

“Dribbling” the hegemonic media: alternative press in the propagation of women’s soccer

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how alternative digital media proposes new ways of processing information and allows greater visibility to marginalized topics by the hegemonic press, rearranging meanings with mass media and consumers. The research is centered on women’s soccer, a subject that has historically received little attention from traditional Brazilian sports journalism, and its object study is the Dibradoras, a blog created in 2015 by a group of women whose aim is to expose gender inequalities in sports. The corpus is composed of 696 units published by Dibradoras on Twitter, between June 7 and July 7 of 2019, coinciding with the beginning and end of the Women’s World Cup in France. As a result,

it is possible to suggest the empowering of an alternative media channel which amplifies the voice of the participants and promotes counter-hegemonic forms of visibility in women’s soccer.

Keywords: Alternative press. Social media. Gender. Women’s soccer. Case study.

Introduction

The FIFA Women’s World Cup of 2019, hosted by France, was the eighth edition of the tournament and only the first to receive attention from Brazil’s biggest television broadcast network, Rede Globo – which shared broadcasting rights on TV with Bandeirantes for the Brazilian National Team. SporTV, a cable channel that belongs to the Globo Group, exhibited 96% of the whole tournament, in comparison to the 46% of the previous edition in 2015 (CAPELO, 2019). The result of this investment in coverage reflected in its audience: summing up the three networks, more than 108 million people watched Brazil’s games, while in the 2015 Cup, in Canada, the outreach was only 42 million. The growth of the exposure of women in soccer in the French Cup was not a phenomenon restricted to Brazil. The numbers released by the world’s maximum authority on soccer, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA, 2019), indicate a total of 1.12 billion of spectators who watched the tournament through TV or digital platforms, and that 540.7 million watched at least 20 minutes of the content through traditional television sets – an increase of 64.9% in relation to the previous tournament. The audience average by game was 17.27 million of spectators, more than double than that of the 2015 edition, in which approximately 8.39 million people (FIFA, 2019) viewed each game.

Soccer has a massive visibility in world media; however, it is important to note that this visibility consists of a disparity regarding gender. When we talk about soccer, the consideration is almost exclusively to male tournaments and national teams. Meanwhile, ever since mid-2015, we experience a so-called “feminist spring” (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019), especially in mass communication channels. This theme, which has not been usually featured by the great media, received the spotlight in mediatic agenda-setting (MCCOMBS; SHAW, 1977) and in advertising representation (VERÍSSIMO, 2008). Soccer, as a social phenomenon (WITTER, 1990), depicts these changes in the field and in their forms of representation.

In this regard, women’s soccer (WS) has gained prominence, whether by the individual conquests of Marta, the Brazilian soccer player and six-time winner of FIFA’s Ballon D’Or, or the National Team’s participation in World Cups. With the history of prohibition and banning women from practicing sports (GOELLNER, 2003)¹, and as supporters (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2016), it is understandable that only recently Brazilian society has taken kindly to WS.

The lack of structure, incentive, investments and the participation of women in club and soccer activities is still today a topic of heated debate. Until 2020, when comparing FIFA’S

¹ The guarantee of the right to practice soccer by women happened at the end of 1979 (GOELLNER, 2003), when the men’s National Team had already been crowned three-time world champions.

investments in WS in Brazil, the female team received only 1% of the total value of funding which the male team received². Furthermore, in 2018, in Russia's World Cup of male soccer, the French National Team, the champion of the aforementioned edition, received as a prize US\$38 million, paid by FIFA, while the US Women's National Team, four-time world champion, received US\$4 million for the title in 2019 – almost ten times less than the male counterpart (MENDONÇA, 2018). Observing this data, we understand that the mediatic interest in the different soccer modalities stems from the inequality in the process of commodification and spectacularization of each modality, and from the way they have been transformed by the creative industry (HARTLEY, 2005).

The interest of mass media in soccer as part of the cultural, political and economic spheres in Brazilian society is undeniable (BRITTOS; SANTOS, 2012). When reflecting about the genesis process of the creative industries, Hartley (2005) also refers to them as cultural industries, which adhere to mass production as a logical perspective. In this context, it is possible to include the spectacularization of soccer. If we broaden the sphere to consider today's worldview of emancipation of communication technologies, it is possible to suggest that new economies emerge (HARTLEY, 2005), especially when considering a social phenomenon widely consumed by the public, such as soccer.

The restructuring of the mediatic chain of production, in its judgement of interests, finds their basis in the joining of economic, cultural and social structures, which have been studied through the Political Economy of Communications (PEC). According to Mosco (1998, p. 25), the political economy is “the study of social relationships, particularly those of power, that comprises the production, distribution and consumption of resources”³. Bolaño (2000, p. 41) adds that the commercialization of media “[...] happens in the production chain of the capitalist kind, and it is a hierarchized communication form, full of bureaucracies, compatible with the power structure of the factory”. Analyzing soccer through PEC optics, Britto and Santos (2012) argue that the potential appeal that soccer has achieved in the last four decades concerning the publicity of brands is enormous. In the case of WS, this process is still solidifying.

