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Strengthening women empowerment through i-docs: Alternative forms of participation and civic engagement in the feminist movement

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to explore how i-docs motivate and drive citizen engagement in a manner that sustains and reinforces the sense of belonging to the feminist movement. Drawing upon the eight core drives represented by each side of the Octalysis methodology, the purpose of this study is to identify the motivational elements that push citizens to participate in feminist causes and to be concerned about different feminist issues. Using a quantitative methodology, our sample comprises three feminist documentaries that enable different levels of

interaction and participation: She Is Beautiful When She Is Angry, *as a closed i-doc;* En la brecha, *as a semi-closed i-doc; and* Las sinsombrero, *as a semi-open i-doc. The results show that the most powerful motivational element in the three i-docs is the 'epic meaning and calling' core drive.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Documentary is a cross-genre that merges information and fiction (Nichols 2010). The hybrid nature of this audio-visual product eases the creation of new narratives and formats and encourages the audience not only to feel themselves as part of the story but also to participate in it in different ways. Following Flaherty's approach, the objective of the documentary is 'to represent life as it is lived, but with a selection (editing) of the documentary material with the purpose of telling the truth in the most appropriate way' (Romaguera-Ramió and Alsina-Thevenet 1998: 152). Grierson conveys that the documentary is 'a creative treatment of actuality' (1966: 36) and includes different intentions of observing and organizing reality.

Concerning the creative potential of documentary, Grierson (1966) high-lighted the importance of this audio-visual format for raising public awareness against social problems and injustices, such as in both *Housing Problems* (Elton and Anstey 1935) and *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti 1935). These documentary films showed not only issues of discrimination that have been socially and politically ignored by filmmakers (Winston 1995, 2008) but also unfair situations to which people have been subjected to.

For the previously mentioned reasons, Grierson is considered one of the first directors who defined the documentary genre as a tool for revealing social exclusion and human rights violations. Nowadays, documentary films keep on being a way to give voice to disenfranchised citizens or helpless individuals within societies, but including different narratives and interactive possibilities that give the audience the opportunity to participate in the story. This is what Servaes et al. (1996) refer to 'participative communication', an indispensable tool in promoting social change. As a consequence, 'participatory communication for social change sees people as the nucleus of development' (Servaes and Malikhao 2005: 98). Tufte and Mefalopulos explained that participatory communication 'is not just the exchange of information and experiences: it is also the exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that need to be improved' (2009: 17).

Nowadays, there are multiple ways to spread participatory communication: online platforms for civic mobilization, social media and i-docs, among others. In this vein, the main purpose of this research is to explore how i-docs (Gaudenzi 2013; Nash 2012) motivate and drive citizen engagement (Gaventa and Barrett 2012) in a manner that sustains and reinforces the sense of belonging to a concrete social justice movement – feminism. In daily life, citizens deal with a wide range of issues due to many reasons: skin colour, race, social class, ethnicity, political ideology, etc. However, these days, it is common for women to struggle against 'relative lack of public power and authority' (Black 1989: 3). Today, feminism is thereby 'identified as a minority ideology' (Black 1989: 10), and so feminists act like other powerless groups that not only share situations and beliefs (Black 1989) but also 'work for social justice, freedom, and equality' (McLaren 2019: 1).

The coupling of feminism and documentary falls into two historical periods (Zimmermann 1999):

1. The birth or early period – from 1955 to 1970 – refers to the 'protofeminist era' in which 'women worked for the Flaherty Film Seminar as trustees, organized the seminar, led discussions on editing and curating, and screened some documentary and experimental films' (Zimmermann 1999: 67).

2. The second historical period or the afterbirth – from 1970 to the present – arose when the 1960s feminist movement 'encouraged the documentation of women's lives and female agency in particular' (Ulfsdotter and Rogers 2018: 2). This generation 'had a decisive impact on the way women experience and document their own lives' (Ulfsdotter and Rogers 2018: 2). This generation also implied an expression of connecting with the women's movement and fighting patriarchal forms of representation.

Horne also explains that feminist documentary was originally both an activist practice and a 'prominent feature of art' that criticized 'the paradigm of the isolated and frustrated middle-class housewife' (2017: 69).

