

## SPANISH ECOFEMINISM IN SOCIAL NETWORKS. ACTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES ON INSTAGRAM

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### Abstract:

Ecofeminism is an indispensable part of Gender Studies, even more so after the COVID-19 crisis, which has fueled the need for international, innovative and restrictive regulations on the care of the planet and the relationship of human beings with animals and their environment. This proposal studies Ecofeminism in Spanish social networks, delving into the most used networks and their reasons; the accounts with more followers and *engagement*; the *influencers* that promote the movement more and better; and the *hashtags* that viralize the problems, complaints and proposals. To achieve this, a mixed methodology is used: longitudinal bibliographic research of the key concepts, as part of the thesaurus of a competitive R&D project on social networks and young Spaniards with a gender perspective; and diachronic, quantitative and qualitative study of the main Ecofeminismo accounts on Instagram and TikTok, as they are the social networks with the highest growth during the COVID-19 crisis and those with the greatest growth potential according to studies and reports. It is concluded that a greater number of publications does not imply a greater number of users; that the accounts studied have more followers on Facebook than on Instagram; and that the originality and variety of the individual ecologist proposals are the most striking part of the contents, with small actions, which show that change begins in simple gestures.

**Keywords:** ecofeminism, social networks, Facebook, Instagram, influencers, engagement.



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## 1. Introduction to Ecofeminism and objectives of the work

Ecofeminism is an indispensable part of Gender Studies, even more so in the aftermath of the global COVID-19 crisis. This unprecedented humanitarian and sanitary crisis has fueled the need for international, innovative and restrictive regulations on the care of the planet and the relationship of human beings with their equals, animals and their environment. In these circumstances, this proposal presents itself to be original and necessary. The main objective is to specifically study Spanish Ecofeminism in social networks, delving into its visibility on Instagram in a qualitative way. To achieve this, a mixed methodology is used:

- 1) Longitudinal bibliographic research on the key concepts of the case study, as part of the R&D Project Excellence Program, State Subprogram for Knowledge Generation, Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness, coordinated by the Complutense University of Madrid, Rovira i Virgili University and the University of Malaga, under the title "Cultural produsage in social networks: industry, popular consumption and audiovisual literacy of Spanish youth with a gender perspective", reference FEM2017-83302-C3-3-P.
- 2) Qualitative diachronic study of the four main accounts of Spanish Ecofeminism on Instagram: Friends of the Earth, Ecologistas en Acción, Greenpeace Spain and Red EcoFeminista. We have chosen Instagram because it is one of the fastest growing social networks during the COVID-19 crisis and one of those with the greatest growth potential according to national and international studies and reports. The other social network that meets these characteristics is TikTok, but its research is reserved for other works, seeking here the recommended concreteness and extension.

Ecofeminism is a current of Feminism that integrates the ecological question, connecting inequality with the degradation of the world. It is not a new phenomenon, although some seem to want to exploit it as if it were. On the contrary, it was born five decades ago, in the late 1970s, in the second wave of Feminism. Its main objective was to combat the patriarchal and capitalist perspective, with a perspective of caring for the planet. This included, and includes, protecting diversity and ending inequality between countries of the North and South, inequality between men and women, and warning of the dangers of natural plundering for quick economic gain.

Françoise d'Eaubonne was its founder. Before that, she founded France's first gay revolutionary movement, the FHAR (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire) in 1974; and in 1978, she initiated the Ecologism-Feminism movement. His new ideas spread rapidly throughout the United States and Australia, more so than in his own country and on the European continent. Among the ideas she promulgated, she encouraged women to be aware of the ownership of their bodies and to care for them as their own, not as the property of their husband or family. She warned of the world's overpopulation rates and its future problems, and urged women to fight for the decision to have, or not, offspring.

Two years later, in March 1980, Ecofeminism materialized in its first mass gathering. The first ecofeminist conference, entitled *Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the Eighties*, brought together more than 600 women in Amherst, Massachusetts. The trigger for the gathering had been an environmental accident, nuclear in nature, the most serious in the United States to date. On March 28, 1979, a nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island Station on the Susquehanna River in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, suffered an unexpected meltdown. About 25,000 people lived in the immediate vicinity of the station and although there was no direct loss of life, subsequent studies by Greenpeace attempted to demonstrate an exponential increase in cancer cases in the exposed population.