The concept of hegemony as established by philosopher Antonio Gramsci helps to understand the sets of consensus and opposition that restrict and guide this symbolic production in communications channels. In Gramsci's understanding, “the hegemony infers the achievement of consensus and cultural and socio-political leadership of a class or a set of classes over others” (MORAES, 2010, p. 54). The actions against hegemony are “instruments to create a new ethical-political framework” (GRAMSCI, 1999, p. 314-315). According to Moraes (2010), the counter-hegemony established the opposite, and tension in what until then appeared to be even and stable in a determined historical context. However, with capacity “to

2 The ten biggest discrepancies between the Women's World Cup and the Men's. Available at: <https://revistamarieclaire.globo.com/Mulheres-do-Mundo/noticia/2019/06/10-maiores-disparidades-entre-copa-do-mundo-feminina-e-masculina.html>. Access on: 17 jun. 2020.

3 All the quotes written originally in Portuguese have been freely translated to English. For the full reference, see the References section.

be restructured, reversed and modified, in a long process of conflict, disputes and cumulative victories” (MORAES, 2010, p. 73).

The objective of this article is to discuss the development of a new process of mediatic production of women’s soccer, considering the opening provided by digital media in circulating counter-hegemonic discourse. The analysis observes how an alternative journalism media specialized in the theme, Dibradoras, articulates with the hegemonic media and adds new products, new forms of production and consumption of media content that can help in the process of commercialization of WS.

Too many people want to know what only a few want to tell

Mourão and Morel (2005, p. 84) analyzed the journalistic coverage of women’s soccer in Brazilian media between 1930 and 2000, noting that “the trajectory of WS in newspapers revealed that this sport has not yet found a permanent space in both Brazilian life and dedicated sports media”. According to the authors,

[...] the transformation of the narrative associated with women’s sports in Brazilian society are slow, and in regards to WS, it is verified that the changes, even when put forward by the media, do not advance this outlook. In WS, there is an “accordion” movement, when the context appears to present a condition of stability, permanence and preservation in the media as well as on the field, a shrinkage of this practice can be observed very dynamically. (MOURÃO; MOREL, 2005, p. 75).

Even after 2010, if we analyze the media focus on men’s soccer and women’s in Brazilian sports media, only by a quantitative aspect, the results show the same findings. As an example, in 2015, the Brazilian Women’s National Team participated in Canada’s World Cup, and ended with an elimination during the round of 16. According to Barreto Januário and Veloso (2019), this received little attention in the most traditional news websites of the country, especially when compared to the equivalent Men’s competition. The authors classified the news of four big Brazilian sport journalism portals (Globo Esporte, SporTV, ESPN and UOL Esporte), identifying that while the Men’s World Cup of 2014 produced 1.175 news articles (BARRETO JANUÁRIO; VELOSO, 2019), the Women’s World Cup gathered a mere 69 publications (BARRETO JANUÁRIO; VELOSO, 2019). In open broadcast network, amidst the biggest outreach of the country, only TV Brasil followed up on the participation of the National Team in the Women’s World Cup of that same year, while Bandeirantes broadcast only the game against Australia, already in the round of 16 (CAPELO, 2019).

From the perspective of a qualitative point of view, the mediatic coverage of WS also deserves a critical evaluation. Mourão and Morel (2005, p. 81) identify that “print media

produced narratives which emphasized the aesthetic aspect of WS rather than the women's skills. The association of beauty in a game was always approached with distrust in the women's true capabilities in the sport". Namely, women players were often featured in the media not because of their skill, but because they reflected certain beauty ideals.

The 2019 World Cup was a game changer in the treatment of greater Brazilian media toward WS. With the world cup, the topic began to be a part of various news outlets in the hegemonic circuit, like *Folha de S.Paulo*, not only in transmitting the games but also the propagation of special news articles, player profiles and interviews. It was also only after the tournament and the premature elimination of the National Team, defeated by France in the round of 16, that the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) started to indicate a change in the treatment of this modality, bringing Swedish coach Pia Sundhage⁴ to lead the team. In other words, various organizations began to act in a way to reframe WS in Brazil, now understood as an object of consumption by a greater public.

This process was no accident. This was helped with the contribution of a "tiny" press (PERUZZO, 1998), which works to deconstruct assumptions and stereotypes in women's soccer. While the Brazilian hegemonic media turned its back on women's soccer, the public interested in the sport had to resort to alternative spaces of production and circulation of information. The internet and digital technologies have been important allies of these agents, but the demand for what lies outside of the traditional press's agenda (MCCOMBS; SHAW, 1977) is nothing new.

The alternative and resistance press (PERUZZO, 1998) allows free manifestation and representation of sidelined groups and ideas (CRUZ; DIAS, 2018), challenging censorship and the monopoly of great corporations. In regards to gender issues, "productions made for and by women, guided to slightly burst the androcentrism in journalism" (CRUZ; CIAS, 2018, P. 259) became frequent in Brazil during the period of military government (1964-1985), for example, magazines such as *Brasil Mulher* (1975), *Nós Mulheres* (1976) and *Mulherio* (1981). In regards to sport journalism, it is worth mentioning the guest column of playwright Plínio Marcos, in the "tiny" *Versus e Movimento*, in which he published short stories, news pieces and articles about politics and soccer.

