of privilege for whiteness when discussing issues related to feminism.*

Keywords: *YouTube; feminism; digital influencers; collaboration networks; intersectionality.*

Introduction

While seeking to reinforce its existence as part of a process of democratization of communication facilitated by digital media (EVANGELISTA, 2019), YouTube faces criticism from various sectors of society regarding its alleged neutrality and the consequences of its action policy (BRYANT, 2020; GILLESPIE, 2010). In this article, we investigate the platform's institutional efforts to construct another image in which YouTube presents itself as a space for debates on relevant issues, especially identity-related ones. More specifically, we seek to understand how, by trying to consolidate an image of a socially relevant platform, YouTube may have contributed to strengthening a network of debates linked to feminism on the Brazilian internet.

To this end, we analyzed campaigns developed by the platform aimed at "women's empowerment"[1] in Brazil between 2016 and 2018, the years following the movement known as the "feminist spring" in the country (DUARTE; MELO, 2017), which brought together virtual and in-person protests for women's rights. We argue that there is little material on the institutional contribution of these environments, despite several studies on the importance of digital platforms for such aspects as the dissemination of feminist hashtags (ALMEIDA, 2020; FREIRE, 2016; REIS; NATANSOHN, 2017) or the formation of digital support networks (MARTINEZ, 2019; YAMAMOTO, 2021) at that time. While there are plenty of studies on the appropriation of digital platforms by "users" – in this case, women and feminist collectives – there is a lack of research that focuses on the role of these companies as institutions that mediate[2] such debates.

In a context of increasing intersections between the spheres of activism and consumption (EVANGELISTA, 2020), we surveyed campaigns

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1 Though problematic, we use the expression because YouTube and campaign participants adopted it. See Evangelista (2020) for a debate on issues related to empowerment in the analyzed context.

2 The notion of mediation refers to Martín-Barbero's proposal, appropriated by Gutmann, to reflect on the "mediation of technicalities," understanding "YouTube, Instagram (...) not only as platforms but as environments through which networks of articulations between bodies, images (...) tastes, etc. constitute themselves." (2021, p. 17).

promoted by YouTube in the period in the Brazilian context, arriving at four: #Criadoras [#Creators], #AVozDelaÉAMinhaVoz [#HerVoiceIsMyVoice], #PorQueMulher [#BecauseWoman], and #FalaMiga [#HeyFriend]. Supported by the reflections of Gutmann (2021), we understand these campaigns as "vectors" that trigger "audio-verbal-visual" content. Based on these vectors, we identified and sought to outline, through qualitative exploratory analysis, a profile of the influencers chosen to participate in the campaigns, paying attention to the networks of articulations between them.

The theoretical discussion that supports our survey proposes to reflect on the characteristic dynamics of YouTube (BURGESS; GREEN, 2009; GILLESPIE, 2010; PEREIRA DE SÁ, 2021) and digital influencers (KARHAWI, 2021; MARWICK, 2015; SENFT, 2013). Moreover, we bring debates on the "post" (GILL, 2016; McROBBIE, 2009) and "popular" (BANET-WEISER, 2018) feminist movements as part of branding strategies of various organizations (BANET-WEISER, 2012) to explore the relationship between consumption and the promotion of issues related to femininity. Finally, we seek to analyze such issues from intersectional perspectives (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CARRERA, 2021; COLLINS, 2015).

Coming out of the closet: dissemination of "serious" debates on YouTube

Thinking of YouTube as a cultural system (BURGESS; GREEN, 2009) means the platform disseminates productions that contribute to the resignification of different values over time. Contrary to what it suggests, the platform is not just a mediator where you can "broadcast yourself"[3] but a non-human actor that produces culture (PEREIRA DE SÁ, 2021). Almost 20 years after its launch, characteristics of what Burgess and Green called the "Youtubeness" of a video (2009), that is, those that make it identifiable as a cultural form native to YouTube, helped to

3 "Broadcast yourself" was YouTube's first slogan.

shape the possibilities of aesthetic and cultural enjoyment of content on the internet.

