#HashtagFeminism: the impact of hashtags on the fourth wave of feminism in Brazil

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Abstract

This research will analyse if and how feminist hashtags – using as case studies three hashtags created and circulated on social media in 2017 – generated emotions and ignited any kind of activism acts. Are hashtags really contributing with the advance of the feminist movement in Brazil? Is the outrage generated from particular events of abuse and harassment that led to the creation of the hashtags temporary or does it have a long lasting outcome? The theoretical framework will look at the fourth wave of feminism and its relevance for Brazil and Latin America, collective digital affect, and the advantages and disadvantages of technological tools such as social media for political change. Taking a feminist standpoint methodological approach, I will use both qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain data and generate a thorough and critical analysis.
#Introduction

Don’t underestimate the catharsis and empowerment that can come simply from telling your story and having it accepted and believed, in a world where it is so often ignored or brushed off (Bates, 2018: 267)

In April 2012 I came across a website called The Everyday Sexism Project. It had a simple premise: to encourage women to submit their experiences of harassment, abuse and gender inequality. I clearly remember how cathartic it felt to browse the website and scroll thousands of comments left by women of all ages and backgrounds from all over Britain. They shared memories from their first experiences with sexism during their childhoods, within their families or at school, as well as recent episodes of sexism at work, street harassment and even rape. I decided to leave my contribution as well, and the more I wrote about my own experiences with sexism, the more I remembered them. For the first time in my life I felt the power of speaking out collectively, and I realised I was not the only one uncomfortable and angry with experiences such as catcalling and wolf whistling, which have been part of my life since a very young age. This is what Alison Jaggar calls ‘outlaw emotions’ (1989), which will be further explored in this dissertation.

![Fig. 01 - The Everyday Sexism Project website](image)

I was so positively overwhelmed with The Everyday Sexism Project that I got in touch with the creator, Laura Bates, and offered my help. She asked me to translate the website to Portuguese, which is my mother tongue. I consider that task my first act as a feminist activist.
The Everyday Sexism Project was not limited to the original website and its translated versions. Women also started sharing their stories on Twitter, using the hashtag #EverydaySexism. Today, the hashtag is still in use, and two years after The Everyday Sexism Project started, Laura Bates was named one of Britain’s most influential women in the BBC Woman's Hour Power List. #EverydaySexism has become a ‘household’ hashtag throughout many social media channels, and in August 2017 only, over five years after it was first used, it was tweeted more than 9,000 times. The Everyday Sexism Project was one of the consultants of Project Guardian, an initiative by the British Transport Police to tackle harassment on public transport, and Laura Bates frequently participates of talks and panels about the subject in schools and universities.

After #EverydaySexism, I started to pay close attention to other online feminist campaigns and made every effort to follow up feminist hashtags, not only in Britain, where I live, but also in my home country, Brazil. I did not have any formal education or experience in organised activism, feminism or women’s movements back then, and I started to build my knowledge from what was posted on social media. After my experience taking part on #EverydaySexism, I did not want to let go of the sensation of self-empowerment as well as being part of a major movement of consciousness raising. I wanted to add my voice to other hashtags and campaigns, and I was more than happy with using my personal social media profiles as platforms for spreading the word. I wanted to reclaim these channels and put them in use for a good cause, even before the expression ‘digital influencer’ was used. I quickly got a reputation among friends and family members, who started sending me links to news and reports about sexism and feminism. I ended up creating a feminist project of my own¹ and today feminist activism is a full time occupation.

¹ See http://www.conexaofeminista.com/
Seeing a powerful campaign such as #EverydaySexism emerge in Brazil was bittersweet. Although the hashtag #FirstHarassment<sup>2</sup> triggered the same cathartic sensation I had felt back in 2012 with #EverydaySexism, the reason why it was created is appaling: in October 2015, a 12 year old girl, contestant in a reality television show, received sexual proposals and abusive comments online. The response was immediate. Twitter users started to share their memories of the first time they remembered being sexually harassed. Apart from generating over 82,000 tweets in only five days, #FirstHarassment was also responsible for encouraging women to talk to each other outside social media. I have a clear recollection of a whole day spent exchanging text messages with friends, telling each other about our memories of our first experiences with harassment. There were women I have been friends with for half of my life, we thought we knew everything about each other, and yet that was the first time we were talking about harassment and trauma. I couldn't help but feel that #FirstHarassment was a game changer: we had kept experiences of harassment and abuse to ourselves for so long because we thought they were things we had to endure as women. As the unspoken ‘silence pact’ was falling, I was feeling optimistic that women and men in Brazil were starting to see things from a feminist perspective, and all because of a hashtag. It did not seem to me that cyberactivism was something to be dismissed. In fact, I realised I was (am) witnessing the fourth wave of feminism, a theme that will be further explored in this dissertation.

Since #FirstHarassment, many feminist hashtags have become trending topics in Brazil. Here, I will focus on three of them: #MyBodyIsNotPublic<sup>3</sup>, #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll<sup>4</sup> and #MyHarasserDriver<sup>5</sup> (alongside its variation #MyAbuserDriver<sup>6</sup>). All three were created in 2017 and relate to specific events of sexual harassment, which I will describe and outline further on. I believe that these hashtags triggered in many, or at least some women, similar emotions to those I experienced with #EverydaySexism.

My objective with this dissertation is to investigate the emotions generated by the stories shared using the hashtags and to find out if these emotions triggered social and political change, going beyond the immediate sensation of self-empowerment. So, my research questions are:

<sup>2</sup> Originally in Portuguese: #PrimeiroAssédio  
<sup>3</sup> Originally in Portuguese: #MeuCorpoNãoéPúblico  
<sup>4</sup> Originally in Portuguese: #MexeuComUmaMexeuComTodas  
<sup>5</sup> Originally in Portuguese: #MeuMotoristaAssediador  
<sup>6</sup> Originally in Portuguese: #MeuMotoristaAbusador
• Did the stories - both the ones that triggered the hashtags and those shared in the aftermath - have an emotional impact on people using social media and/or made they think about feminism?
• Did women that read the tweets realise that certain episodes and experiences they went through were actually of sexual harassment or abuse?
• And how about men? Did they read the tweets? Has any of them come to the conclusion that they commit harassment or abuse?
• Were the emotions generated by the hashtags ephemeral, or did they trigger social and political action? Were these actions momentary or are they ongoing?
#TheoreticalFramework

A feminist end is often a new means. We need more means available the harder it is to achieve our ends (Ahmed, 2017: 241)

To answer the questions that drive this dissertation, it is necessary to locate the research within theoretical pillars that will not only provide a solid base that justifies the importance of the research but also sustain the methodological approach and the subsequent analysis. Much has been written about online activism and feminism, but my aim is to go a step further and understand if and how online feminist activism becomes an emotional trigger for real social and political change.

The theoretical framework is organised in three main sections: the fourth wave of feminism, emotions and online affect, and the role of technology in social movements. In the first part, I will argue that the fourth wave of feminism is particularly important for the movement in Brazil, as it is not simply a result of the advent of the internet but it is intrinsically woven with a political awakening. The second part will approach emotions, using Alison Jaggar’s theory of outlaw emotions (1989) and the work of Papacharissi (2015) to base my quest for understanding affect and how online affect is generated. The final part delves into technology, taking in consideration the great things that social media can do for us but also criticising an utopian view of technology as the saviour of social movements.

The three themes are analysed separately and construct an organic path that weaves them together. At the end of the chapter it will be possible to understand why these three themes were chosen as the theoretical base of the research and how they provide the necessary knowledge to analyse the case studies and the influence of #HashtagFeminism in the contemporary feminist movement in Brazil.

Fourth wave: Latin American political voices
When writing about the construction of feminist theory from the Global South perspective, Marlise Matos (2010) briefly analyses the three waves of feminism that happened in Brazil. The first wave, similarly to what happened in several countries of the Global North, is linked to the fight for women’s right to vote from the beginning of the nineteenth century, as well as the right to work without the authorization of the husband. Spearheaded by women from the upper classes, the first wave also had the participation of younger women, daughters of politicians and intellectuals, which had the opportunity of living and studying abroad, being influenced by the ‘votes for women’ movements in Europe and the United States. The second wave emerged parallel to Brazil’s democracy crisis in the 1970s. Women were not only fighting for sexual liberation, against gender violence and male supremacy but also, and most importantly, they were raising their voices against the dictatorial regime. Consequently, the third wave highlighted the participation of women in the redemocratization process. Moreover, it explored the paradigms from the previous waves (Ribeiro, 20147) and questioned feminism as an universal discourse, bringing to the fore Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality (1989). Ribeiro (Ibid) points out working without the husband’s permission, for instance, was never an issue for black and poor women.

But how about the fourth wave? On her book ‘The Periodic Table of Feminism’, Marisa Bate pinpoints the beginning of the fourth wave to 2011, and outlines some of its main issues:

\begin{quote}
Representation in places of power, intersectionality, transgender rights, reproductive rights, violence against women, supporting refugee women, empowerment, giving women tools to sustain economic independence, the adoption of paternity leave and equality in the workplace, sexual assault on college and university campuses, gender fluidity, climate change (Bate, 2018: 151)
\end{quote}

The existence of a fourth wave of feminism has been challenged, especially because of its link to online activism. Commentators argue that the use of internet for activism (which will be further explored in this chapter) has not created a movement strong enough beyond a ‘call-out culture’ (Munro, 2013). Human rights campaigner Shami Chakrabarti also critiques the existence of feminist waves on her book ‘Of Women In the Twenty-First Century’, making a negative comparison that says that ‘the image of waves crashing onto the beach, but inevitably falling back and disappearing, is a less than optimistic one for what we are striving to achieve with greater

7 See https://www.cartacapital.com.br/blogs/escritorio-feminista/feminismo-academico-9622.html
equality’ (2017: 178). Writing for Jezebel, Anna North argues that ‘it’s time for no wave feminism’. Claiming that discussing waves and ‘generation battles’ is ‘nonsense’, North asks for an inclusive and empathetic movement that is able to embrace disagreements. However, North fails to explain how exactly a no wave feminism would stop internal battles from happening. By requesting a feminist movement that embraces disagreements, North is contradicting her own argument: disagreements and battles are precisely the tools that triggered discussion and put intersectionality in the spotlight, as explained by Ribeiro (2014) and investigated by Kira Cochrane (2013). Cochrane presents the fourth wave of feminism as more active than theoretical, presenting examples of activists that have become contemporary icons of feminism within a short period of time from when they realised they were feminists themselves (including Laura Bates). While acknowledging that the demands of the second wave are yet to be met and that third-wave feminists did want to differentiate their battles from that of their second-wave mothers, Cochrane justifies the existence - or more importantly, the necessity - of the fourth wave by pointing out not only the presence of technology but also a ‘wider political shift, a growing sense of dismay at established political institutions and corporations, a serious and deepening concern with a broad swathe of inequalities’ (2013: 1089).