At the time of the accident, the second reactor, which caused the accident, had only been operating for a few days. The subsequent study included several months of work and the cleanup of the waste was spread over 15 years. In these circumstances, Ecofeminism found the right time and encouragement to begin its struggle. Following *Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism Conference* in the 1980s, another second event brought 2,000 women together in the vicinity of the Pentagon, the main headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense, located in Arlington County, near Washington, DC. They called their second meeting *Women's Pentagon Action*. On November 17, 1980, 2,000 women surrounded the building and denounced the country's arms and nuclear policy, warning of environmental dangers. Thanks to this meeting, Ecofeminism acquired international resonance and made a strong comeback in Europe, the continent where its founder was born.

In Spain we have an authentic academic reference of Ecofeminism in the figure of Alicia H. Puleo, Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of Valladolid. In one of the many interviews she has given, she explains the root and the need for her proposal: "My task has been to elaborate an ecofeminist proposal that is not based on stereotyped identities of woman-mother or woman-nature. We must preserve the values of autonomy that modern feminism has been gaining. Be careful with returning to those natural places of women" (Puleo in Morán, 2018). The Professor raises the slogan: "Freedom, equality, sustainability", including sexual and reproductive rights in freedom (Puleo, 2013 and Puleo in Morán, 2018).

It is also essential to read other academics who address Ecofeminism today, such as Amelia Valcárcel (2008), Cristina Narbona (2020) or Yayo Herrero (2013). On the international scene, Vandana Shiva, physicist, philosopher and writer of Indian origin, has achieved special repercussion. In 1993, she won the Right Livelihood Award, known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize', and the Global Award of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) of the United Nations (UN), for her research and promotion of ecological culture, the study of biodiversity and

the defense of women as the center of environmentalism and environmental protection. One of its branches of work has included the training of small Indian women farmers, to encourage a return to the use of natural seeds and small-scale local organic farming.

Currently, Shiva is a member of Parabere Forum (2020), an international non-profit organization created to give visibility to women working in the world of gastronomy. This organization has an important presence in media, and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Although it is not part of this work now, it is an inspiration and another reason to study the current Ecofeminism and its presence and virality in social networks.

## 2. On the importance and use of social networks

At the beginning of 2020, more than 4.5 billion people use the Internet in the world and 3.8 billion are users of social networks. This means that 60% of the world's population regularly accesses the digital world and 45% of the same population is also on social networks (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). Equal access to the Internet remains a social and necessary challenge, because 40% of the world's population does not have access to the web. They remain disconnected and make up the technology gap, which is particularly striking in Asia and Africa (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). Although it is another point to assess and reflect on, in this paper we are particularly interested in the sector that does access social networks and can be a target for the digital expansion and viralization of Ecofeminism.

According to the data, the digital population spends 6 hours and 43 minutes connected every day (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020) and at least half of that time was spent accessing from a cell phone. Social network users spent an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes per day browsing and interacting through their profiles, which is more than a third of all the time they spend in the digital world (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). The number of social network users still has a long way to go to continue to climb and come to match the data of Internet users, although their usage data is still spectacular and worthy of study. In fact, between 2018 and 2019, worldwide Internet users rose by 9.1%; social network users rose by 9%; and social network users on mobile devices rose by more than 10% (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020).

The social networks chosen were, in descending order: Facebook, with more than 2.111 billion users; YouTube, with more than 1.9 billion users; Instagram, with more than 1 billion users; and Twitter, with more than 325 million users (We are Social and Hootsuite, 2020). In April 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram for US\$1 billion and it became the property of Mark Zuckerberg's company. With this, Facebook and Instagram together are well ahead of their first direct competitor, YouTube, in number of users.

Instagram is the favorite network of millennials, who state that they use up to 5 social networks at the same time (Bernárdez, Padilla and Sosa, 2019; IAB Spain, 2019; Kijek, Angowski and Skrzypek, 2020); and most of its users, 66%, are under 39 years old, being 54% women and 46% men (The Social Media Family, 2020; Clary, Markham and Myers-Bowman, 2020). It is a simple social network, offering to upload photos and comment on them; or post videos less than a minute long, called Instagram Stories, which are deleted after 24 hours. In

2018, it launched IGTV (Instagram TV), a tool for vertical videos up to one hour long with which Mark Zuckerberg sought to compete with YouTube. An important part of Instagram and IGTV is the varied range of free and easy-to-use filters, which it offers for photos and videos. They give a personalized and professional finish to all images and the simplicity of their use stands as one of the formulas for success of the social network.