In this sense, we highlight the emergence of first-person videos related to identity issues, such as gender, sexual orientation, and race. Moving between the fields of entertainment and information, these productions, often of an essayistic nature, became known for the dissemination of "serious" debates that helped foster discussions beyond the video platform. Part of a broader process of popularizing content about intimacy, which would be disseminated on the internet mainly by blogs in the mid-2000s, this movement found in YouTube's affordances[4] and policies a fertile environment to flourish.

One of the first signs of the potential for campaigns related to minorities on the platform occurred in October 2010, when columnist Dan Savage used YouTube to launch a campaign called "It Gets Better." The initiative aimed to send messages of hope to LGBTQIAPN+ youth who felt threatened because of their sexuality and, after going viral, counted with the participation of Barack Obama, then president of the United States. From then on, several YouTubers known for their entertainment-only videos transformed in the eyes of the public, using the platform to reveal their sexual orientation to their fans.

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4 The notion of "affordance" here refers to the "myriad possibilities" that the media allow (PEREIRA DE SÁ, 2021, p. 78). Aspects such as the use and appropriation of tools for interaction and video sharing should be subject to future study since the focus of this paper is on YouTube's institutional policies.

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Given the record audience figures for such "confessions," Vanity Fair columnist Richard Lawson asked: "Will every YouTuber eventually make a 'coming out' video?" In the article, published in 2015, Lawson stated that this "coming out" would not necessarily be about homosexuality but rather the opportunity to talk about some "deep and true" aspect, revealing more complex dimensions of oneself. That dynamic is not exactly new in the world of celebrities. However, we can reinterpret the practice in the context of microcelebrities/digital influencers, who maintain their bond with the audience by revealing strategic aspects of their intimacy (KARHAWI, 2021; MARWICK, 2015; SENFT, 2013).

As discussed in previous works (EVANGELISTA, 2019), this movement occurred amid an institutional effort by Google to consolidate YouTube's image as socially relevant for the democratization of

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5   More information at https://itgetsbetter.org/. Accessed on 10 January 2024.
6   The acronym encompasses Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic/Agender, Pan/Poly, Non-Binary people, and more.

communication. Thus, starting in 2016, the video platform began to invest more incisively in initiatives to promote the visibility of marginalized social groups. Here, we focus specifically on campaigns linked to women. Amid the popularization of feminist debates in various contexts, YouTube followed a movement by organizations from different sectors, making the defense of issues related to women a significant component of its branding (BANET-WEISER, 2012). That year, the company launched the project "Global Program for Women" with the participation of five YouTubers of different nationalities. The project aimed at "continuing our efforts to empower female voices on YouTube" with two initiatives.[7] The first was the announcement that seven YouTubers from different parts of the world would be part of the "Ambassadors of Change" program, a partnership between the company and the United Nations to promote the organization's sustainable development and women's equality actions.[8] The second, more focused on developing content on the video platform, was the #Creators campaign, which we will describe in the next topic.[9]

Such campaigns have kept pace with the platform's audience. In 2017, Kate Stanford, YouTube's director of advertising marketing, stated that the visibility of videos related to empowerment, entrepreneurship, the economy, and services reflected changes in women's interests. According to Stanford, the audience for such productions tripled, contradicting stereotypes about women's consumption of beauty content (STANFORD, 2017).[10] However, although the company characterizes such movements as part of an organic movement, for which YouTube offers only a platform presented as neutral (GILLESPIE, 2010), its

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7   Available at: https://abre.ai/iZcT. Accessed on 20 February 2024.
8   The Brazilian YouTuber Tatiane Ferreira, ahead of the channel Acidez Feminina, was among the chosen ambassadors. The decision incited protests among feminist groups at the time since Ferreira clearly stated she did not consider herself a feminist (FERRARI, 2016).
9   Later, the platform launched the projects #OrgulhodeSer to promote LGBTQIAPN+ pride and #YouTubeNegro to give visibility to producers of content on racial issues.
10   Evidently, that does not mean we should reduce beauty videos to stereotypes of futility or alienation.

policies and strategies offer clues in another direction, contributing to the articulation of certain visibilities.