Cochrane’s view corroborates with Matos’ proposal for a fourth wave of feminism in Brazil. Rather than focusing on the use of technology to qualify the fourth wave as such, Matos argues that the institutionalization of women’s demands through their - albeit partial - entrance in the legislative and executive spheres and the consolidation of NGOs and feminist collectives are at the core of this new era of feminism in Brazil (2010: 80). This analysis meets Zizi Papacharissi’s affirmation when writing about online affect and the role of social media in social movements and uprisings: ‘impact is not determined by the technology but rather by the historically singular interplay of the various sociocultural, economic, and political conditions at work’ (2015: 8). This is not to say that fourth wave is completely independent of technology, but that political power comes first, using a broad offer of technological tools to move forward. According to Munro, it is impossible not to acknowledge that the internet has enabled and facilitated connections, campaigns and discussions between feminists from all over the world (2013: 23), an opinion that is shared by

8 See https://jezebel.com/5650177/its-time-for-no-wave-feminism
9 Cochrane’s ‘All The Rebel Women’ is only available to read in Kindle format and does not have pages, but locations. Please consider the number given in the reference as the location number instead of page
Cecilia Palmeiro, founder of argentinian collective #NiUnaMenos\textsuperscript{10}. According to Palmeiro\textsuperscript{11}, the fourth wave of feminism is essentially Latin American and is a reflection of a ‘feminism 99%’: a movement with no hierarchy, made by a majority for a majority, rather than spearheaded by privileged women. Palmeiro goes on to say that communication via internet has enabled transnational mobilization, and recalls that #NiUnaMenos has been translated in far away countries such as Korea and Poland.

It is indispensible to notice that the existence of a fourth wave is heavily supported in Brazil and Latin America. As most of the critiques towards the use of waves beyond the historical scope comes from the Global North, I will use Alison Jaggar’s argument when defending an oppressed group - in this case, the feminists in the Global South - standpoint as one to be respected and taken in consideration: ‘oppressed people have a kind of epistemological privilege insofar as they have easier access to this standpoint and therefore a better chance of ascertaining the possible beginnings of a society in which all could thrive’ (1989: 182). Denying the existence of a feminist fourth wave is a way of excluding the voices of women from the Global South who are experiencing an unprecedented time and opportunity to organise, speak out and occupy politics. At the time of writing this dissertation, women in Argentina, Brazil and Chile are demanding abortion is decriminalised in their countries. They are not only marching and occupying public spaces physically and virtually but also finding ways to change and create legislation and local culture. In Brazil, the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the murder of councilwoman Marielle Franco in 2018, two events marked by prejudice, sexism, violence and fascism, have become symbols of feminist resistance and political transformation. Initiatives such as My Vote Will Be Feminist\textsuperscript{12} and We Are Many\textsuperscript{13} are raising the voices of feminist politicians and proposing new ways of using political power. It is correct to say that social media is their main tool to articulate and reach a greater audience but their proposals are rooted in the intersection of the needs of women and marginalised groups.

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Ni una menos’ means ‘not one less’. It was founded in Argentina in 2015 and it is a grassroots collective against male violence. See http://niunamenos.com.ar/
\textsuperscript{11} Interview for Cult Magazine (Brazil). See https://revistacult.uol.com.br/home/quarta-onda-feminismo-latino-americana/
\textsuperscript{12} Originally in Portuguese: Meu Voto Será Feminista. See https://www.meuvotoserafeminista.com.br/
\textsuperscript{13} Originally In Portuguese: Somos Muitas. See https://www.facebook.com/asmuitas/
As 2015 will be remembered in Brazil as the year of 'Women's Spring' because of a series of hashtags (some of which I mentioned in the introduction chapter, such as #FirstHarassment) that allowed some women to speak out and experience a sense of collectiveness, it is indispensable not only to highlight this era as the fourth wave but also, and as importantly, to highlight the link of the fourth wave with Latin America. This is not to say that the demands of the second and third
waves have been met or are less important, it is simply a matter of acknowledging Brazilian and Latin American feminists’ standpoint right now.

According to Marieta Cazarré (2016\textsuperscript{14}), the beginning of the fourth wave in Brazil can be pinpointed to June 2011, when the Slut Walk march happened for the first time in the country (in São Paulo). She adds:

> It is all very recent. It was only in 2014 that the movement achieved real repercussion, with massive virtual campaigns against harassment and rape culture (...). [The fourth wave] was consolidated in 2015 and the beginning of 2016 with discussions around #FirstHarassment and the popularization of feminist youtubers (...). There was also the organisation of what might become Brazil’s first feminist political party, PartidA\textsuperscript{15}

The quote above provides a straightforward overview of the importance of technology and politics within the Brazilian fourth wave. What Cazarré is saying is that the fourth wave was not born with the internet or the rise of social media, but that the two became allies. This is a vital statement, as it denies that fourth wavers are naive techno utopians. The fourth wave exists and matters not only because of the advent of online activism, but also and most importantly because fourth wavers believe it exists and matters (Baumgardner, 2011).

However, as access to the internet - and consequently social media - is not available to all in Brazil\textsuperscript{16}, how can feminists make sure the fourth wave is not led by privileged women and will embrace the urgent need of those who cannot be part of cyberspace because of social, economical or even physical barriers, such as disabled, indigenous, peripheral and rural women? According to a 2017 study published by We Are Social, 50% of the global population uses the internet, although, as shown in the figure below, the percentage of internet penetration is much higher in North America and West Europe.

\textsuperscript{14} See http://brasileiros.com.br/2016/01/quarta-onda-feminismo-nasce-em-2015/

\textsuperscript{15} Political party in Portuguese is ‘Partido’. The letter ‘o’ in the end of the word was replaced by the letter ‘A’ to reinforce the idea of women in charge, as in Brazil the letters ‘a’ and ‘o’ used in many words, especially adjectives, relate to female and male respectively. In Portuguese, there are feminine and masculine versions of several words.

\textsuperscript{16} According to a research published on November 2017, 63,6% of households in Brazil have access to the internet.
The same report examines social media penetration by region, showing South America with the second highest percentage, as shown in the figure below. Albeit lower than the Internet Penetration percentage, it is above the 37% average and just 7% lower than North America. But it still means that many women are left out of the online conversation.
Talita Barbosa suggests that online and grassroots movements walk hand in hand, complementing each other. ‘Virtual and physical need to be connected to enable effective actions. Each sphere has its own specificities and target audiences, and possibilities [of partnerships and solutions] are endless’ (2015\textsuperscript{17}). The digital sphere and the transformations it enabled allowed activism to have bigger visibility and stronger participation, ‘because cyberspace attributes voice to a wide number of citizens/internet users that collaborate and interact between themselves’ (Coelho & Costa, 2013: 11).

Samukelisiwe Mabaso, when writing about women in the Global South reclaiming social media to combat femicide (2017\textsuperscript{18}), says that

Femicide and woman abuse are crucial global issues which are often considered taboo thus are not discussed, especially in public spaces. However, women in the Global South are turning to Social Media to voice their frustrations, raise awareness, mobilise, organise offline action and feel a sense of solidarity. Although internet access is dominated by the Global North it is hoped that in the future internet access will be more equally spread thus levelling the online participation of women worldwide. Although femicide and woman abuse will not be solved overnight, the fact that women are speaking up and mobilizing are signs of hope for the future.

Emotions Matter: Collective Online Affect

Sara Ahmed says that ‘emotions involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected’ (2014: 208). Digital spaces such as Twitter can be considered platforms in which affections take place (and here I would like to highlight my own motivation for this research as described in the introduction), therefore generating emotions through all the content that circulate within its virtual space.

Alison Jaggar argues that emotions can be actionable tools for grasping the world, motivating research and therefore can be the basis for the development of feminist theory (Jaggar, 1989: 181). I will use this argument to support a similar idea for feminist digital activism. As outlaw

\textsuperscript{17} See http://bloqueirasfeministas.com/2015/09/o-feminismo-na-internet-tambem-e-importante/

\textsuperscript{18} See https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/reclaiming-social-media-combat-femicide
emotions trigger a deeper and clear perception of the world that goes beyond conventions, they consequently lead one to understand themselves as oppressed and ‘make subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo’ (Ibid). The acceptance of feminist outlaw emotions as going against the grain means the realisation that what was once accepted as fact or unavoidable rule is a barrier to the liberation of the oppressed and an obstacle to equality.