As it does not start from economical motivations, alternative journalism tends to favor innovation, both in form and content. "Even when formal innovations don't seem daring at first sight, alternative journalism differentiates itself in the choice of what is considered or not to be news, and in the aspects of emphasis in each individual news piece" (JORGE FILHO, 2018, p. 8). As an example, in Plínio Marcos' sports chronicle, he did not highlight details about matches, but instead focused on the work conditions of athletes, the importance of soccer during the dictatorship period or corruption cases in the sports sphere (JORGE FILHO, 2018).

⁴ Pia Sundhage was the USA team's coach, winning two gold Olympic medals. She also trained the Swedish team, which made it to the finals in the Olympic games of 2016. In Brazil, the coach replaced Vadão, who had instructed the Brazilian National team during the World Cups of 2015 and 2019, as well as the 2016 Olympics.

From 1990 onwards, digital technology and the popularization of internet access lowered the costs of production and distribution of media content. With Web. 2.0, alternative journalism was able to expand and transform, maximizing the interactive tools (PERUZZO, 2009). Stemming from the desire to focus on aspects rarely (or never) addressed by hegemonic means, alternative sport journalism means emerged, like Observatório da Discriminação Racial no Futebol, or 45 Minutos, a podcast that features a coverage of Brazilian northeastern soccer matches.

In this context, the aforementioned vacuum left by the great media in WS created an opportunity for initiatives such as Menina Joga, Planeta Futebol Feminino, Jogadelas, A Vitrine do Futebol Femino, and the subject of this study, Dibradoras. The last one consolidated itself as an important voice of alternative journalism in participating in the process of the solidifying WS as a product worth creating news about in Brazil. There are at least two particularities presented in the relationship between communication, sports, politics and economics in the Dibradoras’ case: a new commodity of a sport variety, derived from a reinterpretation of soccer practices, and the process of construction and audience participation in the visibility of the digital alternative press.

“Dribbling” the hegemonic press

Soccer is not a thing for women. Rugby? You don’t have the strength to play it... Women belong in the kitchen, and not in the field, in the court, in the bleachers. You’ve heard this many times, right?! But ~dibradoras are here to prove the opposite. Women can like, understand and play whatever sport they want. And whoever thinks that’s not the case, we’ll ~dribble⁵ them;) (DIBRADORAS, 2018).

Created in April 2015, Dibradoras revealed from early on its intention of offering a counterpoint to the hegemonic notions of gender and sports. It began as a Facebook group created by journalist Renata Mendonça, to offer a safe space for women who like soccer⁶. In June 2015, the team grew and the project started a podcast⁷ to cover the World Cup in Canada, offering technical analysis with guests who were experts on the theme. Over time, the project spread its presence over other social and digital media, like Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, and started covering other sports beyond soccer.

In December 2015, Dibradoras debuted its website (www.dibradoras.com.br), a journalistic blog⁸. Since then, the published posts are both informative, including news articles and interviews,

⁵ In Brazilian Portuguese, the verb “driblar” (dribble) is often said “dibrar”, which has become an affectionate way of embracing the non-grammatical variant. Hence the name of the project: “Dibradoras” (dribblers).

⁶ Available at: <https://jornalismojunior.com.br/por-tras-dos-dibres-femininos-quem-sao-as-dibradoras/> Access on: 16 jun. 2020.

⁷ Podcasts are digital archives of audio transmitted through the internet, usually released with a regular schedule, allowing the listeners to follow the most recently released episodes, or listening when they prefer.

⁸ According to Recuero (2003), the *weblog* appeared as a tool to create dynamic content in a website. Blogs are an archive with pieces of text (posts), and constant updating, organized in a timeline, with the most recent update at the top of the page.

as well as guest columns, with critical analysis of games and articles that denounce the gender inequalities present in sports, like the one shown in Figure 1. “While 97% of the coverage of traditional sports media is of men’s sports, and only 3% for women’s, our coverage focus is 100% on women in sports” (DIBRADORAS, 2022). Thus, according to its thematic selection, framework, protagonists and treatment, we can consider Dibradoras as an alternative media. It is important to highlight that some of the content published on the blog was also published in the news portal UOL, in the sports section, between June 30, 2016 and March 1st, 2021, especially on WS.

Figure 1 – Examples of news articles on Dibradoras



Das 8 seleções nas quartas de final da Copa, 5 são treinadas por mulheres

No início da Copa do Mundo feminina, elas eram a minoria. Somente nove treinadoras em 24 seleções que participavam

26/06/2019 08h49

Translation:

Out of the 8 teams in the World Cup quarterfinals, 5 are coached by women

At the beginning of the Women’s World Cup, they were the minority. Only 9 coaches among 24 national teams.