Recalling the role of consumption as a cultural marker capable of building a shared universe of values and practices (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 2009), we are interested in considering which issues and digital influencers linked to women gain space through the platform's direct endorsement in its campaigns □ and which are made invisible. This issue is part of the debate on the nuances of post-feminism (GILL, 2016; McRobbie, 2009) and popular feminism (BANET-WEISER, 2018) that emerge from the appropriation of feminine agendas (not necessarily feminist) by diverse organizations.

In the 1990s, the movement to make practices and products associated with "girl power" visible in the media grew, transforming the rhetoric of female emancipation into a normative one, as explained by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018). Authors such as Rosalind Gill (2016) and Angela McRobbie (2009) characterized this phenomenon as post-feminism. Post-feminism is a set of ideologies, strategies, and practices related to liberal feminist discourses, such as freedom, choice, and independence. Unlike orthodox feminism, which criticizes the structural conditions of gender inequality, Gill (2007) describes post-feminism as a sensibility that includes self-discipline, self-monitoring, empowerment, and personal transformation; that is, a sensibility that would threaten feminism, as it leads to the maintenance of the conditions that sustain patriarchy.

Later, when observing the growing diffusion of debates related to feminism in commercial media, Banet-Weiser characterizes this movement as "popular feminism" (2018). The author observes that, although different, post-feminism and popular feminism share elements. Popular feminism, unlike post-feminism, recognizes gender inequality and female vulnerability, offering a critical vision that distances itself from the vague slogan "girl power" but still presents liberal solutions to the problems under discussion. In other words, the emphasis on aspects such as self-esteem to the detriment of more consolidated (and radical) proposals for structural changes still appears as one of the hallmarks of

manifestations of popular feminism. In this sense, echoing criticisms made by Black feminists since at least the 1970s, popular feminism is not very intersectional.

The notion of intersectionality is polysemic, but it is worth highlighting, in short, that it concerns the intersections between race, class, gender, sexuality, and age, among other identity markers that "operate not in a unique way, as mutually exclusive entities, but as phenomena that are mutually constructed and generate complex social inequalities" (COLLINS, 2015, p. 2, our translation). Racialized women, particularly Black feminists, have made its proposition and articulation (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CARRERA, 2021), generating relevant epistemological, methodological, and political praxis contributions in diverse fields.[11]

Creators and female engagement on YouTube

Based on Juliana Gutmann's (2021) reflection, we understand YouTube campaigns for the visibility of discussions related to feminism and female empowerment as

> audio-verbal-visual expressions that no longer fit into the definitions of meaning and text, however open they may be, nor into the idea of a product or video broadcast by a medium but are constituted as an entangled fabric; a rhizomatic form, a web of heterogeneous, connected, and multiple nodes (GUTMANN, 2021, p. 14-15).

In this sense, videos, channels, influencers, audience comments, hashtags, and debates on multiple platforms about feminism, among other content related to the campaigns observed here, make up this web of diverse nodes that interconnect through the "ambiance" of YouTube. That leads us to the question the author asks: "How can we analytically account for this audiovisual that (...) operates in a network and makes us see flows, aggregates and constitutes our bubbles, presupposes sharing and affective and identity dissonances?" (GUTMANN, 2021, p. 17). I

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11   American Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the concept of intersectionality. In the legal field in the 1980s, she denounced the oppression suffered by Black women (CARRERA, 2021).

In search of a methodological path, we relied on the author's insight into the notion of "vector" to understand the campaign videos that we selected in this work "as a possibility of tracking and mapping a specific entangled audio-verbal-visual set" (2021, p. 71) □ in our case, the discussions on female empowerment mediated by the YouTube platform between 2016 and 2018. Gutmann explains that "the idea of vector refers to an event that is no longer unitary and closed in itself but triggers and mobilizes flows of images, sounds, information, social practices, and rituals that tell us about identities and their disputes" (idem). Thus, we carried out an initial analytical move to map the campaigns carried out by YouTube during the period, understanding them as vectors that generated a network of articulation between influencers in Brazil.