By challenging ingrained behaviours that are symptomatic of a male-dominant society and offering a space for victims of such ingrained behaviours to come together and shout back, feminist activists such as The Everyday Sexism Project creator Laura Bates are disrupting a pre-configured way of living. The unconventional emotional responses, when experienced individually, may lead one to question their own sanity or ability to deal with everyday situations, which was experienced by Bates: ‘At first, I wondered if they were right. (...) Perhaps I was just overreacting and women really were equal now, more or less’ (Bates, 2014: 14). However, when the same unconventional emotions - outlaw emotions - are shared by a group, they acquire the strength necessary to oppose prevailing norms, becoming political. As the stories began to appear on the Everyday Sexism website, traditional mass media outlets started to run features about the project, and Bates recalls that ‘hundreds of women and girls wrote to me describing (...) how they felt guilty or unable to protest - how they’d been made to feel that (...) they shouldn’t make a fuss’ (Ibid: 18). Individual feminist anger, frustration and sadness were transformed into a collective of feminist emotions, triggering action. According to Alison Jaggar, when ‘emotions are shared or validated by others, (...) the basis exists for forming a subculture defined by perceptions, norms, and values that systematically oppose the prevailing perceptions, norms, and values’ (1989: 160). Therefore, Laura Bates created a community through collective affect, where emotions are shared and validated. I argue that the fourth wave of feminism in Brazil and more specifically the hashtags studied in this dissertation had a similar impact: shared outlaw emotions, collective affect and, consequently, action that is leading to social and political change.

Although feminist arguments are often discredited because they are based on emotions, feminists have to be careful themselves not to dismiss the emotions and claim that their arguments are based on reason. According to Sara Ahmed, making this claim would inevitably recognise the western society’s idea of male reason versus female emotions is correct. It would be accepting that one is above the other and independent from each other, therefore dismissing feminist
emotions as a catalyst of activism (Ahmed, 2014: 170). However, Ahmed recognises that ‘the conditions in which we speak are not of our making’ (Ibid: 177), and for the present research this affirmation means that #HashtagFeminism lives within a structure - Twitter or any of the other major social networks - that albeit ‘new’ is based on ‘old’ values. This will be further explored later in this chapter.

Jaggar recognises that there can be implications arising from appropriating emotions for the development of knowledge, saying that although emotions are indispensable, they are not indisputable (Jaggar, 1989: 183). There can be different interpretations, as there can be changes: knowledge, just like emotions, is contentious. However, acknowledging that emotions are indisputable is not the same as ignoring them. As we incorporate emotions such as anger and hope into the development of activism plans, we create a cycle, as activism contributes to the development of emotions. Jaggar brilliantly explains this loop: ‘The new emotions evoked by feminist insights are likely in turn to stimulate further feminist observations and insights, and these may generate new directions in both theory and political practice’ (Ibid). Arlie Hochschild summarizes this explanation when writing about feelings rules: ‘From feelings we discover our own viewpoint on the world’ (1983: 17).

Papacharissi says that emotion is included in affect and is an effect of affect (2015: 15). This connection is what makes impossible to discuss affect without tapping into emotion (and vice versa). There is a gap between being affected by anger and hope - and, using Papacharissi’s explanation, making sense of anger and hope (Ibid) - and using anger and hope to critique the world and then constructing new grounds that allow change to happen (Ahmed, 2014: 171). We already know that ‘media serve as conduits for affective expression’ (Papacharissi, 2015: 4), but it is difficult to know exactly how in fact affect generated online becomes tangible actions or action plans. Fenton affirms that, although affect can be used to express agency, ‘this affective agency in of itself does not transform political systems’ (Fenton, 2016: 92).

The hashtags chosen as case studies - which will be further explained in the methodology chapter - were affective creations and expressions of anger, repulsion and a general sense of injustice, and the hashtags themselves have become a source of emotions such as hope and relief, generating conversations that might extract concrete - albeit utopian - proposals for social and political change. Therefore online affect in itself is not a solution, but a trigger. As Fenton puts, ‘it
is hard to deny that affect somehow plays a part and cannot be glibly discounted' (Ibid: 91). To close the theoretical framework for online affect and to make a direct link with the case studies of this dissertation, I will once more borrow the words from Papacharissi: ‘Streams generated through the collaboratively discursive logic of the hashtag function as affective mechanisms that amplify the awareness of a particular feeling, the intensity with which it is felt' (2015: 118). This intensity generated by feminist hashtags and the subsequently sense of urgency might be what pushes people, particularly women, into actionable feminism. There is, of course, a negative side to this intensity, as it can generate online lynching and social media punitivism. As Tayná Leite explains on her article about a recent event of online punitivism in Brazil - involving a group of Brazilian men that harassed a Russian woman during the 2018 Football World Cup in Russia - ‘if we treat the issue in an individualised way and as something happening outside we will not solve a problem that is, in its essence, systemic and structural' (201819). The men involved were named and shamed on social media, but it is hard to say if the lynching will bring any positive results besides the men losing their jobs. As it will be explained in the next section, social media is a tool, and it cannot transform society by itself (that is also why it is so important to know that the fourth wave of feminism is not solely based on the internet, as previously explained). The way it is used can be either beneficial or detrimental to individuals and groups. That is why collective online affect, in the case of #HashtagFeminism, needs to bring together political awareness and grassroots movements, in order to make the best out of technological tools.

Technology will save/destroy us

The divisive discussion about the role of technology, especially social media platforms, in social movements and the quest for political change is summarised by Papacharissi in the passage below:

The past few decades have witnessed the growth of movements that use digital means to connect with broader publics and express their point of view. Naturally, these manifestations of digital connectivity and networked engagement invite both utopian and dystopian speculation about the civic impact of internet-related technologies. Not unlike other media preceding it, the internet reorganizes the lows of time and space in ways that promise greater autonomy but also conform to the habitus of practices, hierarchies, and structures that form its historical context (2015: 7)

19 See http://azmina.com.br/colunas/18196/
When discussing digital networks and social movements for political change, we are inevitably led to the Arab world and the succession of protests that started in 2010 which became known as the Arab Spring. While some protests led to victory and others to massacres and ongoing war, the discussion about how people - not only in the Arab Spring but also in the Occupy movement and many other movements around Europe - got organised using social media before taking to the streets and if technology is solely responsible for the - negative or positive - transformations have no simple conclusion (Castells, 2012). As feminist movements are increasingly using digital technology to build communities and create a new sense of consciousness raising, it is imperative that we look back at the Arab Springs and other recent social movements and consider digital technology not as a solo actor, but intrinsically woven with power hierarchies. Trying to find out if social media is the cause of uprisings is not the point, in the same way that the fourth wave of feminism should not be diminished to an online movement.

When offering an analysis of some of the protests from the Arab Spring, Castells explains that ‘power relations are embedded in the institutions of society’ (Ibid: 5), and because ‘societies are contradictory and conflictive, wherever there is power there is also counterpower’ (Ibid). Counterpower then, is in the hands of citizens, who can critique and challenge the power of institutions and demand representation. What we take from this straightforward explanation as well as the Papacharissi quote in the opening of this chapter is that the relation of power and counterpower exists before - and beyond - any means of communication. As Papacharissi simply states, ‘people protested and brought down governments long before social media existed’ (2015: 30).

And how do we measure internet influence on the power (institutions) /counterpower (social actors) relation? Before proposing a definition that will help the discussion to move forward, I want to refer to what Rod Benson coined as ‘new descriptivism’ (2014). When researching for material to support my own research, I came across several essays and articles with promising titles and abstracts. However - although I do not have the means to quantify - many of them were just describing a fact or offering data without explanation. When analysing social media and more specifically hashtags, new descriptivism is presented in the form of number of tweets, retweets, unique users posting a hashtag and key words. Although this type of information - the result of an obsession with analytical softwares that provide ‘big data’ - might be interesting and useful for
other purposes, it is not a type of analysis that I want to offer here. Instead, I propose a reflection on power/counterpower linked the other theories previously explained in this chapter. Using Castell’s definition of ‘mass self-communication’ (Castells, 2012: 6) for the internet as platform for digital communication - including digital activism - it is possible to better analyse the positive and negative outcomings of this influence. It is ‘mass’ because reaches multiples receivers and processes multiple interactions. It is ‘self’ because the message is produced by the one who sends it. Furthermore, and more importantly, it is ‘self’ because each user decides what to retrieve, what to see, what to share. Therefore, mass self-communication is a horizontal network of interactions difficult to control by the institutions that hold power, providing a sense of agency, becoming a tool for social movements, therefore an ally to counterpower (Ibid: 6-9).

However, Fenton argues that ‘although in principle everyone can produce and distribute information easily with the help of the internet, not all information is visible to the same degree and gets the same attention’ (2016:157). This argument means that, even if everyone is free to be creative and build communities, an individual trying to be a counterpower ally cannot compete with the online presence of mainstream news, celebrities and elites that dominate legacy media (Ibid). So, is it really possible to say that social media can be a powerful platform for activism? As Fenton also says, ‘mass self-communication must also be understood through the social and political context of which it is part’ (Ibid: 158). In the case of this specific research, which considers the existence of the fourth wave of feminism in Brazil and Latin America rooted in politics, collectiveness and grassroots movements, it is possible to affirm that mass self-communication is indeed relevant. This is not to say that activists dominate social media, but that they create their own spaces to balance and challenge legacy media. I agree with Fenton’s affirmation that ‘if the sociocultural context consists of the consumerist and individualistic ideology of neoliberalism, then any claims to the liberatory potential of the expansion of the means to self-expression should be treated with extreme caution’ (Ibid: 159). Feminists activists are not techno-utopians that stand only on virtual grounds. The use of social media is treated with caution and indeed generates surveillance and attacks, but it is embedded in a deeper knowledge of progressive politics and intersectionality.

It is important to highlight the word tool when discussing mass self-communication and social movements. A tool does not have the capacity of moving structures or building legacy by itself. Furthermore, mass self-communication has also been appropriated by groups and organisations
to galvanise violence against social movements. A recent example is the Incel\textsuperscript{20}, a group that was born from the anonymous message board 4chan and that has been linked to a mass murder in California in 2014 and another one in Toronto in 2018. The anonymity of online forums such as 4chan and Reddit is just the tip of the iceberg. Apart from the well known forums, mass self-communication also incorporates the dark web, which it is not indexed by search engine networks and it is only accessible via specific servers. Untraceable and obscure, dark web networks may contain videos of child abuse and rape manuals, and allows users to buy and sell drugs, weapons, credit card numbers and counterfeit money.