As desculpas de sempre e a falta de ambição que assolam a seleção de Vadão

Em mais uma passagem pelo comando da seleção brasileira, o treinador Vadão e a equipe feminina se despediram da...

28/06/2019 09h34

The usual excuses and the lack of ambition that plagues Vadão's team

In one more season as head coach of the Brazilian team, coach Vadão and the women's team said goodbye to the...



Copa da França faz sonho do futebol ser possível também para mulheres

A Copa do Mundo é o ápice da carreira de qualquer jogador(a). É a materialização daquele sonho que eles têm desde...

30/06/2019 07h56

The Cup in France makes the dream of soccer become possible also for women

The World Cup is the highlight of any player’s career. It is the materialization of that dream they have had since...

Source: Dibradoras (2019) Available at: <http://dibradoras.blogosfera.uol.com.br>.

From 2016 onwards, the Dibradoras blog started to be hosted by the UOL Esportes portal, an important representative of the hegemonic media⁹, demonstrating the “tendency in dissolving boundaries between traditional journalism and alternative media” (JORGE FILHO, 2018, p.11). In 2019, the team traveled to cover the World Cup in France, sponsored by Visa and the bank Itaú. In the same year and because of the tournament, journalist Renata Mendonça had a guest column in Folha de S.Paulo, a nod from the traditional media regarding the potential contained in WS. The “Dibras” have also been on television, participating in shows like Saia Justa, from the cable broadcast network GNT¹⁰; and were also featured in *The New York Times* on the coverage of the World Cup (Figure 2). Accordingly, the project had its authority legitimized by big mediatic conglomerates.

Figure 2 – Dibradoras promotes their participation in a *New York Times* article



Translation:

Have you read today's New York Times? Look who's there! The Dibradoras! A story on the presence of women in #fifawwc coverage - #DibrasNaCopa has now gone international!

Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

9 UOL was created by the Grupo Folha in 1996. In 2019, during the period of this analysis, it was the second most visited news website in Brazil according to the tool ranking Similarweb (www.similarweb.com.br).

10 “Saia Justa” is a debate program that tackles various themes, and only women are invited guest speakers. GNT belongs to the Grupo Globo.

Dibradoras is an active voice in gender issues, committing to a position of direct confrontation of hegemonic gender notions. Their approach invests in the proximity toward the reader, and sets itself apart from the classical notion that journalism should be “neutral” and/or “impartial” (TRAQUINA, 2005). The institutional texts of the project – such as “Here all the voices are female!” (DIBRADORAS – CENTRAL 3, 2018) and “Women belong in sports!” (DIBRADORAS, 2002) – value the representation of women in a field still dominated by men: sports journalism. The “Dibras” also campaign and participate in events that discuss sexism in sports, talking openly about the theme, which reinforces the activist nature of the publication.

On digital platforms, Dibradoras has 119 thousand followers on Instagram, 33.7 thousand on Facebook, 40.6 thousand on Twitter and 56.6 thousand on YouTube¹¹. Although they still do not compare to the numbers on traditional media profiles or blogs dedicated to men’s soccer, the growth of the project is a sign, amongst many others, of the existence of an audience interested in consuming WS. The spaces that have been gradually carved out in traditional media for this modality are proof that this very audience has been recognized by creative industries.

The prominence gained by Dibradoras in Brazil, especially in a perspective that was previously silenced in the soccer world, women’s perspectives and participation as content generators outlines a new niche. To better comprehend this subject, we will analyze how WS is addressed by the project, in the context of the 2019 World Cup.

Methodology

This research utilizes as a method a case study, which “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined” (YIN, 2001, p. 32). Dibradoras was selected by actively participating in the proposed studied phenomenon: visibility given to WS in Brazilian press. A process of negotiation and exchanges between its authors, the public and hegemonic press, shaped the creation and growth of the project.

The *corpus* is comprised of 696 units published by the Dibradoras profile in the microblogging platform Twitter, between June 7 and July 7 of 2019, coinciding with the start and end of the World Cup. This platform was selected because it is widely utilized by journalistic vehicles, and because it is a social media website “capable of integrating and publishing social networks through relationships between people who are followed and their followers” (RECUERO, 2011, p. 8).

Twitter is a dynamic platform, where a large quantity of updates (tweets) can be made several times a day, especially when covering events in real time. We consider that through this network it is possible to integrate all the content related to Dibradoras (blog posts,

¹¹ Data collected on June 28, 2022.

podcasts programs, behind-the-scenes coverage, etc.), as well as identifying the strategies adopted by the team to address WS and form a close relationship with its audience. Therefore, after the gathering of data, the *corpus* was submitted to a process of qualitative analysis that classified its units in different categories, identifying not only the thematic framework, but also the types of strategies used to promote user engagement in the social platform and give greater visibility to the network of agents involved in WS. The 48 units that continue their content in links that click through to full articles in the Dibradoras website also permitted an analysis of the content of such texts, especially taking into consideration the depth and treatment of the subject.

