THE SOCIOPOLITIC GOVERNANCE OF THE *#METOO* BRAND

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ABSTRACT

Within this article considers the institutional brand communication in the context of brand management whilst seeks to discuss impersonal and horizontal governance in the processes of emergence and consolidation of social movements. This is mainly considered from the digital network communication and its consequent influence on attitudes, behaviors and face interactions in the urban environment. An example is the feminist movement that was first widely publicized on the digital network by consolidating the hashtag graphic brand *#Metoo*. As a symbol, a brand is a name, sign, or set of signs that represents something else, including a social movement. Thus, the *#Metoo* brand signaled, guided and organized the communication and actions of people on a global scale, changing their ways of thinking and acting. Firstly, through broad digitally mediated or face-to-face interactions, resulting in political, individual and social actions. The objective is to highlight the impersonal governance of the ideology represented in the *#Metoo* brand, including the breadth of its communicative presence in material products and in-person actions or manifestations in urban environments in different parts of the world. The study was conducted as descriptive-qualitative research, whose object is composed of repercussions of brand communication beyond the digital environment. As a result, we describe and consider examples of material and face-to-face cultural manifestations that express and communicate the brand of the *#Metoo* movement.

Keywords: use impersonal governance. political ideology. digital media. feminist brand.

A GOVERNANÇA SOCIOPOLÍTICA DA MARCA #*Metoo*

RESUMO

Neste artigo, considera-se a comunicação da marca institucional no contexto de *brand management* e busca-se discutir a governança impessoal e horizontal nos processos de emergência e consolidação de movimentos sociais. Isso é principalmente considerado, a partir da comunicação digital em rede e sua consequente influência em atitudes, comportamentos e interações presenciais no ambiente urbano. Um exemplo disso é o movimento feminista que, primeiramente, foi amplamente divulgado na rede digital consolidando a marca gráfica *hashtag* #*Metoo*. Como símbolo, uma marca é um nome, um sinal ou conjunto de sinais que representa alguma outra coisa, incluindo um movimento social. Assim, a marca #*Metoo* sinalizou, orientou e organizou a comunicação e as ações das pessoas em escala global, alterando seus modos de pensar e agir. Primeiramente, por meio de amplas interações digitalmente mediadas ou presenciais, resultando em ações políticas, individuais e sociais. O objetivo é evidenciar a governança impessoal da ideologia representada na marca *#Metoo*, incluindo a amplitude de sua presença comunicativa em produtos materiais e ações ou manifestações presenciais nos ambientes urbanos de diferentes partes do mundo. O estudo foi realizado como pesquisa descritivo-qualitativa, cujo objeto é composto por repercussões da comunicação da marca para além do ambiente digital. Como resultados, são descritos e considerados exemplos de manifestações culturais materiais e presenciais que expressam e comunicam a marca do movimento #*Metoo*.

Palavras-Chave: governança impessoal. ideologia política. mídia digital. marca feminista.

1   INTRODUCTION

According to the American Marketing Association, branding "is a name, designation, sign, symbol or combination thereof that is intended to identify goods and services ..." (Kotler, 1996, p. 386). Considering the studies on Brand Design, it is known that the identification processes between public and brands result from a series of associations lived in people's daily experiences. In fact, this characterizes the brand communication that occurs in a specific or occasional manner. In these individual experiences, memorable memories of the brands are retrieved in the field of brand memory associated with the perceptions collected in the present. This generates a symbolic-constructive cycle, similar to a collage of information, which is synthesized as a mental brand or brand image. In addition, the set of elements and events that, publicly and recurrently are associated to the brand, configures its particular culture, which is collectively shared, worshiped and developed (Perassi, 2001).

Controlling the events and aesthetic-symbolic processes of brand communication with the public is a central task of brand management activities, within the context's action of the Branding area, which organizes and develops the brand creation, consolidation and management system (ROPO, 2009).