Hence, the objective of this research is to analyse the potential value of i-docs as activist products that represent a new form of women empowerment. To this end, we apply the 'Octalysis methodology', proposed by Chou (2013), since it is the most effective method for measuring the engaging elements or 'core drives' (Chou 2013: n.pag.) involved in the narrative of different sorts of products and formats. Although the Octalysis was originally applied to examine the gamification universe, nowadays, gamification refers to the adoption of game elements in non-game scenarios (Kapp 2012; Werbach and Hunter 2012). Therefore, it is convenient to orientate the Octalysis methodology towards the study of feminist i-docs – a non-game scenario – because it enables the identification of the engaging elements or core drives that push citizens to participate in feminist causes and to be concerned about different feminist issues.

Following this approach, our sample comprises three feminist documentaries with different levels of interaction and participation. Thus, following a taxonomy – which combines the methodological approaches proposed by Gifreu (2011), Gaudenzi (2013) and Nash (2012) – based on the 'interactive potential' of documentary films (Cortés-Selva and Pérez-Escolar 2016: 584), we selected the following representative cases: *She Is Beautiful When She Is angry* (Dore 2014), as a closed i-doc; *En la brecha* (Reig Valera 2018), as a semi-closed i-doc; and *Las sinsombrero* (Balló et al. 2015), as a semi-open i-doc. The peak of this classification is the open i-doc, in which users are allowed to modify the content and the structure of the documentary – for instance, *Global Lives* (Harris 2004).

2. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF I-DOCS AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

In this research, we prefer using the term i-docs (Aston and Gaudenzi 2012; Aston et al. 2017) instead of web documentaries or webdocs because i-docs imply a wider dimension of the documentary phenomenon and the use of digital interactive technology. Web documentaries or webdocs are in

constant evolution due to the progress of digital media and the Web 2.0. For that reason, the definition of web documentary or webdoc is complex and currently under construction (Gifreu 2011). Nash described these terms as 'a body of documentary work distributed by the internet that is both multimedia and interactive' (2012: 197). Gaudenzi argued that interactive documentary is 'any project that starts with an intention to document the "real" and that does so by using digital interactivity technology' (2013: 31–32). This definition refers to the potential nature of interactive documentaries to document reality or to create a dialogue with reality using any existing mobile platforms such as mobile phones, portable computers, tablets, etc. Therefore, following Gaudenzi, interactive documentary not only demands a 'cognitive participation from its viewers' (2013: 32) – the act of interpretation – but also 'adds the demand of physical participation' (2013: 32) – the act of clicking, moving, speaking, commenting, etc. In this sense, Vázquez-Herrero and López-García (2019) explain that these new formats invite audiences to interact, play and share in an environment favoured by mobile communication and the skills of the current society.

As stated before, i-docs provide renewed possibilities for civic participation in society (Carpentier et al. 2013). In this context, the power to tell stories relies not only on narrators but also on audiences, whose ability to communicate can also reach the audio-visual community. The 'social dimension of web-documentary participation' (Nash 2014: 387) favours the rise of different forms of social action, such as activism. Activist movements motivate 'ordinary people' (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002: 1) to adopt a new role – as participative actors – tasked with shaping narration. Rose (2014) identified this phenomenon as a 'do-it-with-others citizenship'. Owing to this, i-docs can prove to be a valuable asset in fighting social impact issues and other forms of discrimination, like those relating to the gender gap between men and women.

Feminism is commonly considered a social and political movement, whose origin and evolution are conditioned by the historical context and the circumstances of each country (Ramos 2000; Duarte and García-Horta 2016). Since its inception, feminism has been described as an 'impertinent' phenomenon (Valera 2013: 13) because it is annoying and makes people feel uneasy. As other activist actions, feminism is an expression of civil disobedience (Bedau 1961; Rawls 1979; Magaloni 1990; Habermas 2002; Thoureau 2002; Marcone 2009), since it arises from within a social frustration context with the purpose of reclaiming the value of women as 'human beings, owners of their destiny, capable of thriving on their own, and enjoying their lives regardless of their condition' (Mastretta 2004: 54sc).