Discussion of results

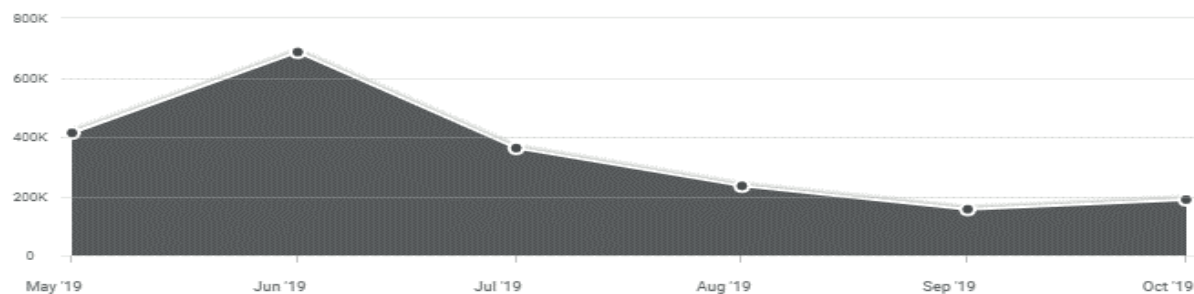
The World Cup presented Dibradoras with an uncommon audience. During the month of June, the blog received a number of accesses greater than their own average: the SimilarWeb¹² platform estimated 690 thousand visits to the website during this period. When compared this data with site traffic from other months of that same year, June stands out (Graphic 1). In this period, the average of monthly access was 340 thousand visits.

Also during the Cup, the Dibradoras profile on Twitter gained 13.136 new followers (arriving at the mark of 30.771), a 74% increase.

Graphic 1 – Visits to the Dibradoras website, between May and October of 2019

Total de visitas ⓘ

Em web de dispositivos móveis e computadores, nos últimos 6 meses



Source: SimilarWeb (2019).

¹² SimilarWeb is an analytic tool of website that provides data that allows greater insight in the digital market. It provides data such as search analysis, number of visits and their origins. On November 8 of 2019, we checked this tool to gather the number of visitors on the Dibradoras page, from May to October of 2019. More information can be found in: <https://www.similarweb.com/pt/top-websites/>

On Twitter, it is relevant to mention that the team uses the typical tools of conversation in that social channel (RECUERO, 2012), such as an oral language (a language that tries, with writing, to reproduce the same markers of oral communication), a tactic that confers greater proximity towards its audiences. They also use visibility tactics, like hashtags¹³ and the action of following up on conversations with other users. Dibradoras exchanged tweets with 376 other profiles, including athletes, national teams, newspapers, broadcast networks, podcasts, artists, fans, associate brands, as well as other projects dedicated to women's soccer. There were 165 unique profiles in total. When we analyzed the official pages of traditional press on Twitter, such as Globo Esporte, that same behavior is not observed: these accounts utilize the platform almost exclusively to divulge links to their website, almost never mention external accounts, and when this was done, it is only restricted to collaborators of that same platform. On the other hand, Dibradoras has exchanged conversations with pages that could be considered their "rivals", like Jogadelas, Joga Miga and Planeta Futebol Feminino, as well as hegemonic media profiles, such as SporTV and Globo Esporte.

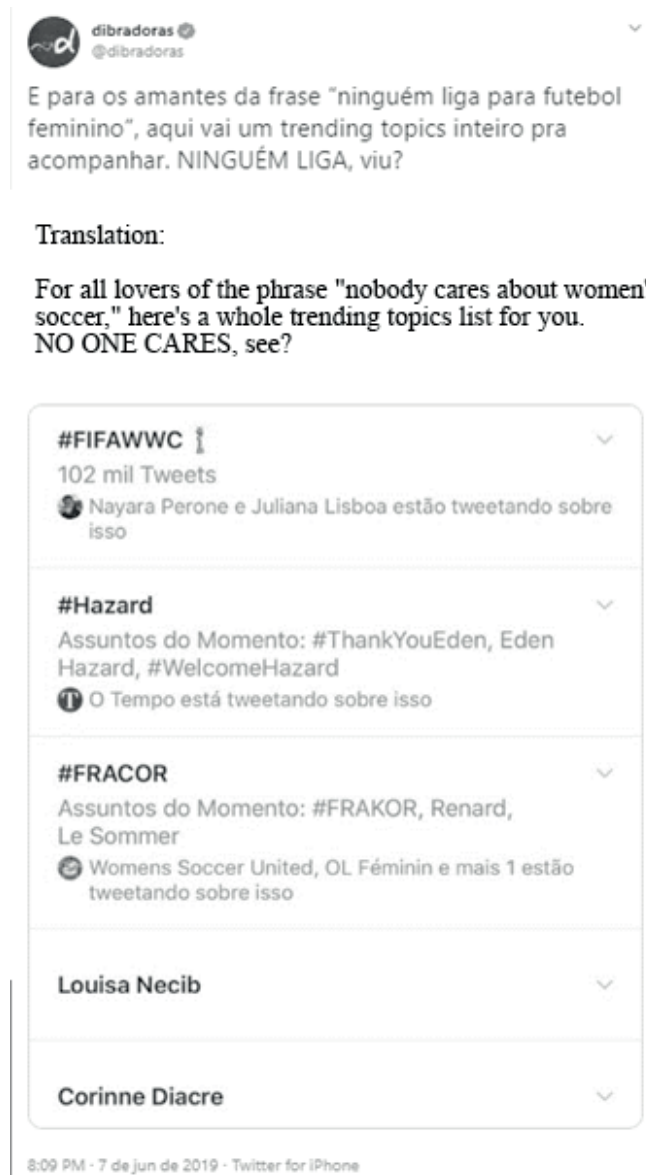
Thus, the blog authors seek to actively participate in a platform that gathers the audience interested in WS, with all its diversity. This strategy allows the profile to benefit from the social capital (BORDIEU, 1985) of other users, enriching its own through establishing new connections. Additionally, we noted a tendency to decentralize the content and legitimize other agents that participate in the conversations about WS, amplifying the knowledge network shared on the theme – while hegemonic media still opts to centralize and restrict their dominance. This fact engages directly with the development of a new PEC, in the regards of consumerism and WS audience, and the content produced by women.