In a second stage, we mapped the influencers invited by the platform to participate in the four campaigns through an exploratory qualitative analysis. We observed descriptions, cover images, and featured videos on the identified channels to delimit the themes the chosen participants addressed the most up until the campaign period. Finally, we analyzed the collaborations published on the channels of three YouTubers who appear centrally in the campaigns, Júlia Tolezano, Maíra Medeiros, and Nátaly Neri, during the same period as the survey. The objective was to understand collaboration networks formed from the institutional mediation of the platform – algorithmic mediation is beyond the scope of the work.

The #Criadoras campaign, launched on International Women's Day in 2016, was a global production from YouTube Spaces, the company's studios spread across different countries. Seven participants appear on the scene playing notable women in the video "100 Years of Incredible Women."[12] The production featured a Brazilian representative, Júlia Tolezano, who played the Brazilian writer, poet, journalist, and political activist Patrícia Galvão, known as Pagu. In just 2m55s, the video attempts to summarize the trajectories of notable women, emphasizing their ability to overcome challenges and inspirational messages taken

12   Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0MouLJcG-Q. Accessed on 26 May 2024.

out of context □ in Pagu's case, the phrase chosen was "Dream. Even if you have nightmares, always dream." Far from proposing any change in the structures that perpetuate the difficulties experienced by women, the video invites the audience to fight for individual achievements, referring to post-feminism (GILL, 2016; McRobbie, 2009).

A trained journalist, Tolezano had gained prominence the previous year after publishing a video about abusive relationships entitled "Não tira o batom vermelho" ["Do not remove the red lipstick"] (TOLEZANO, 2015). Like the other participants in the campaign, the YouTuber welcomed guests from her country to collaborate on topics related to discoveries and challenges of the activity of "female creators" on YouTube, discussing issues such as racism, aging, and the fight against homophobia. The idea of the meetings with her Brazilian peers, as the YouTuber explained in an interview with the newspaper O Globo, was to "talk about what it is like to be a woman on YouTube." Recorded at YouTube Space São Paulo, the videos of the meetings aired on participants' channels and made available in a playlist on the channel "Jout Jout Prazer." Besides Jout Jout, 15 guests star in the series.

Image 1 – #Criadoras campaign influencer

	Influenciadora	Canal	Temáticas principais em 2016
1	Bruna Vieira	Bruna Vieira	Beleza, maquiagem e a passagem da adolescência para a vida adulta
2	Flavia Calina	Flavia Calina	Rotina familiar nos Estados Unidos e maternidade
3	Liliane Prata	Canal da Lili	Literatura e relacionamentos
4	Tatiana Feltrin	Tiny Little Things	Resenhas de livros em vídeo (booktuber)
5	Tatiany Leite	Vá ler um livro	
6	Malena	malena010102	Games
7	Nátaly Neri	Afros e afins	Moda, beleza e feminismo negro
8	Julia Petit	Petiscos	Moda e beleza
9	Ana de Cesaro	Ana	Temas do seu cotidiano e debates sobre feminismo e temas afins
10	Mandy Candy	Mandy para maiores	Processo de transição de gênero e o preconceito contra pessoas transgênero
11	Ana Lídia Lopes	Ana Lídia Lopes	Beleza, maquiagem e a passagem da adolescência para a vida adulta
12	Isa Lima (atual IZA)	Isa Lima	Covers de grandes nomes da música
13	Lorelay Fox	Para tudo	Maquiagem, universo das drag queens e, posteriormente, temas relacionados à luta contra a homofobia
14	Jéssica Tauane	Canal das Bee	Temas variados ligados ao universo LGBTQIA+
15	Debora Baldin		

Source: Elaborated by authors[13].

The heterogeneity of the channels involved in #Criadoras indicates an attempt to engage with diverse audiences through women with different interests and "identity avenues" (AKOTIRENE, 2019) in a perspective that seemingly embraces intersectional dimensions. Announcements and articles about the campaign do not specify the participant selection criteria. However, it is possible to note that some already presented a more "engaged" profile on their respective channels.