Women empowerment goes beyond protesting in the streets, since there are different sorts of feminist outcries. The activist group Femen has resorted to different strategies to uphold women's rights: from organizing massive social demonstrations to carrying out disputed topless protests (Vera 2015). There are increasingly more media discourses that come out to bolster the feminist movement, like the Spanish Pikara magazine, the English writer Julie Bindel or the Canadian journalist Meghan Murphy, among others. Other revolutionary expressions in the field of art are also worth mentioning: in music – Riot Grrrl, Pussy Riots, Patti Smith or Janis Joplin; in literature – feminist books, for example, *Little Woman*, or feminist authors like Margaret Atwood; in the film industry – from *Thelma and Louise* (Scott 1991) to Emma Watson's speeches.
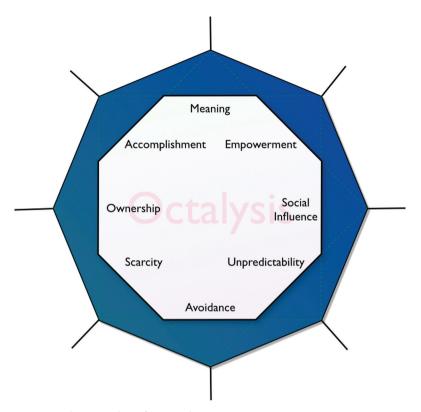
Figure 1: Chou, Octalysis framework, 2013.

Nonetheless, feminism is still presented as a current dispute waged between two sides: antagonists who conceive feminism as an anti-men move-ment, and those who understand feminism as a necessary struggle to reduce inequality between men and women (Carreón and Garza 2016). Diverse authors (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2007; Lazar 2009; Hammer and Kellner 2009; Press 2011; Wichels 2019) have reported that the demonization or the denial of feminism is a dangerous attitude, although it is not a new one (De Miguel 2008). The main difference between then and now is that, nowadays, the power of dissemination of information technologies not only has amplified the echo of voices that vilify feminism but has also reinforced the anti-femi-nist mindset of cyber-ghettos by spreading disinformation (Wardle 2017) on a massive scale. In the same vein, Pal and Banerjee (2019) assert that hoaxes are liable for the vilification of feminism, as they have become a prominent prob-lem in the digital landscape. For these reasons, Sánchez (2013) emphasizes that societies seem more sexist nowadays than decades ago.

Hence, Herrero-Diz and Ramos-Serrano assert that 'today, theories about empowerment have been moved to the virtual space, […] carrying out activism in a way that's never been done before' (2018: 102). This growth trend means the surge of cyberfeminism (Fernández et al. 2011; García Aguilar 2015; Núñez Puente 2016; Moghaddam 2019; McAdam et al. 2020) as an activist phenomenon that brings out a new sexual revolution (Plant 1998). One of the most recent and representative examples of cyberfeminism is the #MeToo
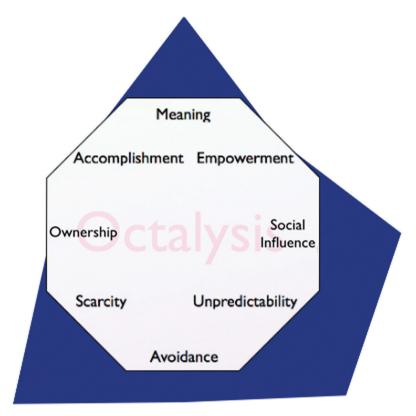
Figure 2: Elaborated by the authors using data from the Octalysis tool: Octalysis framework for She Is Beautiful When She Is Angry, *2020.*

movement, which has been stretched throughout multiple online scenarios. However, prior to this, there were other popular cyberfeminist protests, like the *Priya's Shakti* project or the *#Ni una más* manifestation. These kinds of feminist actions have risen the fourth wave of feminism – focused on women empowerment on the digital ecosystem (Cochrane 2013; Rivers 2017) – in which also i-docs have become a useful asset for spreading feminist messages, as we hypothesize in this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