In regards to content, the analysis determined the commitment of Dibradoras in engaging in a discourse that breaks away from the hegemonic notions of gender, tackling the structure of male privilege in sports. We comprehend this rupture as the blossoming of a new perspective on reflections about PEC associated with soccer, universalized and naturalized as something masculine (GOELLNER, 2003; BARRETO JANUÁRIO; VELOSO, 2019). This fact is evidenced by both the language used in the profile and the themes selected on articles and analysis published on the blog. Occasionally, this aspect manifests itself in an explicit form, such as the tweet below (Figure 3), published during the opening match of the World Cup, between France and South Korea, when the list of most discussed topics on Twitter (called Trending Topics¹⁴) were led by the tournament.

13 Hashtag here is understood as a keyword, preceded by the special character "#", which generates a link to access every tweet published using that same keyword.

14 Most discussed topics on Twitter during a given time period.

Figure 3 – Dibradoras dedicates the post to “lovers of the expression ‘no one cares about women’s soccer’”



Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

The spotlight tweet utilizes irony to attack the hegemonic discourse that affirms that “no one cares about women’s soccer” – as if the absence of a mediatic coverage on this modality could be justified by the inexistence of an audience interested in that theme. The tweet utilizes the list of trending topics to prove that the audience does exist, its number is significant, and that they talk

about the topic. This type of language is another indication of the character of Dibradoras as an alternative media, breaking away from the rigid molds of traditional journalism; it is focused on activism and faces defending women’s soccer as a necessary battle, as observed by Goellner (2020).

Those characteristics also reveal themselves in the thematic preferences of the blog, in its featured people and chosen angles. In this period, 48 texts were published in the Dibradoras website on the World Cup, frequent articles guided by gender themes, such as the lack of women in technical commissions and the wage gap between men and women in soccer. On the blog, initiatives for empowering WS were applauded, records in viewers were celebrated, and both international as well as national media coverage on the event was monitored. Furthermore, Dibradoras shone a light on the stories of women in soccer.

On Twitter, the links for these texts were published along with comments that made a brief introduction of the articles, and already demonstrated their angle (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Examples of the divulging of articles that discussed gender themes



Translation:

Queen Marta shared her record with all the women who struggle and need to prove that they can perform any activity. And her speech only shows how frequent it is to question and undermine a woman's achievements. We talked about it on @UOLEsporte.

Over the last 3 years, the @USWNT has made more profit on their matches than the men's team. They are three-time world champions and will seek their fourth tomorrow. Yet they need o fight in court for equal pay and working conditions #dibrasnacopa.

Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

As the blog favors long and analytical reporting, Twitter is a strategic environment for factual descriptions and brief comments. More than divulging links to the blogs or the podcast, the social media platform was used to cover the competition in real time, including a narration of each game play, presenting contextual information, behind-the-scenes comments, sharing athletes’ and coaches’ declarations in press conferences, amongst others. These aspects evidence a disruption of the silence on the behind-the-scenes action of WS, and an amplification of voices and characters in the mediatic sphere (BARRETO JANUÁRIO; LIMA; LEAL, 2020). The profile on Twitter was also used to answer fan’s questions and to promote an audience engagement, with partner profiles and journalistic vehicles.

Table 1 – Categories of types of content identified in the corpus

Category	Description	Units classified (N=696)
Sports narration in real time	Account of the main events (goals, dangerous game plays, fouls, etc) as they happen. Uses informal language, slang and vocal expressions and emojis, from the perspective of the fan crowd.	388 (55.7%)
Conversations with other users	Interaction with followers and other pages focused on women’s soccer.	92 (13.2%)
Self-referential promotion	Texts and links for the dissemination of content produced by Dibradoras (blog posts, podcasts episodes, etc.)	68 (9.7%)
Contextualization	Texts that complemented information on the tournament and/or about the host cities.	67 (9.8%)
Technical comments	Opinion texts on particular aspects related to the tournament.	62 (8.9%)
External promotion	Texts and links for the dissemination of content that were not produced by the Dibradoras group.	13 (1.8%)
Sponsored content	Texts produced following advertising logic to promote brand sponsors on the website.	6 (0.9%)

Fonte: Created by the authors.