At least, partially or circumstantially, it is considered that there are individual or collective perceptions, impressions and actions of people, which are organized and oriented, that is, "governed" by values or ideas of strength directly associated with the brand culture. Therefore, the different people who, spontaneously or otherwise, take action or perform individual or collective actions governed by the ideology or culture of the brand, constitute a collectivity, community or "tribe". For Coelho; Franck e Backes (2015), concomitantly, individuals create bonds and build culture, while this culture shapes the constructed bonds. Thus, although acting together and simultaneously or acting in different times and places, what actually unites people as a "tribe" is the impersonal and ideological governance of the brand.

The governance in social organizations arranges and guides the behaviors and actions of the internal public, according to the organizational management directly practiced and controlled by their leaders (MARQUES, 2007). However, in a different way, it is here proposed the impersonal governance of the external public, which is established and developed indirectly or mediated by means of the Metoo brand, which occurs from the spontaneous collaboration of users. In turn, whether expressed as a name or another type of sign, the brand is here presented as

a synthesis symbol of a particular culture or ideology. Moreover, the term "ideology" is indicated in its broad and original sense as a set of strong ideas or values that can organize and guide people's actions since it is potentially capable of influencing their feelings and thoughts.

In the context of tribes (MAFFESOLI, 2012), including those that are impersonally governed by the ideology of a brand, the process of identification or identity construction occurs from a set of different relations: sensory, affective, cognitive, symbolic and political. All these relations are synthetically represented in the central expression of the brand, which is the name represented with sound or written words. In spite of that, there are also many other expressions that, officially or circumstantially, are directly associated to a brand's name. Thus, there are other sensory elements such as images, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations that are equally recognized as brand expressions. These include communication products and attitudes in brand culture, such as colors, graphic symbols, hand signals, attitudes, clothing, flowers, vehicles, and other products that still characterizes the Hippie culture.

The process of building and developing the impersonal governance of the *#Metoo* movement was popularized on October 15, 2017, when the American actress Alyssa Milano published the following sentence on her Twitter social networking page: "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write me too as a reply to this tweet ".However, soon after, the personal initiative was collectivized, because there was a wide and diverse occurrence of me too messages in the online social network Twitter, in response to the Milano initiative. Following the messages, there were also indications that abuses occurred in different environments, including domestic and professional, among many others. The sharing of the early messages was enhanced and reverberated in practically every other media due to the reports by actresses and other professionals against Harvey Weinstein, who at the time was recognized as a Hollywood film industry mogul.

Facuri and many other authors (2013) state that women are still the main and most numerous victims of sexual harassment and abuse, although their practice also affects people who, personally and socially, are identified as men. In addition, the female public was more mobilized by the campaign and, politically, feminism is also positioned against all types of harassment and abuse. For all these reasons, the *#Metoo* movement was broadly identified with the feminist sociopolitical dynamics. In this article, we focus on the movement's characteristics that reproduce the idea of Brand. We seek to think over the composition of graphic and linguistic

signs (the sign # and the phrase Metoo) as a representative brand idea. Furthermore, as it was previously pointed out, the communication campaign and consequently the movement represented by the brand started and was previously consolidated in the online social networks, and then extended to the material world of urban environments with manifestations incorporated into communication and clothing products, as well as people's attitudes and actions. The movement's transition, according to Costa (2019), occurs from the debate, dialogue and circulation of ideas that take shape and strengthen over time. Finally, due to the beginning, to the consolidation and continuity of the *#Metoo* brand campaign in online social networks, the communication campaign and the socio-political movement are identified as cyberfeminists (also defined as network feminist practice).

The consolidated cyberfeminist social movements in online social networks are commonly configured as a result of democratic and non-institutionalized participation. In general, for Costa (2019), cyberactivism, as adapting process for social movements to new technologies, has contributed not only to the dissemination of various social, political and economic causes but also to the determination of these claiming movements. It is a characteristic phenomenon of the cybersociety, which is constituted in a network, allowing the organization of social groups or tribes in favor of common interests which, in this case, considers the recognition of power differences between men and women and empowerment of the feminine. It is observed that the virtual environment is potentially democratic, even allowing the horizontal or relatively equal participation of many people, despite the technological and ideological investments of different social, political or business groups that seek to dominate and control online social networks.