The Octalysis methodology (Chou 2013) was originally applied to examine the gamification universe; but nowadays, this method is also employed to measure the human motivators involved in the narrative of different sorts of products and formats. Today, gamification goes beyond introducing game-based mechanics in a narrative content, but it refers to the use of game-based thinking and techniques 'to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems' (Kapp 2012: 16). In the same line of thought, Werbach and Hunter (2012) agree on describing gamification as the adoption of game elements, game design and game logic in non-game contexts. Therefore, following these approaches, it is also appropriate to orientate the Octalysis methodology – as a way of discerning all the game mechanics
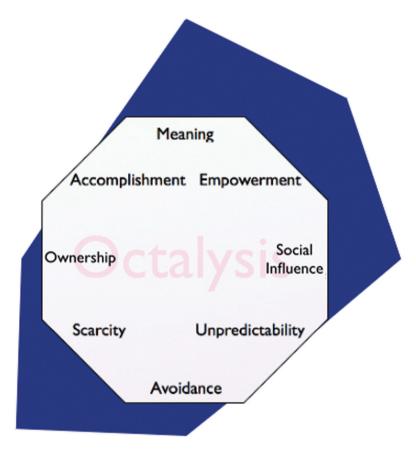
Figure 3: Elaborated by the authors using data from the Octalysis tool: Octalysis framework for En la brecha, *2020.*

that are in a product – towards the study of varied non-game scenarios, like feminist i-docs.

The Octalysis methodology is based on an octagon shape with eight 'core drives' (Chou 2013: n.pag.) representing each side. As Chou (2013) suggests, we address the analysis of each core drive by assigning a number between zero and ten 'based on personal judgement, data, and experience flows, and then square that number to get the Core Drive Score'. In this vein, the rating scale proposed by Chou (2013) is connected with the Likert scale range from zero to ten, which is the most accurate progressive structure accord-ing to many authors (Loken et al. 1987; Jaeschke and Guyatt 1990; Garland 1991; Cummins and Gullone 2000). Depending on how strong or weak these core drives are, each side of the octagon will expand – becoming strong – or retract –becoming weak. These eight core drives are (Chou 2013):

- Epic meaning and calling. This core drive makes users believe they are 'doing something greater' (Chou 2013: n.pag.) than themselves or that they were chosen to do something. Users spend a lot of time maintaining a forum or contributing to an entire community.

Figure 4: Elaborated by the authors using data from the Octalysis tool: Octalysis framework for Las sinsombrero, *2020.*

- Development and accomplishment. It is when users make progress, develop skills and overcome challenges – points, badges or trophies are common rewards when winning challenges.
- Empowerment of creativity and feedback. This core drive makes users engage 'in a creative process where they have to repeatedly figure things out and try different combinations' (Chou 2013: n.pag.), like in Lego.
- Ownership and possession. This core drive reinforces the ownership feeling. Users 'are motivated because they feel like they own something' (Chou 2013: n.pag.) and they devote a lot of time to designing and customizing their avatar or the narrative, since that makes them feel even more attached to the product – as in Tamagotchi.
- Social influence and relatedness. This core drive 'incorporates all the social elements that drive people, including: mentorship, acceptance, social responses, companionship, as well as competition and envy' (Chou 2013: n.pag.).
- Scarcity and impatience. This is when users feel motivated to get something because they cannot have it. 'The fact that people can't get something right now motivates them to think about it all day long' (Chou 2013: n.pag.).

Level of civic participation	Participation forms allowed in the taxonomy of documentaries	Arnstein's ladder of participation	Results from the marriage between i-docs and politics
Passive	Closed model	1. Manipulation	Orwellian model
		2. Therapy	
Active	Semi-closed model	3. Informing	Tokenism model
		4. Consultation	
		5. Placation	
	Semi-open model	6. Partnership	Playful model
	Open model	7. Delegated power	Athenian model
		8. Citizen control	

Table 1: Taxonomy based on the interactive potential of documentary films.

- Unpredictability and curiosity. This is when users do not know what will happen next. 'If you don't know what's going to happen, your brain is engaged and you think about it often. Many people watch movies or read novels because of this drive' (Chou 2013: n.pag.).
- Loss and avoidance. This core drive makes users feel that if they do not act immediately, they could lose the chance to act forever, like in Farmville.