In 2017, Brazilian YouTubers stood out in YouTube projects to promote International Women's Day again. The first was the

13   Danilo Dabague interprets the YouTuber drag queen Lorely Foz.

#HerVoiceIsMyVoice campaign (#AVozDelaÉAMinhaVoz in Portuguese).[14] In the global promotional video for the initiative, two Brazilian women appear among other YouTubers from different parts of the world: Nátaly Neri (Afros e Afins) and the aforementioned Tatiane Ferreira (Acidez Feminina). Unlike Ferreira, who stated she did not consider herself a feminist, Neri had already produced videos related to Black feminism (besides engaging in broader Black movement debates).

However, like other YouTubers portrayed, Brazilian women do not have a voice in the campaign. We see only images of Ferreira and Neri on their respective channels while listening to a voiceover speech by Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai about the importance of representing other women. Celebrities such as the former First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, and the American TV host Ellen DeGeneres also convey messages of female empowerment. In fact, DeGeneres appears emotional on the screen upon receiving an award and claims to have discovered a mission "that was not just about me," as seems to have happened with the other women who appear in sequence.

By framing the work of influencers in this context, the campaign suggests that YouTubers, public figures, and celebrities are on par since they all use the "spotlight" to become inspirations for other women. However, the enthusiasm of the women on camera seems limited to representation: at the end of the video, there is a call for the audience to share videos of "inspiring women" — an attitude that is more than convenient for YouTube. Recalling the discussions on post-feminism and popular feminism (BANET-WEISER, 2018), we can say the platform emphasizes the relevance of voices in favor of feminist discussions, as long as they are presented in an inoffensive and palatable way, preferably contributing to the increase of its audience.

Another initiative that brought together Brazilian YouTubers, this time for collaboration, was the #PorQueMulher campaign in 2017.[15]

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14 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdX55I9WHDw. Accessed on 25 May 2024.
15 The playlist with official campaign videos are available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-nOo-k8pIAU&list=PLEIJP9n-xzZYqCug4nuF0_9R9CMhjrudv. Accessed on 25 February 2024.

In the form of sketches, eight videos recorded from YouTube Space São Paulo presented debates on taboos associated with women, such as the absence of women in history books, the need for hair removal, or wage inequality. Another rising feminist YouTuber, Maíra Medeiros, from the channel "Nunca te pede nada" ["Never ask you for anything"] was the "godmother" of the campaign. "Also known for sketches and parodies that provoke and raise awareness among her audience with themes about the female universe," explains a report on the website "Canal Tech," Medeiros was the only one to participate in all the videos recorded at YouTube Space and responsible for publishing them on her channel (CANAL TECH, 2017, online).

Unlike previous campaigns, #PorQueMulher was launched in partnership with Think Olga, a feminist NGO linked to significant feminist movements, especially on social media platforms. Possibly due to this involvement, many of the 17 YouTubers were already known for producing activist content or discussing issues related to representation.

Image 2 – Influencers in the #PorQueMulher campaign

	Influenciadora	Canal	Temáticas principais em 2017
1	Luiza Junqueira	Tá Querida	Gordofobia e movimento body positive
2	Alexandra Gurgel	Alexandrismos	
3	Jéssica Tauane[2]	Gorda de Boa	
4	Gabi Oliveira	De Pretas	Racismo e empoderamento da mulher negra
5	Nátaly Neri	Afros e Afins	
6	Maíra Azevedo	Tia Má	
7	Ana Paula Xongani	Ana Paula Xongani	
8	Amanda Mendes	Tô de Crespa	
9	Xan Ravelli	Soul Vaidosa	
10	Rosa Luz	Barraco da Rosa	
11	Mariana Torquato	Vai uma mãozinha aí?	Conteúdos sobre pessoas com deficiência
12	Mag Halat	Mag Halat	Rotina como muçulmana que utiliza véu no Brasil
13	Helen Ramos	Hel Mother	Desromantização da maternidade
14	Mari Nolasco	Mari Nolasco	Música
15	Haru	Canal da Haru	Games e cultura pop
16	Nathália Arcuri	Me poupe!	Educação financeira

Source: Elaborated by the author.