In this article, however, we present a study that prioritizes the manifestations of the *#Metoo* brand in the urban material space, because it is an exemplary process of how a digital address sign, *#Metoo*, was widely used as an ideological brand of products and relevant actions to a socio-feminist movement. In addition, the same graphic symbol acts as a flag, gathering spontaneous actions of several people or groups, and also characterizing an example of impersonal and horizontal governance in the processes of emergence and consolidation of social movements. This is confirmed by Costa (2019) which indicates the widespread inclusion of the sign or hashtag (#) as a mobilization symbol of the Metoo movement.

The digital origin of the campaign and movement is emphasized in the material communication products, with the recurring presence of the "#" symbol, which communicative

functionality is directly related to the characteristic language of cyberspace. Thus, it is considered that, beyond the expression Metoo, which marks the ideology of campaign and movement, the symbol "#" is also recurrently presented as a brand of its digital origin.

The study presented here was developed under the phenomenological-qualitative approach and as "descriptive research". For Valentim (2005), in the descriptive research, it is observed without interfering, registering, correlating and describing the facts of the phenomenon, which constitutes a certain reality. To identify the facts of the studied phenomenon and the theoretical sources for the study, the exploratory stage of the research was performed and then there were the theoretical-bibliographic and documentary stages. Lastly, the studied documents were correlated and described according to the previously developed theoretical arrangements.

The reality considered here was the one which registers the mobilization, organization and orientation, characterizing the impersonal governance practiced by the ideological influence of the *#Metoo* brand in the urban material environment, outside the online social networks. In the exploratory research carried out using the descriptor *#Metoo* on the Google digital search engine over the Internet, dozens of images were immediately observed in which the *#Metoo* graphic brand is presented in communication materials and use products, inclusive public manifestations in urban spaces. Some images were recurrent, being repeatedly observed on the first page. However, due to the type of research, it was not intended to browse multiple image pages or count images because the goal was to observe the *#Metoo* brand communication outside the online social networks, signaling the influence of the cyberfeminist communication on material product reality and social manifestations in urban spaces (Figure 1). It is also considered that a similar search can be performed by anyone who has online access to the Internet and Google's digital search engine.

Figure 1 - Urban demonstrations in various parts of the world with the brand *#Metoo*.

Source: Authors Composition (2019) with digital images from www.google.com

In summary, the impersonal and horizontal governance promoted by the *#Metoo* brand in the sociopolitical manifestations that occurred in the urban material space is immediately documented in dozens of images arranged on a single page of data collected on the Internet, with the Google search engine.

2   BRAND CONTEXT AND VALUES *#Metoo*

The human body is recurrently the object of desire, greed and possession, being perceived as something to be appropriated, as a sexual, functional or social asset. Even the relationship between the double domain of body and mind is constant. By physically mastering the body, the mind's achievements are limited, and by mastering the mind, it is possible to condition the actions of the body. In fact, the separation between body and mind is only conceptual or didactic,

because the body continually reacts under the dynamics of the mind and at the same time decisively interferes in the mental dynamism.

Traditionally, bodies that, due to biophysical characteristics, are socially identified as male, have predominantly been dominated, appropriated and functionally explored. On the other hand, bodies whose biophysical characteristics are socially identified as feminine, in addition to being appropriate for work, were also frequently coveted and dominated as sexual objects. Sexual desire and other desires are circulating and influential in all people. Nevertheless, historically, people who have been socially recognized as men, for various reasons, have had greater access to the physical, material, financial, and social resources that allow the ownership and mastery of the bodies of things, plants, animals, and people.

Confirming the ideas presented, Simone de Bevoir (1970) pointed out that, at the time, women were seen as inferior to men and had fewer possibilities and opportunities. However, as the very emergence of the Metoo movement points out, such situation persists, to a greater or lesser extent and still tends to perpetuate itself if there is no resistance and struggle for change. Historically, female bodies, whose biophysical characteristics are socially attributed to women, constantly, have been and still are appropriated and dominated as objects of desire, greed and possession.