Hence, regarding the main purpose of this study, the Octalysis methodology will enable to determine the core drives – integrated in feminist i-docs – that push citizens to participate in feminist causes and to be concerned about different feminist issues. The sample of this study comprises three feminist documentaries that permit different levels of interaction and participation. According to the taxonomy proposed by Cortés-Selva and Pérez-Escolar (2016), i-docs are classified upon their 'interactive potential': closed model, semi-closed model, semi-open model and open model.

In this context, based upon this taxonomy (Cortés-Selva and Pérez-Escolar 2016), which combines the methodological approaches proposed by Gifreu (2011), Gaudenzi (2013) and Nash (2012), the selected feminist i-docs are:

- *She Is Beautiful When She Is Angry* (Dore 2014). This feminist i-doc is a closed or Orwellian model because audience is not allowed to participate or interact with the narrative content. This documentary has a linear structure; therefore, there are no feedback opportunities – passive audience. *She Is Beautiful When She Is Angry* is a documentary about relevant women who spearheaded the second wave of feminism in the United States, by combining archive footage, dramatizations, performances and real interviews.
- *En la brecha* (Reig Valera 2018). This feminist i-doc is a semi-closed or tokenism model made by Barret Film Production and RTVE Lab in collaboration with Diputació de Valencia, Spain. Through a mosaic structure, this documentary narrates the story of seven women who have suffered gender inequalities at work. The audience navigates

inside the i-doc to look up information and find testimonies, but they cannot modify the structure of the documentary – that is, stories are always the same, but users can decide which one they listen to.

- *Las sinsombrero* (Balló et al. 2015). This feminist i-doc is a semi-open or playful model made by Intropiamedia and Yolaperdono. This documentary is a Catalan transmedia educational project that has been adapted to different media platforms, changing the format and the content of the i-doc: there is an i-doc on the internet, a linear documentary film on television, a book and a wiki-project. Audience can navigate inside the documentary in multiple ways, shaping the content to the users' preferences. This means individuals live a personalized experience. However, the opportunities to participate or to change the narration are still limited. *Las sinsombrero* aims to recover, disclosure and preserve the artistic and intellectual heritage from 1920s and 1930s Spanish women, specifically those who were part of the so-called *Generación del 27*.

At the top of the documentary taxonomy, by Cortés-Selva and Pérez-Escolar (2016), is the open or Athenian model, in which users play an active role in modifying both the content and the structure of i-docs. The audience is involved and interacts with the documentary at a cognitive and a physical level – for instance, *Global Lives* (Harris 2004). Nonetheless, we have not found any feminist i-docs fulfiling the requirements of the open model.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the Octalysis methodology, the strongest core drives will lead us to identify the main motivations that push citizens to engage in different feminist issues and, therefore, to grasp the potential value of each i-doc as an activist product. The results show that the most powerful motivational element in the three i-docs is the epic meaning and calling core drive. Regardless of the kind of model – closed, semi-closed or semi-open – the epic meaning and calling core drive is a common element that all i-docs share. This development indicates that feminist i-docs motivate and drive citizen engagement by using narratives that make users believe they are doing something greater than themselves. On the other hand, the most powerless core drives in closed and semi-closed models are the development and accomplishment, ownership and possession, and loss and avoidance. However, the semi-open model lacks the unpredictability and curiosity core drive. This issue suggests that certain motivational elements – core drives – are absent in some i-doc models.

In general, the higher the level of interaction and participation in i-docs, the more game techniques the narrative content presents. For that reason, the narrative of *Las sinsombrero* – which is a semi-open model that enables participation on a high level – includes more game-based mechanics to engage people and inspire actions than in other i-doc models. However, this fact does not mean that the other i-doc models are deficient activist products, since, as Chou advocates, 'any good and engaging product or system will have at least one of the core drives' (2013: n.pag.). For that reason, it is also important to itemize the eight-core drive score for each i-doc in detail.