Albeit mass self-communication is a tool for counterpower, it also a place where counterpower actors can be traced and scrutinised. Surveillance and privacy are not only issues that should be a concern of every internet user, but issues that need to be addressed with feminist lenses (Dubrofsky and Magnet, 2015). Surveillance, in the case of mass self-communication, not only means the acceptance of questionable terms and conditions and the logging in using names, dates and addresses; but also the fact that some bodies are made visible while others invisible, perpetuating interlocking oppressions, ‘ones that are often integral to the structures that underlie our culture’ (Ibid: 3). When reflecting on internet surveillance, Lisa Nakamura reminds us that, back in the 1990s, both digital utopians and critics did not see the internet as a ‘space’ where surveillance would be possible because ‘users left their bodies behind’, and ‘electronic’ bodies would turn the internet into a gender and race-neutral space that would not perpetuate oppression (2015: 222). However, for Nakamura, women use mass self-communication already in a defensive way - negotiating ‘between the desire to connect and the need to self-regulate’ (Ibid) - to prevent possible sexist attacks, as a reflection to their cultural understanding of their gendered bodies (Ibid: 222-223).

Internet surveillance is a feminist issue also, and most importantly, because exposes women to violence. While women’s bodies and identities are thoroughly scrutinised, ‘online threats often are not taken seriously, but rather are tolerated as part of Internet culture’ (Ibid: 225). According to the website ‘Conexões que Salvam’\textsuperscript{21}, it is estimated that 95% of all aggressive behaviour on the

\textsuperscript{20} Incel stands for ‘involuntary celibate’. See https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/25/what-is-incel-movement-toronto-van-attack-suspect
\textsuperscript{21} Conexões que Salvam (Connections that Save) is an online platform created by Brazilian feminist NGO Think Olga and Facebook, aiming to help women recognise and report online violence. See https://www.conexoesquesalvam.com
internet is directed towards women and that 70% of women that are connected to the internet have been exposed to some kind of online violence. A research published by Instituto Avon\textsuperscript{22} revealed that online harassment in Brazil grew 26000% between 2015 and 2017 and that 96% of harassers are men. Among internet users that are using mass self-communication to discuss online violence, 3% are the victims themselves and 100% of these outspoken victims are women, of which 80% are black women. The research also identified an increase in digital activists of 500%, and the existence of support groups increased 176%. The majority of digital activists are women (98%), white (56%), and part of the working class (60%)

The rise of digital activism and, more specifically, feminist digital activism in Brazil from 2015 coincides with the creation of the hashtag #FirstHarassment (see Introduction). Since then, Brazilian women have mobilised online to raise awareness towards sexist practices embedded in Brazilian culture, using social media as a space of connectivity and participation (Fenton, 2016:42). One example of a successful online intervention refers to a series of advertisements published by Skol (a beer brand) targeted at carnival goers in 2015. The company used messages such as ‘I forgot the no at home’ and ‘My answer is yes before knowing the question’, bringing to the fore the issue of rape culture in the country. Some adverts got interventions that added the words ‘and brought the never’ after ‘I forgot the no at home’, which were spread on social media. The company published an apology and withdrew the sexist ads from circulation, replacing them with messages that condemned violence against women (Langner et al, 2015: 11).

A great example of digital activism that combines political interest with a straightforward online tool - Facebook Messenger - is Beta, the Brazilian ‘feminist bot’. Beta was created in 2017 by Nossas\textsuperscript{23}, a self-entitled ‘activism laboratory’ that aims to invent new ways for people to influence and add new meanings to politics. Beta connects with Facebook users using the Messenger tool: sending news about law proposals that might be harmful or positive to women and telling users what they can do to interfere. In 2017, Beta advised subscribers about a law proposal that would criminalise abortion in all stances. Subscribers were asked to provide their email addresses, and Beta sent an email to all members of congress for each subscriber. Because of the thousands of emails received, congressmen decided to postpone the vote. Beta is a contemporary

\textsuperscript{22} See http://dev-institutoavon.adttemp.com.br/uploads/media/1521058108964-infografico_forum_v9_final%20(1).pdf
\textsuperscript{23} Nossas means ‘ours’ in Portuguese
counterpower tool, using mass-self communication to generate collective response and create a community that goes beyond clicktivism. As Fenton states, ‘a radical politics must claim power. (...) For power to be used for democratic gain it must be wrested from those who have too much and reinvested in those who have too little’ (2016: 174-175). Brazilian feminist digital activists are coming up with ways of doing exactly that. They are exercising counterpower not purely based in online optimism, but by acknowledging and reacting to powerful institutions that are also present in mass self-communication.

Because social media is part of culture and culture is contentious (Merry, 2006), I agree with Paolo Gerbaudo that techno-optimism and techno-pessimism are essentialized views that ‘tend to look at social media (...) without due attention to their intervention in specific local geographies of action or to their embeddedness in the culture of the social movements adopting them’ (2012: 5). As I explained in the first part of this chapter, the fourth wave of feminism is particularly important in Brazil, as it is a result of a unique moment that brings together political turmoil and a means of organisation and sense of collectiveness.

Where do we go from here?

The three sections of this chapter are intrinsically woven as the basis for the research about #HashtagFeminism. I started with the fourth wave of feminism and its importance for Latin America as it is imperative to understand the fourth wave as a serious and politically grounded movement. Voices of Latin women are not simply virtual voices, but they are amplified virtually. These voices are fuelled with emotions, with anger and hope, and are constructing communities and networks that transcend the binary of online and offline in order to make emotions actionable. Online connections are powering affective communities, renovating a movement that has always been on the progressive side since its beginning. Brazilian fourth wavers do not see social media as the ultimate savior, but as a tool to trigger conversations and debates, echo and amplify demands, and request power.

The theoretical framework constructed throughout this chapter generates a clear path towards methods that will allow proper gathering of data. As we already possess the theory, we will now develop a methodology that is based on it and will push us forward to come closer to the understanding and significance of #HashtagFeminism in Brazil.
#Methodology

All researchers, however inexperienced, carry intellectual, emotional and political baggage with them (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 148)

Since the day I found out about #EverydaySexism, I have been increasingly committed with digital activism. I have joined feminist groups and liked feminist pages on Facebook, kept track of several hashtags across the globe and even created my very own online project, which is present across all major social networks. I have supported crowdfunding campaigns and online petitions, been to events, marches and protests organised online and met several like-minded feminist activists that are using social media to promote feminism and fight for women’s rights. For me, social media has strengthened feminism and became an essential part of my everyday as an activist.

So, how do you study something that you do, while you do it? I am immersed in the world of online feminism, digital campaigns and feminist hashtags. My experience - and the experience of the women that generated the hashtags - was used as starting point (Brooks, 2007: 56). As I consider my feminist knowledge and experience as partial ‘both in the sense of being “not-total” and in the sense of being “not-impartial”’ (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 66), and I believe that ‘theory cannot be separated from experience’ (Ibid: 72) I will take a feminist standpoint to develop my methodology. The key characteristics of a feminist standpoint analysed by Ramazanoğlu & Holland (Ibid: 65) support my position as someone right in the middle between research/knowledge and activism/experience when it comes to feminism in social media. Moreover, a feminist standpoint takes in consideration women voicing their experiences, emotions and embodiment, which is the core of my research. Brooks adds that feminist standpoint is the sum of knowledge building (theory) and doing research (method) that results in ‘a call to political action’ (2007: 55). I will integrate feminist standpoint in my methods, which will be explained further in this chapter.

My data production24 will be gathered using mixed methods: quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews). Both methods will take in consideration the three feminist

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24 According to Ramazanoğlu and Holland, the term data production ‘implies that information gathered by the researcher is produced in a social process of giving meaning to the social world’ (2002: 154)
hashtags in which this dissertation focuses. Before I explain my methods and my approach in each one, I want to present and contextualise the hashtags.

**Case studies**

I selected three hashtags that were created in 2017 and thoroughly used on all major social media platforms, including Twitter. From dozens of feminist hashtags that became talking points in Brazil last year, the selected three have a couple of things in common: they were created following an event of sexual abuse or harassment by one man directed towards one woman (which I consider an expression of feminist standpoint); and they generated talks and discussions around patriarchal values in powerful institutions. The events that led to the creation of the hashtags and what happened immediately after the hashtags were published are explained below.

#MyBodyIsNotPublic

On August 29, 2017, at around 13:20h in São Paulo, a man ejaculated on a woman on a bus which was riding on Avenida Paulista, one of the most iconic (and busiest) streets of the city. The bus warden realised something was wrong when a few passengers started to scream. He moved towards to rear of the bus and found the victim in shock and the perpetrator trying to escape through the rear door. Police was called (by one of the passengers) and the perpetrator was detained and arrested. However, in less than 24 hours, the judge responsible for the case decided
the perpetrator should go free, even though he had already been registered with the police for rape or sexual abuse 16 times. In the judge’s words, by ejaculating on a woman, the man had not committed a violent act, but a criminal misconduct\(^{25}\), liable for a fine.

The case sparked outrage among the general public, especially on social media, with people not only questioning the judge’s decision but also a possible ‘grey area’ in the law regarding gender-based violence and harassment. A collective of women from the creative industries called Mad Women immediately responded by creating a tumblr website with the name My Body Is Not Public. The website comprises of illustrations created by several women, using the words My Body Is Not Public as inspiration and tackling the issue of harassment in public spaces, especially public transport. All illustrations were made available in high resolution, and the creators of the campaign encouraged people to print them and affix them in buses, trains, stops and stations.

My Body Is Not Public immediately became a hashtag, with Twitter users sharing other cases of harassment and violence in public transport as well as photos of the illustrations affixed in public transport.