More than half of the publications (55.7%) had the main function of describing events in real-time, especially the games (Figure 5) and press conferences. The profile utilized informal language with even more proximity to oral language, reproducing the mannerisms of a fan, and including *emojis* to ascribe sentiment to text. That specific characteristic was more present in the Brazilian National theme games, but it wasn’t restricted to the team, and predominantly

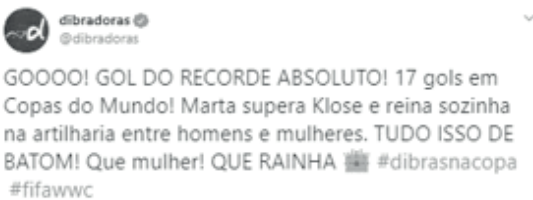
narrated in first-person (both singular and plural, with “I” and “we”), creating an effect of proximity, and situating the profile in the game’s action. This type of record was complemented by multimedia resources, such as images and videos produced by the authors, from the bleachers.

Figure 5 – Examples of “real time sports narration”



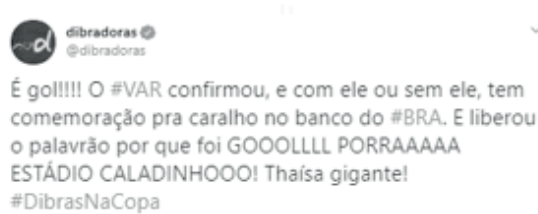
Translation:

OOOOHHHHHHH! Ludimillah ran down the right side and crossed into the area. Bia almost scores. We are close! #dibrasnacopa



5:32 PM - 18 de jun de 2019 - Twitter for iPhone

GOAL! THE ABSOLUTE RECORD GOAL! 17 goals in World Cups! Marta overtakes Klose and reigns alone as top scorer among men and women. WHILE WEARING LIPSTICK! What a woman! WHAT A QUEEN!



5:26 PM - 23 de jun de 2019 - Twitter for iPhone

It's a goal!!!! The #VAR confirmed it, and with or without it, there's a fucking celebration on the #BRA bench. And the swearing is allowed because it's a FUUUUCKING GOALLLLL. THE ARENA IS SILENT! Thaísa is a giant!

Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

The tweets’ approach went beyond sports coverage itself, highlighting gender issues. As an example, the sequence below (Figure 6) narrated a situation that occurred between the blog’s author and US-player Megan Rapinoe, during a post-match press conference, an open space for the press to ask questions to the technical team and the athletes. The author reports that male journalists interrupted her questions, something that displeased Rapinoe. Rapinoe’s attitude reinforces how her speech is followed by an activist practice, which sees soccer as political, and a place of resistance (GOELLNER, 2003). It is relevant to understand that the term “activism” means defending something. The athlete’s attitude, supporting the voice and turn of the journalist, shows coherence with the athlete’s position associated with her feminist activism, i.e., with the feminist cause that are directly related to defending women’s rights, their leadership and the fight for equal rights. The situation described also demonstrates structural sexism that reverberates behind the scenes, on the field, or on the sidelines in soccer.

Figure 6 – Report of the post-game press conference



Translation:

We need to talk about @mPinoe. At the @USWNT post-game Mixed Zone, dozens of journalists were talking to her. Most of them were men. A few times I tried to ask her a question, but always one of them would speak up and get ahead. At a certain moment, she stopped answering them....

Stared at me, nodded her head and glared at the guy next to me, who was interrupting me again. A clear statement: "let the woman ask her question". A player who, besides being a giant on the field, is a symbol of our struggle off it. WHAT A WOMAN!

Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

The publications show the openness of Dibradoras to negotiate and discuss the meaning of women in soccer as other factors and agents. The “conversations” category, the second most frequent in the *corpus*, refers to conversations with other profiles on the platform, especially tweets in which the profile answered questions or talked to the audience about the World Cup.

Through the platform, the audience was able to complement the process of production of new meanings in the modality, offering different points of view, adding on, correcting or disputing information disseminated by the blog. In response, Dibradoras clarified their editorial choices and their verification processes, legitimizing their position in defense of women’s soccer, and demonstrating an openness to correct misconceptions when necessary. As an example, on June 17, 2019 they entered a conversation with a reader about the measurements of the goal post in WS, explaining that they had based their opinion of the matter on goalkeepers who worked in the profession. On the 18, they replied to a user that insinuated that the site’s team is a “sponsor cheerleader” and only cheers for the team during the Cup, countering with the coverage of a game during the Brazilian Cup as proof that their defense of the modality goes beyond the World Cup (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Example of the “conversations” category



Translation:

- What a wonderful article, Rapinoe is amazing. However, it's a mistake to put a picture with her ex hahaha, since her girlfriend Sue Bird is equally amazing (and one of the best basketball players in history).
- Girl, what a mistake! We hadn't realized that, hahaha! I'm going to delete it.