In 2018, a new campaign by the company focused on collaboration between YouTubers to promote issues related to the female universe. In

partnership with YouTube Space RJ in Brazil, the channel Whohaha and the American director Elizabeth Banks promoted the Women in Comedy initiative described as a "global project for female empowerment.". According to YouTube, over 100 creators received support in the form of film sets, coordination, and production resources for recordings in Los Angeles, London, Toronto, Mumbai, Berlin, Paris, and Rio de Janeiro.[16]

Named "#FalaMiga" in Brazil, the project this time was led by the creators of the channel DRelacionamentos, which specializes in the production of comic sketches, many of which have a feminist bias. Jackie Salomão, Nina Dutra, and Felipe Ventura ran the channel at the time (the male actor does not appear in the videos of the #FalaMiga campaign). Besides new sketches, the videos recorded in partnership with other YouTubers featured conversations on the same topics women are "tired of hearing about," such as job market demands or in relation to pregnancy. Among the 16 participants in the initiative's official videos (in addition to the members of DRelacionamentos), six had already participated in the 2016 and 2017 campaigns: Júlia Tolezano, Maíra Medeiros, Jéssica Tauane, Luiza Junqueira, Helen Ramos, and Malena. The NGO Think Olga once again worked on selecting the guests in partnership with the DRelacionamentos channel. The other guests produce content on various topics (Image 3).

16 We obtained information from the descriptions of project videos from Brazil. The complete list is available at https://bit.ly/2I8vu6q. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

Image 3 – Influencers in the #FalaMiga campaign

	Influenciadora	Canal	Temáticas principais em 2018
1	Carol Moreira	Carol Moreira	Cultura pop e cinema
2	Luisa Classen	Lully de Verdade	
3	Cátia Damasceno	Cátia Damasceno	Sexo e relacionamentos
4	Ellora Haone	Ellora Haone	Autoestima e saúde mental
5	Mariana Morena	Mariana Morena	Autoestima da mulher negra, beleza e
6	Luci Gonçalves	Luci Gonçalves	sexualidade LGBTQ+
7	Natália Abreu	Natália Abreu	
8	Lilian Melchert	Que Diabos!	Curiosidades, estilo de vida e autoajuda
9	Gabie Faddel	Gabie Faddel	
10	Karen Jonz	Karen Jonz	
11	Dafne Amaro	Saúde na rotina	Vida fitness
12	Adriana Cubas	Adriana Cubas	Mulheres e carreira

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

More than determining the role of each of these YouTubers in disseminating messages related to feminism, we sought to identify the formation of networks based on institutional campaigns linked to YouTube, which we understand as vectors (GUTMANN, 2021). It is worth noting that the networks in question go beyond the guests listed since each campaign had a collaborative bias. By choosing to map only those who participated in the "official" campaign videos, we understand that the choice of certain YouTubers is part of legitimizing them as representatives of the type of "creators" that the company wants to promote. The direct involvement of a recognized feminist organization in Brazil in the articulation of two of the campaigns under analysis reinforces this legitimization.

On the other hand, an interesting qualitative fact for our research concerns the increase in videos related to ideas of female empowerment in the period between the campaigns. All channels whose authors published videos with a more militant profile emerged in mid-2015 or later. In many cases, the trajectories are also similar. Names such as Ellora Haone, Nátaly Neri, Luci Gonçalves, Júlia Tolezano, Maíra Medeiros, and Ana de Cesaro started on YouTube with videos that discussed female roles that are widely popular on the platform, whether through content about fashion and beauty or through humor. Little by little, they began to publish videos more frequently that more explicitly mention the struggle of women/Black people/LGBTQIAPN+ people for social

equality. In this sense, one can think that integration with the market is a significant part of the dissemination of debates linked to popular feminism (and other identity-based issues), which in turn will contribute to the visibility and recognition of the digital influencers who promote them.