#MessedWithOneMessedWithAll

![Fig. 09 - Female employees of Globo TV network wearing a #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll t-shirt](image)

On March 31, 2017, Su Tonani published an article on a blog hosted within one of the biggest Brazilian news portal, Folha/UOL. The article was entitled ‘José Mayer harassed me’ and its first

sentence was: ‘I, Suslem Meneguzzi Tonani, was harassed by José Mayer Drumond’. Both Su Tonani and José Mayer are employed by Globo, Brazil’s biggest and most powerful television network. Tonani was then a 28-year-old stylist working on her first soap opera produced by Globo, as an assistant in the fashion department. Mayer, at the time, was 67 years old with a prolific acting career, mostly as lead character in dozens of soap operas and adored by Brazilians. Therefore, the article had a massive impact and was reproduced by several media outlets all across the country.

This is how Tonani reported the harassment:

The very first ‘joke’ José Mayer Drummond said to me was 8 months ago. He was the lead character in the first soap opera I was working as an assistant. The violence started with a simple: ‘you are beautiful’. Working from Monday to Saturday, dealing with José Mayer was an everyday situation. And with him came the ‘compliments’. From ‘you dress very well’, I was soon getting: ‘your waist is thin’, ‘I look at your butt and imagine your tits’, ‘are you never going to give it to me? (...) In February 2017, in the company’s dressing room, alongside two other women, this actor, white, rich, 67 years old, that built his fame as a stud, put his left hand on my genitals. Yes, he put his hand on my cunt and said I was the object of his desire for a long time. And the women? They could be in my shoes, but they did not care. They laughed of his ‘joke’. I found myself alone, unprotected, ridiculed, invisible. I felt despair, disgust, regret for being there. There was no assistance, no sisterhood (Ibid)

After a few days, Mayer was suspended by Globo for an undetermined amount of time and publicly apologised to Tonani. By then, the hashtag #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll, which was already a well known used expression in rallies and protests and associated with the concept of sisterhood, spread on social media. Some of Globo’s female staff - including famous actresses - joined forces and publicly positioned themselves on the side of Tonani. On the other hand, many male actors came forward to declare that Mayer should not be punished for his ‘mistake’.

Tonani’s supporters used their popular social media profiles to post photographs of themselves wearing t-shirts with the hashtag, taking #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll to Twitter’s trending topics, embracing the idea of sisterhood that Tonani addressed on her original blogpost.

26 See http://agoraequesaoelas.blogfolha.uol.com.br/2017/03/31/jose-mayer-me-assediou/
On August 27, 2017, writer Clara Averbuck was sexually abused by an Uber driver who was taking her home from a party. Averbuck took to social media to report the abuse, publishing the following text on her Facebook page:

Well, I became part of the statistics again. I would like to say it was an ‘attempt to rape’ but it was rape. Was I drunk? Yes. Fuck it. I won’t do the same mistake of when I was a teenager and blame myself. I was violated again, violated because I am a woman, violated because I was vulnerable and even if I wasn’t it could have happened all the same. The disgusting driver took advantage of me being drunk, my skirt and my small knickers and stuck a filthy finger on me, while saying he was helping ‘the drunk lady’. I am hurt but I am home and I am medicated so I can calm down. I am still deciding if I want to put myself through the violence which is going to a women’s police station and be questioned, since sexual violence is the only crime that the victim needs to prove. I don’t want the sexual perpetrator to be free of consequences but I also don’t want to submit myself to state violence. Especially because I have taken so many women to the police station, so I know what awaits. I’m considering. I have a black eye and guilt for drinking and putting myself in this vulnerable situation. It’s not my fault. I know. The pain, anger and impotence won’t go away. I am
saying all of this so all women that are reading know that it can happen to all of them, at any time, and that desperation and helplessness are inevitable. The world is an awful place to be a woman.\textsuperscript{27}

Uber published a statement saying the driver was banned, but Averbuck decided not to go to the police to press charges. On the following day, she announced a campaign\textsuperscript{28} using two hashtags: #MyHarasserDriver and #MyAbuserDriver, with the objective of not only encouraging women that have been through similar situations to come forward and share their stories but also to raise awareness about proper training for drivers in companies such as Uber. Averbuck said that ‘Unfortunately this type of situation is more and more common. We want - by giving voice to women that have suffered abuse and harassment - that these services are rethought. These jobs should not be advertised as something extra that anyone can do. These service providers should be selected more carefully and educated to respect women’ (Ibid).

**Methods**

My objective with this dissertation is to investigate the emotions generated by the stories shared on the hashtags and to find out if these emotions triggered social and political change, going beyond the immediate sensation of self-empowerment. My research questions are:

- Did the stories - both the ones that triggered the hashtags and those shared in the aftermath - have an emotional impact on people using social media and/or made they think about feminism?
- Did women that read the tweets realise that certain episodes and experiences they went through were actually of sexual harassment or abuse?
- And how about men? Did they read the tweets? Has any of them come to the conclusion that they commit harassment or abuse?
- Were the emotions generated by the hashtags ephemeral, or did they trigger social and political action? Were these actions momentary or are they ongoing?

Although there have been several discussions about qualitative x quantitative methods in feminist research (Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007: 292-325; Leckenby & Hesse-Biber, 2007: 249-288),

\textsuperscript{27} See \url{https://www.facebook.com/averbuck/posts/866335266825064}
\textsuperscript{28} See \url{https://claudia.abril.com.br/noticias/clara-averbuck-estupro-escreve-para-claudia/}
there is not a method that is more feminist than the other. I do not see quantitative and qualitative methods as unique choices. Rather, I took a pragmatic approach to mixed methods (Leckebby & Hesse-Biber, 2007: 268-269) and used one to build a foundation for the other. My quantitative method provided important data to create the structure for the qualitative part of the research, as I explain below.

Quantitative: online survey

Like Miner-Rubino and Jayaratne, I ‘consider quantitative research as one method of investigation that can make a significant contribution toward advancing the feminist goal of improving the lives of women’ (2007: 292). I used online survey as my quantitative data collection method. As previously observed, I am immersed in the digital world and I am conducting this research while I continue my work in social media and digital activism. My presence in social media allows me to reach thousands of people. I created the survey using the Survey Monkey platform, and it was made available from 14/05/2018 to 14/06/2018 through the link bit.ly/heloma. The link was distributed using my personal social media channels several times, and also shared by friends and acquaintances. It gathered a total of 2524 responses.

The survey comprised of 26 close-ended questions in total (because of skip logic, responders answered a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 16). After two demographic identifications (age and gender), responders answered specific questions about their knowledge of the hashtags selected, the level of interaction with the hashtags, their emotional responses to the Twitter posts or media reports about the hashtags and, finally, what kind of actions and attitudes - if any - they took because of their knowledge and interaction with the hashtags. Although I provided options for all the answers (responders only had to write if they wanted to or if they chose the option ‘other, please specify’ in certain questions), the choices were thorough and when possible included ‘I
don’t know’ as an option. To analyse the data I used the analytics tool provided by Survey Monkey.

By doing an online survey, my intention was not to reduce participants to anonymous and emotionless answers, but to build a solid base for the interviews and create a parallel between feminist hashtags, emotions and social and political action. As Miner-Rubino and Jayaratne say, survey as a quantitative research method allows for not only gathering data about ‘women affected by this or that, but the consequences of those experiences’ (Ibid: 293).

Online survey has the advantage of privacy and anonymity (responders were not requested to sign in with names or emails, and the survey settings were adjusted as to not record responders IPs), which tends to leave responders feeling more free and less influenced by the interviewer. ‘This can create an important advantage for feminist researchers because research participants may feel more comfortable with the research situation and give voice to their true opinions or experiences when in private’ (Ibid: 304).

Before the survey went live, it was pretested. I asked 10 people to respond it using the preview mode provided by the online survey service. The testers were asked to respond more than one time in order to test technicalities of the tool (such as skip logic, ‘next’ buttons and end page) as well as to pay attention to wording and answer options. After feedback, a few adjustments were made to enhance the quality of measures (Ibid: 318).

- Feminist standpoint approach: As feminist standpoint ‘challenges us to see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change’ (Brooks, 2007: 55), survey questions were developed with the objective of making responders remember and reflect not only about the hashtags but also about their actions and attitudes (or lack of) because of the hashtags.

- Ethics: Responders did not need to identify themselves to answer the survey, nor their IPs were recorded. Before accessing the questions, responders read a disclaimer that explained what the survey was about, and that all the data is confidential and used exclusively for this dissertation. I provided my email address as well as my supervisor’s.
- Possible issues/weaknesses: As the link to the survey was first shared on my personal social media profiles, friends, acquaintances and family were more likely to respond the first call to action, generating data that most likely agrees with my personal views. Albeit the link was then shared and distributed and went beyond my social circle, it still was distributed using the internet, which excludes a percentage of people that are not connected or prefer not to be connected.

Qualitative: Semistructured interviews

As ‘structured interviews require large-scale data sets with fixed-choice items’ (Ibid: 117), I used partial results of the online survey (as it was still ongoing while the interviews were conducted) to prepare the questions for the interviews. I decided to do semistructured interviews - which means that I had a list of questions prepared but I still had the freedom to come up with unplanned questions during the interview, depending on given responses (Ibid: 115-116). The following questions were asked for all interviewees:

- Do you use social media? How do you use Twitter specifically (for news, to check with friends…)?
- Do you follow feminist campaigns or activists on Twitter?
- Do you know any feminist hashtags? Do you know why they were created?
- Have you ever interacted with a feminist hashtag?
- Has any feminist hashtag triggered emotions? Or personal memories?
- Do feminist hashtags and/or campaigners on Twitter or social media in general make you feel more engaged with feminism? How?