In August 2020, after the global confinement by COVID-19 and the exponential growth of TikTok, Instagram launched reels. They are short 15-second videos, but with a permanent life, since they do not disappear after 24 hours like stories, and directly resemble the mini-videos of the Chinese social network, which could steal users. The reels also offer free editing tools, filters, audio or music insertion, stickers, speed changes and other accessories also offered by TikTok.

### **3. Research: Spanish Ecofeminism on Instagram**

The first step for the analysis of Spanish Ecofeminismo on Instagram must be to analyze its searches on Google, since it is usually the first step before getting information or finding a specific account. According to the Google Trends tool, in the last 12 months and in Spain, the term “Ecofeminismo” experienced the flow of more searches in these weeks: from March 8 to 14 and from June 28 to July 4, 2020. The first date is particularly striking, as the searches coincide with International Women’s Day, March 8. The autonomous communities from which the most searches were made were in decreasing order: Community of Madrid, Basque Country, Valencian Community, Catalonia and Andalusia. The related search topics were “Alicia Puleo” and “Vandana Shiva”.

Extending the search in Google Trends from 2020 to 2004, which is the date of the first search for the term in Spain, the highest peak of searches is in March 2004, also coinciding with International Women’s Day. It is followed by June and August of the same year. The autonomous communities with the most searches, in decreasing order, are the Basque Country, the Valencian Community, Andalusia, the Community of Madrid and Catalonia. For all these years, the associated searches are “Yayo Herrero”, “Ecology”, “Vandana Shiva” and “Feminism”.

After knowing the searches on Ecofeminism in Google, we proceed to analyze the four Spanish ecofeminist associations with more presence in Instagram. We order them alphabetically, since the research is qualitative in origin, according to what was explained in the introduction and the specific objectives of this work.

Friends of the Earth is a non-profit environmental association with the mission of promoting local and global change towards an environmentally friendly, just and caring society (<https://www.tierra.org/>). Its Instagram account is @amigosdelatierra\_esp and at the close of this work, it has 4,692 followers and 610 publications. It defines itself in these terms: “Environmental association with the mission of promoting local and global change towards a society that respects the environment, fairness and solidarity”. It offers free conferences and webinars, commentaries on current environmental problems and laws, meetings and demonstrations, and denunciation photos on current environmental problems (excess waste, excess plastics in



food packaging, use of pesticides, dirty energy, animal welfare, healthy and sustainable diet and food, drought or famine, among others). His most successful publication in the last year refers to the consumption of vegetable protein versus animal protein, with more than 600 likes and the hashtags #Agroecology, #FoodSovereignty, #SaveBeesandFarmers, #MundoRuralVivo, #vegetales, #DietaSana, #SOSCampesinado, #StopGanaderíaIndustrial, #Agriculture, #GoodFood, #Environment, #MeatlessMonday and #MenosCarneMejorCarne.

Ecologistas en Acción is a confederation of more than 300 environmental groups distributed throughout towns and cities. It is part of social ecologism, which understands that environmental problems have their origin in an increasingly globalized model of production and consumption, from which other social problems also derive, and which must be transformed if the ecological crisis is to be avoided (<https://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/>). On Instagram, its account is @ecologistas and at the close of this work, it has 33,500 followers and 598 publications. It offers seminars and workshops, infographics, interviews with experts, comments on environmental news and proposals, and explanation of current problems in very didactic ways (use of pesticides and pesticides, deforestation of the Amazon, asbestos deposit, use of plastics, coastal law, high demand for biofuels, among others). One of its most successful publications is a video from November 7, 2020, where activists dressed as gorillas demonstrated in front of the Cepsa plant in San Roque, Cádiz, to show the responsibility of oil companies in the destruction of natural habitats. It generated more than 3,690 interactions and the hashtags were #NoEnMiDepósito, #NiPalmaNiSoja, #SiEsPalmaNoEsBio, #AparcaLaSoja, #SinBiodiversidadNoHayVida and #NotInMyTank.