Firstly, dominance over women may have been established by objective factors, such as physical strength or other characteristics. But then it became predominantly symbolic and commonly supported by moral and legal conventions. Thus, throughout the history, there have been weak people in every way who have been socially identified as men, and only for this reason have had access to perks, power and respect which at the same time was socially denied to strongly capable people who have been socially identified as women. Due to the strength of conventions, which are socially instilled from the early childhood, women themselves have been, and some still are dominated by prejudice against themselves and women in general.

For Donna Haraway (2000), the liberation process of female bodies depends predominantly on the awareness and liberation of their minds, becoming aware of the continually suffered and experienced oppression. Firstly, women need to identify and understand what oppresses them. In addition, this awareness must be collective, resulting in cooperation against dogma and oppressive facts. Previously, Guy Debord (1997) had already pointed out that non-contestation can attribute new qualities to old lies. Therefore, collective awareness of symbolic

and physical abuses, the constant denunciation and public contestation of abuses and harassment suffered are necessary as a way of combating the naturalization of bad habits and the continuation of abusive behavior.

Initially and continuously, through cyberfeminist activism, the *#Metoo* movement began a process of breaking the silence, proposing the discussion, understanding and public contestation of the conventional, habitual and legal dogmas that provoke and enable harassment and sexual abuse. Initially, each participant invests in the individualized action of posting a message on online social media. It is the *#Metoo* brand expressed in the posts that make up the collective bonds that form around the perceived values developed in the cyberfeminist movement. Subsequently, however, the brand was emancipated from the digital restriction by establishing a governance that, besides ideologically bringing people together on online social networks, also organizes them into public and sociopolitical actions in urban material environments, being continually stamped on communication and use products, in a professional, handmade or improvised way.

In the 1990s, Pierre Levy (1999, p. 17) introduced the cyberspace as a "means of communication arising from the worldwide interconnectivity of computers." It was exactly the interconnectivity that caused the constitution of digital networks, for synchronous and asynchronous communication, configuring the political-commercial phenomenon of online social networks. Through network interconnections, people have met at a distance, others to establish or re-establish relations around issues of common interest.

In summary, cyberfeminism is developed by groups of people who share the feminist ideology through online networking connections in the cyberspace. Collado and Navarrete (2007) state that cyberfeminism aims both politically and aesthetically to build new orders and to dismantle old myths of society through the use of technology.

Along with Haraway (2000), it is pointed out that the conjunction with network technology, connecting people from distance, allows the shared and enlightened construction of a feminist identity, considering the new destinies of sexuality and the female gender. Even observing the pluralism of the contemporary world and comparing it with previous feminist waves, being a political and democratic movement that broadens and streamlines the debates, it simultaneously shares ideas on a global level. In this regard, Provan and Kenis (2008) point out

that governance systems are transitory structures that change according to the characteristics and needs expressed in the sharing network.

3   DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL GOVERNANCE

The wide diversity of topics or subjects circulating in online social networks requires content identification resources. A widely used resource is the descriptors, such as keywords or key phrases, that act as a tag or identification tag. However, to indicate that the word or expression is a tag, the use of the hash symbol "#" (which in Brazilian daily life is referred to as 'tic-tac-toe') was also adopted. Thus, a hashtag is characterized by a keyword or expression that is preceded by the "#" symbol, being commonly used to categorize, identify and highlight a post or comment posted online. It also allows the quick search engine location, facilitating interactive communication between people interested in the same subject.

Techno-digital connections between computer users and related devices constitute dynamic communication networks, which act as governance systems. For Maturana (2001), systems derive from relations and interactions that define it in spontaneous organization processes. Hashtags act strongly in the processes of organizing user collectivities according to themes or subjects of common interest. The organization of circumstantial or more permanent collectivities configure organizational processes in cyberspace. This is confirmed by Maffesoli (2012) when considering the undefined contours and infinite possibilities of cyberspace that, in a matrix way, allows the meeting of people at a distance, strengthening the social body.