Apart from formulating the questions, I also used the data from the online survey to select my interviewees. I decided to interview five women, one 24 year old, three within the 26 to 44 years old range and one above 60. I know each of these women from different circumstances, and they all know Twitter and have Twitter profiles, although they use it in very different ways. They are all aware of the existence of feminist hashtags, but again their interactions with the hashtags selected as case studies are specific. The interviewees will be identified as follows:

Interviewee 1 (42 years old), Interviewee 2 (36 years old), Interviewee 3 (61 years old), Interviewee 4 (24 years old) and Interviewee 5 (38 years old).
The content of the interviews was analysed based on theoretical principles of discourse analysis, as explained by Potter (2004: 607-622). According to Potter, discourse is action-oriented, situated and constructed (Ibid: 609-610). It is action-oriented because the analyst approaches discourse as an actionable tool; it is situated because the actions that lead to discourse ‘are embedded in sequences of interaction’ (Ibid: 609); and it is constructed because it is made of language but also because it constructs ‘versions of the world’ (Ibid: 610). Potter’s definition of discourse analysis weaves together both activist and academic interests of this research.

- Feminist standpoint approach: Taking into account the diversity of interviewees’ experiences and their embodiment of emotions (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 65) as well as being mindful about my relationship with them during the interviews is at the heart of the process. The semistructured interview allowed interviewees to disclose personal experiences and emotions if the question triggered reflection, leading to questions not previously listed and extended conversations. The theory of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991) was particularly important in the interviews, as the information gathered goes beyond statistics and embraces individual truths. For all interviews, I considered Hesse-Biber’s point that ‘The researcher must (...) listen intently to what the interviewee has to say, for the researcher must be prepared to drop his or her agenda and follow the pace of the interview. The interview and conversations with the researched will assume an agenda independent of that of the researcher, and researchers should be ready to work with these changes’ (2007: 132-133).

- Ethics: I obtained consent from each interviewee, written and spoken, before the interview started. The interviews were recorded in video format and saved in my personal Youtube account as private videos. I am the only person with access to the account, although the interviewees were informed they could request a copy of the video if they wanted. All interviews will be deleted from my Youtube account once this dissertation is marked.

- Possible issues/weaknesses: A small sample of interviewees does not generate the same amount of data of a survey. The five interviewees, albeit having different opinions and experiences, did not represent the diversity of Brazilian internet users or even Brazilian women using the internet to know more about feminism or using the internet for activism.
#Findings

Decision-making in feminist social research means overcoming considerable challenges, so achieving a feminist project is a considerable accomplishment (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 163)

The online survey and the interviews were conducted in parallel, and as the survey reached more people and answers poured in, the questions and dynamics of the interviews were adapted accordingly. Therefore, the themes presented as major findings in this chapter were selected based on the data gathered by the survey, with findings from the interviews being used to provide a more personal approach and tangible examples. After analysing the data from the online survey and the content of the interviews, I organised the findings into five themes:

- **The F word**: do people consider themselves feminists? Is feminism a well known concept in Brazil?
- **Sexists and victims of sexism**: is #HashtagFeminism making people more aware of sexism, harassment and abuse?
- **Personal, emotional, political**: what kind of impact does #HashtagFeminism has on people beyond the understanding of feminism and recognition of sexism?
- **Game changers**: not all hashtags get the same attention and have the same impact. Which ones besides the case studies are remembered?
- **Legacy media**: is #HashtagFeminism completely independent of traditional media? Do newspapers and magazines influence what is going on within the social media bubble?

A total of 2524 people completed the survey, and all of them were asked about their age and gender. The percentages are shown in the figures below:
**How old are you?**

- 35.78% Between 26 and 34 years old
- 25.48% Between 35 and 44 years old
- 21.55% Between 19 and 25 years old
- 6.38% Up to 18 years old
- 8.99% Between 45 and 59 years old
- 1.82% Above 60 years old

*Fig. 12 - Survey results*

**What is your gender?**

- 89.66% I am a woman
- 9.43% I am a man
- 0.16% I am a trans man
- 0.36% I am non-binary / queer / gender fluid
- 0.32% I don't know
- 0.08% I prefer not to say

*Fig. 13 - Survey results*
The F word

This research is based on the existence of the Fourth Wave of feminism in Brazil and a feminist standpoint was used as methodology. Therefore, it is important to know how people in Brazil feel about feminism and if they consider themselves to be feminists. Moreover, it is important to know if being a feminist is necessary to engage with the hashtags or to take action after engaging with the hashtags.

The first question of the survey after the two demographic questions about age and gender was ‘do you consider yourself a feminist?’.

![Survey results]

The overwhelming percentage of 82.96% saying ‘yes’ was unexpected, even taking in consideration the limitations and bias of the method. Considering only women and non-binary responses it rises to 85.33%, and considering only men responses it decreases to 60%. Applying the age filter, the percentage of people that consider themselves feminists are as follows:
Although the percentage is high across all age ranges, it is interesting to highlight that it starts to decrease as the age range goes higher. This might suggest that the fourth wave of feminism in Brazil is led by Millennials that are bringing together social causes and technology. However, this suggestion could only be confirmed in a more in-depth demographic study of feminism in Brazil, which is not the objective of this research.

The fact that the survey was shared using social media and the vast majority of responders considers themselves feminists confirms that feminism in Brazil is indeed linked to the internet and social media. Among interviewees, all of them consider themselves feminists, however the relation between feminism and social media is very distinct. Interviewee 1, for instance, has always been interested in feminism, but social media had an impact on how she relates with it. Interviewee 2, on the other hand, said she had an ‘aversion to feminism’ and that only changed because of social media: ‘seeing people sharing their stories [of sexism] made me give myself permission to say that I am a feminist’. She goes on to say that ‘social media creates spaces for feminism, we are not dependant of a newspaper editor, we create our own spaces’, which fits into the concept of mass self-communication (Castells, 2012: 6). Interviewee 4, the youngest of the five women interviewed, affirmed that all her feminist knowledge is linked to the online world: Facebook groups, blogs and memes. She goes further to say that ‘of course feminism would exist without the internet, as it existed before. But the internet made it more accessible, more shareable. Feminism was restricted to academia, to white women, rich women. And the internet is resolving that issue’. Interviewee 5 considered herself a feminist before being an internet and social media user, but she feels that when social media and blogs embraced feminism, it changed our relation with the social movement: ‘not only helping women to recognise sexist attitudes but

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also changing the way people perceive feminism. It has definitely changed perceptions from negative to positive'.

When asked if any of the three hashtags presented as case studies (even if not actively engaging with them) made they think or reflect about feminism, survey participants could choose between zero and 100: zero being equivalent to ‘yes’, 50 to ‘don’t know’ and 100 to ‘no’. The average general answer was 9, again an overwhelming response that shows that feminism is something people are aware of. Among the ones that consider themselves feminists, the number drops to 7, and among those who do not know or do not consider themselves feminists, the number rises to 21; still closer to ‘yes’ than ‘don’t know’. However, when asked if knowing and/or engaging with the hashtags made they get involved or more involved with feminism, the average number rises to 21. Still closer to ‘yes’ than ‘don’t know’ but a considerable difference from the average answer of 9 for thinking or reflecting about feminism. Looking only at the responses of the ones that consider themselves feminists, the average number is 20.

Getting involved with feminism can sound elusive and abstract, so responders were given a list of 14 options - they could choose as many as they wanted - as well as the option of saying ‘I didn’t get involved in any way’ and writing down something else that was not on the list. The top choice was ‘I started talking about feminism in real life and continue to do so’ with 66%. The percentage rises to 71.5% among those who consider themselves feminists.

Even though survey participants were not asked to define feminism, it is important to know that it is a well known word and people identify themselves with it and think about it, despite their gender or age. In a country going through political turmoil, having feminism as a buzzword is already a positive outcome. Identifying oneself as a feminist or reflecting about its meaning can lead to an important step: recognising sexism, not only as a victim but also as a perpetrator.

Sexists and victims of sexism

The hashtags presented as case studies are related to events of harassment and abuse, as explained in the methodology chapter. I wanted to find out if these hashtags made people realise they were victims of harassment or abuse or behaved in a sexist way. Moreover, I wanted to know if men, women, and non-binary people responded in different ways.
Without filtering by gender, the average response when asked if engaging with the hashtags in any way (including only reading about them) made them realise they were victims of some kind of harassment or abuse was 27 (Zero being ‘yes’, 50 ‘don’t know’ and 100 ‘no’). If we consider only the answers of women there is a small drop to 24, and the average answer of all who marked non-binary gender options was 30. However, men on average marked 64.

It is also relevant to mention that Interviewee 3, who lived through the second wave of feminism, said that she did have an idea of women’s rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s, especially because of the work of Betty Friedan. However, during her teenage years and early adulthood, she never associated street harassment with sexism. ‘Being catcalled on the street was fine, some of us used to find it flattering’, she completes. ‘It was only after the online campaign Enough With Catcalling30 was launched in Brazil that I realised that catcalling was not ok.’ Moreover, Interviewee 3 recalled an episode of sexual harassment that happened to her during her teens after knowing about the hashtag #MyBodyIsNotPublic. Interviewee 4 mentioned a hashtag not included in the case studies, #HeDoesntHitYouBut31, which brought gaslighting and psychological abuse to the fore. She said: ‘the hashtag made me remember situations I went through with my ex partner. I recognised myself in the tweets that used the hashtag’. Interviewee 5 said that social media in general made her dig deeper and recognise sexism more easily, as well as realising it is much more present than she previously thought.

Responders were also asked if engaging with the hashtags in any way made them realise they have had sexist behaviour or attitudes. The average response was 30, and breaking in gender categories, the average number for women was 31, for men was 22 and for non-binary was 24 ((Zero being ‘yes’, 50 ‘don’t know’ and 100 ‘no’).

In conclusion, both women and non-binary have recognised they were victims of harassment or abuse after engaging with the hashtags, and they also identified their own sexist behaviours. On the other hand, there is a noticeable difference when it comes to men: they do not identify

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30 The original name in Portuguese of the campaign is Chega de Fiu Fiu (Fiu Fiu is the whistling sound used for catcalling). The campaign was launched online in July 2013 by journalist Juliana de Faria to raise awareness regarding street harassment. In 2018, the campaign launched an eponymous documentary, which was crowdfunded.