Another relevant point of the analysis concerns the categories of visibility articulated based on YouTube's institutional choices. Of the four campaigns mapped, only one focused on a Black woman, Nátaly Neri (who, even so, shared the spotlight of the initiative with a White woman, Tatiane Ferreira). The other channels that centralized the production of videos for the actions described were, at the time, run by White people. As we will see below, these decisions may have significantly impacted the networks of collaboration between feminist YouTubers established after the campaigns.

Fluctuating between market incentives and social engagement, we argue the platform favors identity-based issues in a restricted and segmented way, emphasizing discussions that refer to the notion of popular feminism and a specific social group. In this sense, we hypothesize the company encourages debate on female empowerment based on a logic that continues to privilege the pact of Whiteness (BENTO, 2022), even though it pays attention to the intersectional dimensions of the subjects.

Beyond campaigns: collaboration networks between feminist youtubers

From our survey of campaigns, we proposed to analyze the collaborations between three digital influencers that starred in the YouTube campaigns from 2016 to 2018: Júlia Tolezano, Maíra Medeiros, and Nátaly Neri. The goal was to understand a possible confluence of participants, indicating a strengthening of connections and interaction networks around activist content. Like in the above mapping, we sought to identify the focus areas of each YouTuber and the themes they approached in the examined collaborations.

Júlia Tolezano, the most popular among the three YouTubers, reached up to 2.9 million subscribers.[17] Maíra Medeiros, one of the most popular creators in that "segment," has 2 million subscribers. Nátaly Neri has a little over 810 thousand subscribers (a substantial figure, though considerably smaller than Tolenzano's and Medeiros') and recognition as an activist. In this case, we also considered her approach to Black feminist issues, which the other two women, White middle class, only marginally discuss in their productions.[18]

Over three years, besides participating in the #MulheresCriadoras and #FalaMiga campaigns, the Jout Jout Prazer channel published 12 collaboration videos with 14 other channels and recorded conversations with friends or personalities not included in our research because they did not identify as digital content producers at the time of their participation. Among the 12 videos, eight feature guests who participated in the YouTube campaigns listed above, often addressing debates related to women's experiences. This number becomes expressive if we consider the few collaborations recorded during the period.

Among the channels analyzed, Maíra Medeiros' was the one that published the most collaborations. In addition to the videos recorded for the #PorQueMulher campaign, the YouTuber published 54 productions with participants from other channels. Besides having more collaborations, her videos are more heterogeneous, although the guests often discuss issues related to feminism and LGBTQIAPN+ culture. In total, 16 channels participating in the YouTube-related campaigns collaborated with Medeiros on videos and the campaigns themselves (the DRelacionamentos channel appears in two videos). The collaborations recorded on Nátaly Neri's channel during the examined period point to more interaction with Black content producers. Known for addressing issues related to Blackness on her channel, the influencer published few collaborative videos with content producers in the abovementioned

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17 The journalist announced she was pausing her channel in 2019. She chose to finish it in 2022.
18 Despite its central position in the #FalaMiga campaign, we did not include DRelacionamentos in this phase because the channel posts fictional videos with diverse actors.

campaigns, marked by a greater participation of White women. We found six in a universe of 32 videos.[19]

The following image shows the correlation between the YouTubers who participated in the three selected channels and those who were part of the campaigns promoted by YouTube during the period under analysis. The highlighted names correspond to the YouTubers or channels in at least one of the campaigns described here. The figure also indicates that YouTubers were in two of the three channels analyzed during the period.

Image 4: Collaboration in the YouTube channels of Nátaly Neri, Júlia Tolezano, and Maíra Medeiros between 2016 and 2018

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

19 It is worth noting, however, that among the collaborations found, several names were part of two YouTube initiatives linked to Black influencers: Creators for Change, which brought together YouTubers from different countries at an event in London, and YouTube Negro [Black YouTube], in which Neri received Black personalities at YouTube Space SP.