There is therefore a game in cyberspace between greater or lesser permanence and predictability or the eventuality and unpredictability. For Bauman (2003), it is a space for sharing and collaboration, which is ephemeral and immediate, characterizing a particular aesthetic of coexistence in informational relations and constituting different social conditions in the plurality of virtual communities. With regard to feminism in cyberspace networks, a survey by Josemira Reis (2017) indicated that online searches with descriptors such as "feminism" and "female empowerment", among other related expressions, were exponentially expanded in 2017 over the years with growth averages between 80% and 350%. Therefore, expressions such as feminism and related are indicative of content that increasingly interests the interacting public in cyberspace. In general, network communication in cyberspace has also grown and is still growing exponentially, signaling contemporary hyperconnectivity, which tends to further pluralize cyber-

cultural crossings. Parente (2000), for example, considers the "flood of information" as an irreversible phenomenon.

Traditionally, it considers that: "art imitates life, but life also imitates art." In regard to cyberspace and cyberculture (LEVY, 2009) firstly, it seems that digital culture is a reflection of material culture, considering that the images of material products, once digitized, also carry the symbology of things. This is partially valid and coherent, however, it is considered that digital culture is also a field of original signs production, as this case of the *#Metoo* brand indicates. In short, the organization of the cybercultural system around feminist content and the people's call for collective adherence to the Me Too concept, identified as a tag by the use of the hash symbol "#", has produced an original sign that also acts as a brand of the movement in both cyberculture and material culture, being expressed in material products of communication and use and presented in presential and collective manifestations that occur in the urban material space.

Figure 2 - Relationships between digital and face-to-face networks from a central
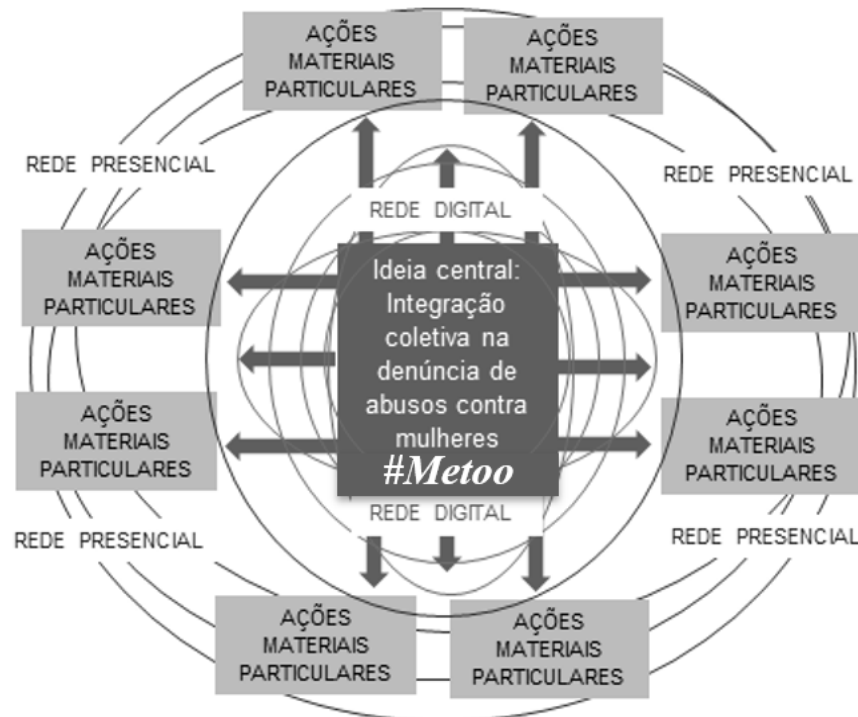
idea.