31 Originally in Portuguese: #EleNãoTeBateMas
themselves as victims, but they do recognise they have had sexist behaviours. Identifying oneself as a victim or as an oppressor and/or perpetrator can have a significative emotional impact - which may trigger political action, previously examined within the Theoretical Framework - something that will be further examined in the next section.

Personal, emotional, political

In the methodology chapter, I questioned ‘how do you study something that you do, while you do it?’ Being an engaged online activist means I am aware of the feminist hashtags, especially the ones that emerge in my home country, that often come up and take Twitter by storm. Being immersed in this bubble might give us the impression that a hashtag, or a campaign, or a conversation, is bigger and bolder than it actually is. So, rather than supporting #HashtagFeminism through data analytics, which would provide substantial numbers but would lack context, I asked survey participants and interviewees if and how #HashtagFeminism takes them on a journey from personal experience to political action as well as if and how their emotions impact said action.

As stated in the first section of the chapter, 82.96% of survey participants consider themselves feminists. From this total, only 45.5% follow feminists and/or activists and/or feminist campaigns on Twitter because they want to, while 21.5% only do so if the people and/or campaigns appear on their feed occasionally. These percentages tell us that there is a gap between considering oneself a feminist and engaging with feminism online. This gap, however, does not mean that people are not affected by #HashtagFeminism, as it will be further analysed.

Participants in the survey were also asked not only if they had heard about the three case study hashtags, but also if they had read something about them and if they published and/or retweeted a publication that had one of the hashtags. When asked ‘have you heard about any of the hashtags below?’, only 3.5% answered no. What is even more impressive is that among the 27.5% of responders that had previously stated they do not use Twitter (When asked ‘do you follow any feminist campaigns or activists on Twitter?’), only 3.9% said that they had not heard about the hashtags. Among the interviewees, they all knew at least one hashtag as well as the reason that triggered its creation.
The response for the question, ‘have you read tweets using any of the hashtags below?’, already shows that albeit people do know about the hashtags, they may not be as interested in following up and getting to know more about their contents. Here, 24% answered no. Although this number means that 76% of people have read something, the gap between the 3.5% that never even heard about them to the 24% that have not read the tweets is important. The last question about active engagement with the hashtags, ‘have you tweeted or retweeted something using one of the hashtags below?’, provided even more insightful data, as 71% of people answered no. Interviewee 5 is a good example of a passive Twitter user: she does not reply or retweet, and does not even have a photo in her profile. However, she knew all the hashtags and all the motives behind the hashtags.

Not actively following activists and/or campaigns on Twitter as well as not engaging with the hashtags does not mean not being affected by them. Taking in consideration the previously analysed answers - from survey participants and interviewees - regarding recognising oneself as a victim of abuse and harassment or as a person that have sexist behaviours, it is possible to affirm that not actively engaging with the hashtags means that the subject of harassment and abuse is simply something that most people do not want or do not feel prepared to share. It is perceived as a personal matter. Interviewee 2 said that ‘maybe at that moment a retweet is all I can do, and maybe it doesn’t mean a lot. But the change that I’m going through is massive’. We can affirm that she was affected by this very personal interaction and the retweet is an expression of agency, albeit it is difficult to measure its impact in a bigger context.

The emotional impact of reading or actively engaging with the hashtags is another factor that corroborates with the idea that people are being affected even if they do not share their experiences online. When asked if ‘reading about the hashtags, tweeting or retweeting contents with the hashtags has had any emotional impact on you?’, the average general answer was 22 - with zero being ‘yes’, 50 ‘don’t know’ and 100 ‘no’. Among those who consider themselves feminists, the average number is 20, and among those who do not consider themselves feminists or do not know the average number is 36. So, even those that do not consider themselves feminists felt some kind of emotional impact, as their average answer was between ‘yes’ and ‘don’t know’. If we filter the responses by gender, the average answer for men is 27, for women is 22 and for non-binary is 27. In conclusion, emotions play a key role when it comes to #HashtagFeminism. Interviewee 2 mentioned how satisfied she felt about the hashtag
#MessedWithOneMesssedWithAll. She described the relief of witnessing women coming together to support the victim, which is something mentioned by Interviewee 1: ‘Twitter is making us aware of sisterhood. We do not feel alone when we share our issues and experiences of sexism. We did not have this awareness before’.

And how do people use all of the personal realisations about sexism as well as the emotional impact, if they use them at all? Being aware of the hashtags, reading about them or actively engaging with them generate any kind of action? Is the personal political? Interviewee 1 said that her interest in feminism has gained a new significance with Twitter and social media in general: ‘I was interested in the history of feminism, and I was aware of street harassment, but the practical side of it, the idea that I can actually do something about it and be more actively engaged, came with social media’. She adds: ‘Twitter made the feminist debate go viral’. Interviewee 2 consider social media as ‘door’ to understanding feminism, saying that she took the conversation beyond her online presence: ‘it has influenced my behaviour in real life’. As presented in the first topic of this chapter, 66% of survey participants affirm that they have started talking about feminism in real life and continue to do so. Other relevant actions include:

- ‘I am more active online, following feminist people or groups on social media’, with 55.4%
- ‘I have started talking about harassment and abuse with family and friends’, with 57%
- ‘I have changed a few attitudes and actions of my everyday life that I detected as sexists’, with 58.5%.

What all of these actions have in common is the fact that they are, in a way, actions taken within a personal environment. Using social media and changing everyday habits are valid actions, as it is speaking to friends and family. However, they live within a pre existing social circle that every individual inhabits. Actions that burst the personal limits are not as popular: donating to campaigns and charities got 5.3%, taking part in public mobilisations got 9.3%, and going to lectures or any educational event about feminism got 14.6%.

Responders were also given the option to write what other actions they might have taken and were not on the list. Although only 2.4% used this tool, there were relevant insights, and many of them are related to education - people that are motivated to learn more as well as parents and teachers that are approaching feminism with their children and students:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personal realisations, individual actions:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● I realised that by being silent I was condoning sexism. I stopped condoning by saying something every time I witness sexist behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have awakened for feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I believe that the hashtags helped to make concepts such as feminism and sisterhood more popular, taking them out of the academic bubble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I feel stronger to deal with abusive relationships and gaslighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I started to deconstruct sexism in my social circles and in the education of my daughter much more after people manifested themselves on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I am a man and I have started to say something when I receive sexist content on Whatsapp (memes and nude pictures)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Children's education at home and at school:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● I started speaking to my students about harassment, feminism and limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I make an effort to reflect about my actions in relation to my kids' education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have two small kids and pay attention to our sexist environment. From the toy shop to the museum (where women are portrayed but never the artist). After my daughter was born, I have become very worried with gender-related issues. It is terrifying to realise that expectations are so different when raising a girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I’m a teacher so I have started to debate the subject with my students more and more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I’m a science teacher and nowadays I plan my classes to approach female issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have started to promote pedagogic actions of consciousness about feminism and related themes within my work environment. I’m a primary school and high school teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Motivation to learn:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● I started to read and research about feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have enrolled in disciplines at my university that approach and discuss feminism in a more active way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have started to read specialized literature and references about the subject as well as thinking about the industry I work for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have started to read more books to have a theoretical base for my knowledge about feminism and all its forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● I have organised lectures about the theme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Albeit the idea that a personal change in attitude - from reading a book to talking to friends - might not be perceived as a political act for many people in Brazil (a country where politics has a strong negative connotation), it is a political act for feminists of the fourth wave, as analysed in the Theoretical Framework chapter. These 'small' and 'silent' changes are not invisible. As Interviewee 5 adds: ‘there is political significance. Spaces are being occupied and discussions that used to be secretive are way more explicit’.

Game changers

Although this dissertation is focused on the hashtags presented as case studies, and the online survey revolved around them, some participants as well as interviewees, mentioned other hashtags when given the opportunity. Among survey responders that said that did not know any of the hashtags presented (3.5%), 30% said they knew other feminist hashtags, with #MeToo being the most popular one. Albeit a small number when compared to the total of survey participants, it is important to reiterate that this percentage of people that have declared to know #MeToo did not know #MyBodyIsNotPublic, #MessWithOneMessWithAll and #MyAbuserDriver/#MyHarasserDriver. Therefore, we might say that the 96.5% of people that knew the case studies might know #MeToo and other more mainstream hashtags. However, albeit #MeToo was thoroughly explored in all social medias in Brazil as well as in traditional media, the public’s engagement with the hashtag is different if compared to the case studies.

The awareness regarding #MeToo is impressive: from the survey participants that declared they did not know any of the hashtags presented as case studies, 80.7% declared to know the reason that led to the creation of the #MeToo, 61.5% read the tweets using the hashtag and 73% read about #MeToo on websites, newspapers and magazines. 50% said they tweeted or retweeted something using the hashtag, against 29.3% that tweeted or retweeted something using the case studies hashtags. However, when it comes to impact - emotional and political - the numbers are not as impressive as in the case of awareness, when compared to the case studies. The table below compares average answers of the two groups (Zero being ‘yes’, 50 ‘don’t know’ and 100 ‘no’).
| Engaging with the hashtag made you think or reflect about feminism | 24 | 9 |
| Engaging with the hashtag has had an emotional impact on you | 33 | 22 |
| Engaging with the hashtag made you realise you were a victim of harassment or abuse | 39 | 27 |
| Engaging with the hashtag made you realise you had sexist attitudes or behaviours | 39 | 30 |
| Engaging with the hashtag made you get involved or more involved with feminism | 46 | 24 |

It is important to make two remarks: #MeToo came to the fore in October 2017, after all the three case studies were already out. Moreover, the percentage of participants that did not know the case studies is much lower than the ones that knew. An extended research could potentially investigate this comparison deeper and reveal more significant data regarding national x international feminist hashtags. Interviewee 5 suggested that the huge awareness but lack of emotional involvement with #MeToo could be explained because 'it was so far away from us. Celebrities, Hollywood, cinema, it is hard to put ourselves in their shoes'.