The mapping indicates the YouTube campaigns functioned as vectors for disseminating specific visibilities related to feminism and female empowerment. As a cultural system (BURGESS; GREEN, 2009), the platform not only reflects contemporary disputes — such as the relevance of specific agendas — but also helps to construct them (PEREIRA DE SÁ, 2021). Analyzing the participation in the channels of the White influencers, Tolezano and Medeiros, and the recurrence of names that collaborated with more than one of the three channels, we can say that, during that period, the institutional campaigns had a relevant impact, strengthening a network of socially engaged YouTubers linked to feminism. Nátaly Nery, in turn, favors Black content producers, many of whom also appear in the platform's campaigns but specifically about Blackness. Still, the predominance of Whiteness in the networks formed indicates that white feminism continues, from suffragettes to influencers, leaving Black women behind, as BECK (2021) argues.

Final considerations: the articulation of feminist YouTuber networks

The microcosm described above did not intend to exhaust the network of meaning surrounding female protagonism formed by articulations between human and non-human actors on YouTube during the analyzed period (2016-2018). Among the various possible analytical trajectories, we chose to follow four campaigns promoted by the company, understood as vectors of audio-verbal-visual content (GUTMANN, 2021). In an exploratory manner, we categorized the profiles of the influencers' channels according to their themes, mapping articulations between them in the years that followed an intensification of feminist movements on the Brazilian internet (following a global trend).[20]

It is worth noting that it was not possible, within the limits of this work, to analyze the collaboration videos comprised in the four campaigns, a

[20] It is also worth remembering that the social context of the crisis that followed the coup against former president Dilma Rousseff and the rise of far-right politicians in Brazilian politics certainly contributed to this configuration.

task that remains for future research developments. However, drawing from our analysis, we argue that 1) YouTube sought, through its campaigns, to approach a social agenda that was very much in vogue at the time, possibly aiming to build a brand positioning that was considered "inclusive" and "democratic." 2) In doing so, the platform provoked the networking between influencers and the generation of more content about "female empowerment," promoting networks about feminism as an institution. 3) However, there was a preponderance of White women invited to participate in the campaigns, reinforcing a place of privilege for Whiteness when addressing issues related to female "empowerment."

By emphasizing these articulations, we seek to contribute to an interpretation of YouTube's role as a cultural system that guides discussions linked to "popular feminism" (BANET-WEISER, 2018), seeking to position itself in the platform market as a company concerned with social issues by encouraging the production of "serious" entertainment content. That is, of course, a business strategy anchored in strengthening discussions about identity issues in contemporary times and their articulation with instances of consumption. Still, the strategic side does not obscure the real effects of this visibility policy. Among a good part of the analyzed channels, there was a notable increase in publications discussing issues related to some form of social activism.

Years later, we can say there were significant changes in the universe of content producers related to social issues □ as mentioned previously, Júlia Tolezano announced the end of her YouTube channel. Nátaly Neri and Maíra Medeiros remain on the platform but with more modest numbers and fewer videos on topics related to feminism and Black feminism. YouTube seems to have chosen to invest in other issues □ the last campaign on women on the platform's official profile was #HerVoiceisMyVoice, in 2017.

In presenting this historical review, our objective was not to praise YouTube as a disseminator of socially engaged content. Differently, we sought to argue that, in a context strongly influenced by consumption, forms of digital activism can suffer the influence of institutional strategies

of the platforms, which, in turn, will also align with market demands. However, it is necessary to consider the complexities emerging from the characteristic dynamics of digital environments. On TikTok, a platform characterized by short videos, feminist digital influencers accumulate millions of views, indicating a possible migration of content production networks related to the topic − a hypothesis we intend to investigate in future analyses.

Finally, we emphasize that the company's actions in favor of "minorities" are also an important tool to counterbalance the accusations that YouTube faces for issues such as disrespecting copyright and promoting false and extremist content (BRYANT, 2020). Although the platform officially articulates the strengthening of feminist discourse, its algorithms increasingly drive networks of anti-feminist discourse, an issue that deserves in-depth analysis in future works.

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