First, as mentioned before, the epic meaning and calling core drive is one of the strongest elements of motivation that all the documentary films have in common, but this is not the only one. The narrative of *She Is Beautiful When*

She Is Angry (Dore 2014) also presents other powerful core drives, like scarcity and impatience, together with unpredictability and curiosity. On the other hand, this i-doc lacks the development and accomplishment, empowerment of creativity and feedback, and ownership and possession core drives. This documentary film also has a feeble core drive: loss and avoidance.

Second, the documentary film *En la brecha* (Reig Valera 2018) has a narrative with two important core drives: epic meaning and calling, and scarcity and impatience. But, there are other noticeable motivation drives, like empowerment of creativity and feedback, and social influence and relatedness core drives. The narrative misses the development and accomplishment, and the unpredictability and curiosity core drives. The ownership and possession, and the loss and avoidance core drives are barely shown in the narrative content.

Lastly, almost all core drives play a prominent role in the narrative of *Las sinsombrero* (Balló et al. 2015). The unpredictability and curiosity core drive is the only motivational element that is not present in the i-doc.

Thus, we support the idea that feminist i-docs represent a new form of women empowerment within the fourth wave of feminism. However, feminist i-docs still need to evolve and adapt to the idiosyncrasy of the current society, which is a heterogeneous community made up of diverse citizens who show their concerns and willingness to participate actively in the social and political landscape.

Nonetheless, this digital revolution is a process very much still in development, mainly with regard to feminist i-docs and the fourth wave of feminism in general. The fourth wave of feminism appears to have stalled, because most of the protests are focused on the use of social networks, blogs, linear documentary films or other forms of artivism that refer to a low-middle level of user engagement. This reality heightens a sort of activist practice popularly known as slacktivism (Morozov 2011; Christensen 2012; Kristofferson et al. 2014) or/and clicktivism (White 2010). These concepts are inherent to the 'lazy generation' (Morozov 2009), since they mean a kind of activism for sluggish people, who conceive participation as an effortless way to help other individuals or to work on a good cause.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Bearing in mind the results of this study, it is important to point out that the potential value of the selected i-docs, as activist products, mainly relies on the epic meaning and calling core drive. This engaging element drives citizen involvement and pushes individuals to participate in feminist causes and to be concerned about different feminist issues. The epic meaning and calling is the core drive whereby the audience believes they are doing something greater than themselves. This is a powerful motivational element, since that feeling makes individuals devote a lot of time to contributing to the women community. The results have also underlined the idea that the higher the level of interaction and participation in i-docs, the more game techniques the narrative content presents. These findings would suggest that including more game-based mechanics to i-docs would reinforce the sense of belonging of audience to the feminist movement. However, it could not be verified at this stage, so further research is needed.

However, the lack of open-model feminist i-docs is quite revealing, as it demonstrates that the feminist movement still needs to spread its power and visibility on more participative platforms and products. For this reason, we

argue that the fourth wave of feminism is incomplete, because audience must be called to participate and collaborate more actively and to become more engaged in the cause. This lack of involvement of audiences in real feminist matters makes us wonder whether or not there has been an evolution from the third wave to the fourth wave of feminism, or whether the fourth wave is still so incipient that it needs time to develop. The internet has been the birth-place of the fourth wave of feminism and has opened up meaningful spaces for the development of cyberfeminism. However, since the starting point of this fourth wave in 2008 (this date may vary depending on some authors and the social context), there have not been significant technological changes that denote the difference between the end of the third wave and the beginning of the fourth. Indeed, the concept of cyberfeminism was coined in 1991 by a group called VNS Matrix to refer to a set of feminist practices that reclaimed and defended the identity of women in the cyberspace. Nonetheless, those pioneering practices are not so different from the new ones because, nowa-days, cyberfeminists are still using the same social networks and technologies utilized during the third wave. The fourth wave of feminism was expected to bring more interactive strategies and tools that lead the audience to partici-pate in the narrative, as well as to experience real environments and situa-tions (i.e. through the virtual reality technology or gamification). But, for the moment, the fourth wave of feminism seems to progress slowly and may need more time to offer better involvement opportunities.

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