Among the interviewees, all five knew all the case studies. When asked if they could remember any other hashtags they thought were significant for feminism, three of them mentioned #FirstHarassment as a game changer in Brazil. Interviewee 1 said #FirstHarassment led a 'shift in consciousness', Interviewee 2 remembered feeling angry and finding out what happened to women close to her because the hashtag served a conversation starter, and Interviewee 5

32 Please refer to the Introduction, where #FirstHarassment in explained in detail
considers it the most relevant feminist hashtag in Brazil. #FirstHarassment was created in 2015, which could also be a reason why survey responders do not feel impacted by #MeToo. After #FirstHarassment, many other feminist hashtags, including the case studies of this dissertation, have been created and discussed across social media and traditional media.

In conclusion, although the objective of this dissertation is not to compare hashtags but to investigate if and how were are affected by them, it is possible to say that both #MeToo and #FirstHarassment were game changers for the fourth wave of feminism. Their impact are distinct and significant in particular ways that could be subjects for another study.

Legacy Media

Natalie Fenton argues that on the internet ‘not all information is visible to the same degree and gets the same attention’ (2016: 157), meaning that social media replicates power hierarchies, and individuals and groups that are using social media as a counterpower tool are unable to reach as many people as large organisations. To find out if #HashtagFeminism is indeed a product of mass self-communication and a tool for counterpower, I asked survey participants a series of questions about their knowledge about the hashtags. The first question was simply if they knew any of the three hashtags. The answers are as follows:

Do you know any of the hashtags below? Mark all that apply

![Survey results chart]

Fig. 15 - Survey results
The difference between #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll and the other options is striking. Even among those that had previously declared they do not use Twitter, #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll still got 95%, and #MyBodyIsNotPublic also maintained a similar percentage, of 55.5%. However, #MyHarasserDriver/#MyAbuserDriver dropped to 24.8%.

Among those who said they knew one or more of the hashtags studied, most of them also knew why at least one was created. Again, there is a massive difference between #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll and the others, as exhibited in graph below:

![Survey results](image)

Moreover, when asked if they had read an article on magazines/newspapers/websites about any of the hashtags, #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll once again got the highest percentage:
So, why are people way more aware of #MessedWithOneMessedWithAll than the others? As explained in the methodology chapter, this specific hashtag was created following an event of harassment within Globo, the biggest television network in Brazil. The perpetrator, José Mayer, has an acting career spanning almost 40 years and is a well known face for the Brazilian public. The case was widely reported across social media - pushed by celebrities that also work at Globo - as well as legacy media, including traditional newspapers and established news websites that belong to major media companies, such as Globo and Abril. Therefore, and based on what Fenton argues - that ‘mainstream news and information sites remain the main source of news’ (2016: 157), we can conclude that legacy media not only influences what we see in social media, but also pushes social media campaigns - in this case, feminist hashtags - to become more popular. Interviewee 2 agrees, saying that she only uses Twitter to search specific hashtags if she hears about them from other news channels or from conversations with friends. However, she highlighted how deeper the conversation is on Twitter and how she can only perceive the true scale of a certain conversation - not only about a specific hashtag but feminism in general - if she checks Twitter.

The less known hashtags according to the responses of the online survey, #MyHarasserDriver/#MyAbuserDriver, were created by someone who is not as well known
outside social media. The hashtags were not as widespread on traditional media and, in addition, some survey participants questioned the truth of the facts related by the creator of the hashtags, who was the victim of sexual abuse (as previously explained in the methodology chapter). The following comments were written by two different responders:

The driver was wrongly accused of sexual violence

The hashtags created by Clara Averbuck are pathetic. She’s an embarrassment for feminism

The above accusations show the mistrust that part of the public have when women use social media to share their experiences with sexism, especially if the person speaking out is not validated by mainstream media. With no witnesses to her episode of abuse - different from the other two events that triggered the other two hashtags - and armed only with her presence on social media, Averbuck’s case is an example of how the spaces women create on social media are not as credible as the stories legacy media supports and published. Interestingly, this type of suspicion does not arise for other type of accusations and revelations made against established institutions, as Fenton explains: ‘The use of social media platforms for disclosing secret information either from private corporations or from governments is now common practice and offers a relatively easy means to disrupt and unsettle traditional institutions and to engender debate’ (Ibid: 160).

In conclusion, albeit #HashtagFeminism triggers conversation and creates spaces for an oppressed group to speak out, therefore becoming a counterpower initiative, it is not always that the voices using this tool are heard or, if heard, believed. They can be either amplified or muffled, depending on the subject, the trigger, and the interest of legacy media. Each hashtag has its own nuances. As previously analysed, some of them lead the way and become game changers for #HashtagFeminism, contemporary symbols of collective affect and outlaw emotions. Although mass self-communication is not an equal competitor to legacy media, it is an evolving, tangible tool. It is not as simple as either thinking that we are changing the world with a tweet or as ineffective as only preaching to the converted. There is space in the middle for real, albeit slow, change, as demonstrated by the survey as well as the interviews made for this study.
#Conclusion

Even the most committed feminist researcher is in the game of research out of self-interest (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002: 158)

To talk and write about feminism in academia and activism is to constantly question not only our own ingrained behaviours but also how these actions influence the environment and society we live in. Moreover, realising that feminism is not simply something that we agree upon but rather something we belong to can be both exhausting and utterly satisfying, which is what Sara Ahmed calls ‘killing joy’ (2010). The sense of being able to change and provoking change - questioning our behaviours to kick start transformation - and of being part of a movement that will lead to a positive legacy is something inherent to all waves of feminism. The ongoing fourth wave and its strong presence in Brazil and Latin America is providing women opportunities to understand their place in a overwhelmingly conservative and sexist society and consequently defying and reclaiming power. Brazilian NGOs that emerged from social media, such as Think Olga and Não Me Kahlo, are spearheading a political awakening with feminist lenses. As Brazil is going through a political turmoil since the impeachment of its first female president in 2016 and the danger of a fascist government hovering over the general elections in October 2018, Brazilian women are recognising their unfavourable place in society, coming to terms with intersectionality, realising the existence of sexism in all spheres of their lives and raising their voices - online and offline - against male power. Brazilian women are making sense of their emotions: they are being collectively affected and learning how to use this affect to trigger change.

In this study, my aim was to understand the intersection of online feminism - more specifically the use of hashtags within feminist activism - and emotions as a trigger to political and social change in Brazil. I wanted to know how #HashtagFeminism impacts our everyday lives, triggered by my

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33 Think Olga started as a feminist blog in 2011 and in 2013 became a NGO. Its aim is to raise feminist awareness using communication. Think Olga is present in all major social media platforms and is constantly producing content which is distributed for free. Founder Juliana de Faria has is the creator of #FirstHarassment and become an icon of contemporary Brazilian feminism and has participated in several events, protests and marches. Faria is also a TED speaker. See https://thinkolga.com

34 Não Me Kahlo started as a feminist collective on Facebook, gathering over 150.000 followers in less than a year. The collective founders also started a website to share essays and reports from several contributors. In 2015 they launched the hashtag #MeuAmigoSecreto ('My Secret Santa') which encouraged women to report sexist situations within the workplace. The success of the hashtag led to a book about feminism, published in 2016. In 2018, thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign, Não Me Kahlo became a NGO. See http://www.naomekahlo.com
own experience. I was eager to make sense of what it means to people when they go on social media and participate - in any way - in feminist discussions. I thought I knew very well my standpoint as an activist when I first started to write and develop the research, but while working on this dissertation I became aware of something that I had not yet realised when I first started: my standpoint as a Brazilian immigrant living in the UK. I had never before crossed these two very clear facts: my activism and my immigrant status. As I started this dissertation describing a personal experience, I believe it is important to finish it with another one.

The experience of living abroad and having the privilege to witness and be part of the feminist movement here in the UK while being an almost full time online presence in the movement in Brazil is an unique one. I was able stand on a very interesting place that allowed me enough distance from Brazil and enough knowledge of how Latin America is perceived through European eyes to realise how political and strong the feminist movement is in my home country and how this strength is yet to be recognised by feminists in the Global North. This auto-ethnographic experience can of course interfere with the academic research, and I understand this interference as part of the feminist standpoint that permeates the methods of this dissertation, something that makes it unique and therefore valuable.

It is impossible to know the intentions of each and every woman, each and every person that goes online and engages with #HashtagFeminism. However, as this research shows, doing so has an emotional outcome. #HashtagFeminism not only exposes harassment and abuse, but also triggers inner reflection and conversations, which lead to small actions that help individuals stand up for sexism in their everyday lives. Social media is a not a world without patriarchal interferences, surveillance, violence and oppressive hierarchies, and it does nurture violent behaviour. However, opposition will always manifest itself, as it has always done. #HashtagFeminism does not aim to silence opposition, but to help to grow a social movement that, in time, will provoke major cultural changes.

While this dissertation was being written, several other hashtags were created in Brazil. From abortion and feminicide to domestic chores and paternal responsibilities, #HashtagFeminism continues to renew itself and embrace subjects that not long ago were perceived as personal matters. The findings presented here suggest emotion and affect theories influence mass self-communication and can be powerful allies for activists. The possibilities for future analyses
are plentiful, specially because, due its necessary limited scope, this study could not investigate intersectional aspects such as race, class and sexuality. New technologies will come up and feminist activists will continue to learn, adapt and create their own spaces to enable conversations and organise actions.

I would like to borrow the words from Dawn Foster to finish this dissertation:

Social media has been a huge force in both mobilising and publicising campaigns and injustices. While a lot has been said about the abuse prominent women receive on the internet, the ability to get online and connect with potentially millions of people who would care about your cause if they heard about it is revolutionary. For women, the democratising potential of social media networks has helped bring attention to campaigns and causes that previously would have buckled without press attention. People speaking in real time and consistently sharing information, has sustained and bolstered many campaigns. (2015: 76)
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And note: it is often books that name the problem that help us handle the problem. Kick-ass feminist books have a special agency, all of their own. I feel propelled by their kick (Ahmed, 2017: 240)


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