Greenpeace Spain is part of Greenpeace, a global movement made up of 55 countries, to stop environmental abuses (<https://es.greenpeace.org/es/>). The Spanish account on Instagram is @greenpeace\_esp. It has more than 327,000 followers and 2,250 posts. They define themselves as follows: “We are an environmental and pacifist NGO, economically and politically independent. We work for a greener and more peaceful world”. It is the account, of those studied, with the most followers and with stories archived and classified by themes: Rural, Actions, Mobility, Plastics, Democracy, Oceans, Forests, Renewables, Climate Change, Signatures, Post COVID, Food, Fires, and Ships. They all appear under a simple logo, with no filler, and in the same color: Greenpeace’s characteristic green. In their posts they mix photos and videos, with information, awareness and denunciation. They do this with infographics, testimonials, photos of the devastation of nature and photos of their actions. Their videos exceed 20,000 views in several cases and in recent months, one of the photos with more likes refers to the spill of the Japanese freighter MV Wakashio off Mauritius, in August 2020, with the hashtags #Greenpeace, #NoMásCombustiblesFósiles and #DemandaPorElClima.

Red EcoFeminista is a group that supports Ecofeminism as an increasingly accepted and valued option for people who want a change in the political and ethical model. Its essential motto is that we live in a crucial moment for the future of the planet in which it is not possible to wait any longer to integrate into everyday politics the discourse of political ecologism and Ecofeminism (<https://redecofeminista.org/>). Their Instagram account is @redecofeminista and they define themselves with these words: “We fight for a more sustainable and just world for all beings on the planet”. Their account, inaugurated on March 2, 2018, has more than 200 posts and 3,245 followers, at the close of this research. It shares posters, calls from various

associations, demonstrations and nature's own photographs. There are also training courses and workshops. The most used hashtags are #PolíticasLocalesGénero, #MovimientoAnimalistaValle, #ElPactodeTegui, #CulturaDePaz, and #CooperativaRajo. One of the most successful publications in 2020 was a workshop on how to create vegetable gardens and homemade soaps, with the tags #ecofeminismo, #talleres, #jardínhuertoecofeminista and #apúntate. On several occasions, their initiatives of tweetstorms or calls to write tweets, on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, about certain ecological emergencies stand out.

#### 4. Conclusions and proposals for the future

The main objective of this work was to study Spanish Ecofeminism in social networks, delving specifically into its visibility on Instagram in a qualitative way. After studying and commenting on the four accounts with more followers and greater success in the social network of photographs and videos, Friends of the Earth, Ecologistas en Acción, Greenpeace Spain and Red EcoFeminista, the research and its results make us draw some conclusions and questions to continue expanding the research:

- A higher number of posts does not imply a higher number of users. Although the accounts have to be active and respond to current problems as they occur, the ratio of followers/publications is very uneven. In future research, we value studying the reasons for the ratios and the proximity of the publications to the appearance of the news that they denounce, taking into account the days and times.
- It has not been possible to include them due to space constraints, but the accounts studied have more followers on Facebook than on Instagram; and fewer followers on YouTube than on Instagram. These two circumstances, according to the data on social network users in Spain and worldwide, would suggest that they may not yet have reached the millennial and centennial public, but rather adult audiences that choose Facebook. This situation leads us to wonder if they should implement new actions on Instagram; if they should publish more reels, according to the tastes of young audiences; and why they cannot replicate the same content on social networks.
- The originality and variety of the individual ecological proposals are the most striking part of the contents. The accounts propose small actions, showing that change begins with simple gestures, in every home. Proposals for home gardens, home composting, improving eating habits, using community energy, reducing the use of plastics or promoting the circular economy are repeated in the four accounts, rather than massive actions.

## Support

R&D Project Excellence Program, State Subprogram for Knowledge Generation, Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness, coordinated by the Complutense University of Madrid, the Rovira i Virgili University and the University of Malaga, under the title “Produsage cultural in social networks: industry, popular consumption and audiovisual literacy of Spanish youth with a gender perspective”, reference FEM2017-83302-C3-3-P.

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