Translation:

- Why do you treat an exception as the rule?
- We don't. We take the opinion of the goalkeepers, who are people who play in the position and are talking about it. We think that their opinion counts more than the opinion of people who are on the outside and want to determine what is best for them, right?



Translation:

- Cheering with sponsorship is easy, I want to see you at the Brazilian women's championship game.
- We are always there, just follow us here at Dibradoras. This was just one of the examples, but if you follow us here and on Insta there are several others ;)



Translation:

- Good, that's it, I think actions are important because they help to spread the word, but only in the World Cup is not enough. I take back what I said, let's move on, girls, and good luck to our national team today. I'm following you now on Insta and Twitter.

Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

The “self-referential promotion” type refers to moments in which the profile published their own articles on the blog, podcasts and partnerships or guest columns in Folha de S.Paulo. Profiles of hegemonic media in the same segment almost exclusively use Twitter for this function. Dibras also do this, but it is worth noting that they have prioritized conversation within the platform. Tweets with historical information, statistics, team lineups, amongst other aspects, were classified as “contextualization”. These posts have as an objective to locate the audience in the games and the tournament. The “technical comments” are tweets that present brief analysis or opinions on facts relating to the Cup. Among them, comments on games, the Brazilian National team’s performance and the players stand out.

The “external promotion” refers to disclosing content from a third party – articles from other media vehicles, profiles dedicated to women’s soccer and supporting initiatives. We emphasize again that the exchange of the alternative press channel with other agents focusing on discussing women’s soccer, in building a network collectively constructed to give more visibility to the theme on one of the most utilized platforms to circulate news. Finally, the “sponsored content” type encompasses tweets that mentioned businesses or sponsored actions by brands, duly identified as advertising, revealing thus the potential for consumerism in this content.

Figure 8 – The profile promotes #EuTorçoPorTodas (“I cheer for all”), hashtag sponsored by Itaú bank, and flags the sponsorship with the hashtag #publi (#ad¹⁵)



Translation: Cheering has taken us to places we could never have imagined. We have spent the night on the street and even been to France. What about you? How far has cheering taken you? What are your greatest experiences as a fan? #ICheerforAll #ad

Source: Twitter (@dibradoras).

The thematic choices of Twitter as well as the blog, as aforementioned, have the objective to defend women’s soccer, through an activism that seeks to give visibility to this theme in contrast to the hegemonic media. The tweets and articles which celebrated record viewers achieved by this edition of the World Cup were frequent, as well as those putting forward analysis on numbers of spectators through the main television channels and the public’s interest in digital and social media. The authors seek to prove that an interested audience in WS exists, demanding that hegemonic media gives visibility to the modality, and encouraging its commercialization.

15 In Brazil, it is established by law that all advertising must be clearly identified as such.

Final remarks

The current study demonstrates the diversity in practices of alternative media within the social and digital media context, contributing to re-signifying meanings around women's soccer. The emphasis on conversation rather than the mere dissemination of content on the site made the project grow in the context of the World Cup, in addition to making it an important participant in discussions about Women's Soccer on social media. The growth of Dibradoras follows a process of legitimization and commercialization of the modality in Brazil, contributing to the creation of a new political economy of communications regarding soccer, recognizing new ways of production and broadcasting, with a distinctive gender-conscious approach.

The analysis showed that Dibradoras establishes itself as an alternative media channel that amplifies the voice of the public interested in WS. More than simply an alternative media channel, the project aggregates multiple mediatic platforms and demonstrates interest in having objectives linked with activism, defending and disseminating feminist principles openly from the WS point of view. We comprehend feminism here, as in all its divergence and perspectives as a movement of struggles and victories led by women, who seek equality and equanimity of rights and living in various social structures. Women's resistance and existence in a male dominated field is a political and activist struggle, be that in the game field or in various spaces and phenomenon, such as the case of sport journalism. When reflecting that the establishment of soccer is historically connected to male-dominated ideals and still excluding toward women, it is possible to remark on the character of resistance in the mere presence of women in soccer (GOELLNER, 2020). In the case of Dibradoras, this is visible when they affirm that Rapinoe is a symbol of "our struggle", and describe the behavior of the player inside and outside the field regarding gender equality issues.

Through the profile and their activities on Twitter, the project now has several correspondents that take part in this construction, pointing toward less centralized means of production. Their editorial choices are considered not only in featuring women's soccer, but also providing context and revealing gender inequalities, denouncing the structural sexism in sports and hegemonic media.

The authors approach WS with subjectivity, centering themselves both as fans as well as moderators of the theme on platforms. Additionally, they construct a statement that has the intention of contradicting hegemonic perspectives of gender and sport, perpetuated by the traditional media industry. The data reveals a new outlook in research about Soccer, Gender and Political Economy of Communication.

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Cecília Almeida Rodrigues Lima, Soraya Barreto Januário and Daniel Felipe de Oliveira Leal actively participated in all stages of the manuscript’s preparation.

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