Source: Authors Composition (2019)

The central and organizing potentialities of the *#Metoo* brand, as a graphical-representative synthesis of the ideology built on the development and consolidation of the

feminist sociopolitical movement, converge and guide people 's actions in the digital context of cyberspace and in the material urban space of cities (Figure 2). For Vanzin and Palazzo (2018), the virtual world is added to the material world, not being separated, but integrated in social relations composing the broad and ambiguous contemporary reality. This also characterizes the symbolic governance of the brand that, as a graphic icon of strong ideological power, "leads", organizes and guides the sociopolitical performance of the people involved. In fact, Bakhtin (1981), warns that the word is the ideological sign par excellence, establishing and moderating sociopolitical relationships. The feminist brand *#Metoo* is the synthetic sign that represents the slogans and the entire discourse that constitutes the ideology of the movement in denunciation and fight against acts of harassment and sexual abuse.

Collectively or individually, the public display of the brand, as a synthetic sign of the feminist cause, manifests the integration of a collective as a community or tribe, which is brought together and moved by common interests. The shadow that defines the clipping of common interest is the pain that comes from harassment and sexual abuse, which, although experienced individually, is recurrent in many women. Actually, it is commonly reaffirmed the shared common sense of certainty that all women have experienced sexual abuse or harassment. For Bauman (2000), suffering is personal and private, but to be named, socially shared and faced, it must also be expressed with names or words in the public domain. For Haraway (2000), the awareness of exclusion that is produced through the act of naming is acute. However, the case of the *#Metoo* movement stands out for the naming and recognition that has occurred and still occurs massively, characterizes the personal and social strength of the phrase me too related to words or phrases such as sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

The brand printed on various products, such as t-shirts and pins or buttons, is publicly manifest because it understands the values carried through empathy (Figure 3), also communicating the commitment of the user to the collective cause that characterizes the movement and the social tribe which origin is cyberfeminist.

Figure 3 - Material products, t-shirts and button with the brand *#Metoo*.

Source: Authors Composition (2019) with digital images from www.google.com.

Lemos (2003, p.11-23) proposes that "tribes are sociocultural forms that emerge from a symbiotic relation between society, culture and digital communication technologies." For their part, Rodrigues and Malo (2006, p.32) indicate that "governance appears as shared power or managed collective action, being particularly pertinent to treat cooperative, democratic and associative organizations". Movements from the virtual environment, when reverberated in the urban material context resulting in the social good, constitute a process of positive governance, which Ki-Moon (2009) considers that positive governance should promote equality, participation, transparency and responsibility in an effective, efficient and lasting manner.

4 FINAL REMARKS

This article describes an example of a graphic brand expanded performance as a central element of the informal governance in a feminist movement, bringing together a broad collectivity in the digital context and in the reality of personal and material actions in the urban scene. It is also interesting to note that, originally, the graphic sign (#) associated with the name Metoo (*#Metoo*) should fulfil the objective function of identifying and directing messages in the specific context of digital networks. However, the sign combined with the name (*#Metoo*) was raised to the condition of symbol or central brand of the movement, acting as a binding element of multiple intentions and actions for the same cause. This characterizes the strategic role of the

#*Metoo* brand in the informal governance of the feminist movement that was initially characterized as cyberfeminist due to its role in networking. But then it also took to the city streets around the world, with posters and products identified with the #*Metoo* brand.

In synthesis, a leader or a leadership team can bring together and lead a social or organizational community to achieve the goals that define an ideal. But similarly, once formally and informally legitimized in collective emergence and consolidation processes, a symbol or graphic brand also plays a leading role in directing intentions and actions that are conducive to the achievement of the objectives of a collective project.

In addition to the broadly positive ideological aspects regarding the fair civic revaluation of women as full citizens of rights and power, this study also highlights the symbolic role of brands, such as names, flags and emblems, which synthetically identify and represent sets of ideas (theory), actions and products (practical) in favor of a common cause.

Here the elements and relationships that developed and consolidated the impersonal and horizontal governance of the #*Metoo* brand were described as a symbolic synthesis of the ideology of the global movement of denunciation, repudiation and the fight against harassment and sexual abuse. Due to its origin and characteristics, it is a cyberfeminist movement which was started and cultivated in online social networks, being extended to the urban material space. This happened by means of brand demonstrations on communication products such as posters, banners and buttons, or on T-shirts and other apparel. Thus, with individual or collective actions, the movement's brand recursively participates in public and sociopolitical manifestations in urban material spaces.

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