



Digitally Entangled Feminism

Hashtagging Resistance on Swedish Social Media

Lisa Lindqvist

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Sociology

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To Elsie, my favourite person.
To Elisabeth, forever my fat cat.

List of papers

The dissertation is based on the following four papers.

- I. Lindqvist, L. (2023). Hashtag re-appropriation, voices of reason, and strategic silences: ‘Soft’ feminist resistance practices on Swedish social media. *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, 3 (1).
- II. Lindqvist, L., & Lindgren, S. (2022). Mapping an emerging hashtag ecosystem: Connective action and interpretive frames in the Swedish #MeToo movement. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(8), 4089–4106.
- III. Lindqvist, L. Everyday feminist tagging as techno-rhetorical strategy: Interference and curation through Instagram hashtags in #Kvinnostrejk. Manuscript under review (revised and resubmitted).
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Author contribution, paper II

Both authors contributed to the study conception and design. Data collection was performed collaboratively. Social network analysis was performed by S.L., and discourse analysis was performed by L.L. The first draft was written by L.L., except for the methods and results sections concerning data collection and social network analysis, which were written by S.L. Subsequent versions were collaboratively developed. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Contents

1 INTRODUCTION: ALGORITHMICALLY AMPLIFIED SEXISM AND HASHTAGGED FEMINIST RESISTANCE	1
AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	6
<i>Research questions</i>	7
<i>Empirical cases</i>	7
<i>Key concepts, empirical scope, and delimitations</i>	8
STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION	9
2 RESEARCH FIELD: SOCIAL MEDIA, HASHTAG ACTIVISM, AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE.....	10
CRITICAL SOCIAL MEDIA STUDIES	10
<i>Business logic, algorithms, and user agency</i>	11
FEMINIST SOCIAL MEDIA STUDIES	13
<i>Engagement-based logic, amplified sexism, and false promises</i>	14
<i>Popular feminism, cyborg affinities, and recognition</i>	16
DIGITAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES	18
<i>Framing, connective action, and personalisation</i>	19
<i>Discursive-material-affective digital resistance</i>	22
RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTION	27
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DIGITALLY ENTANGLED FEMINISM	30
ENTANGLEMENTS OF FEMINIST ONLINE PRACTICES	31
MEDIALITY AS ENTANGLEMENT	32
AFFORDANCES AS RELATIONAL PROPERTIES OF PLATFORM FEATURES	34
<i>Communicative affordances in social media research</i>	36
ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY: DISTRIBUTED AGENCY AND SITUATED KNOWLEDGE	37
4 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS: LOCATING SOCIOTECHNICAL PRACTICES.....	42
DIGITAL METHODS: DISCOURSE, INTERVIEWS AND SOFTWARE-ASSISTANCE ...	42
<i>Affordance-based multimodal critical discourse analysis</i>	43
<i>Triangulation through interviews and social network analysis</i>	45
METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	46
RESEARCH DESIGN AND EXECUTION	49
<i>Execution</i>	49
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	54
RESEARCH SITUATION AND EMPIRICAL CASES	58

<i>Contemporary gender equality and digital feminism in Sweden</i>	58
<i>Choice of hashtags and my position</i>	59
RESEARCH OUTPUT	61
5 DIGITALLY ENTANGLED SOFT RESISTANCE: PLATFORM-NATIVE ARTICULATION AS FEMINIST TECHNO-RHETORICS	65
SHREWD SOCIOTECHNICAL RESISTANCE: SOFT FEMINIST PRACTICES AND TECHNO-RHETORICAL STRATEGIES	68
<i>Soft feminist resistance</i>	70
<i>Techno-rhetorical strategies</i>	73
AFFORDANCE ACTUALISATION – FRAMING, INTERFERENCE, CURATION, AND ABSURDIST INCONGRUENCE	74
PLATFORM-NATIVE AND LOCALISED ARTICULATIONS OF FEMINISM.....	78
THEORETICAL REFLECTION AND CONTRIBUTION	81
METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION.....	83
FUTURE RESEARCH	86
CONCLUSION	88
REFERENCES	89

1 Introduction: Algorithmically amplified sexism and hashtagged feminist resistance

The emergence of social media during the 1990's and early 2000's transformed how people come together in publics, movements, and other social formations. As information on these media flows asynchronously and across vast physical distances, scholars suggest that they enable temporary transnational publics¹ to form through weak ties and shared affective states (Castells, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014). These publics are said to have replaced more traditional organisational forms based on geographical closeness and collective social identities (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; Castells, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014). Because contemporary digital platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok host billions of users worldwide, present-day political discussion and mobilisation for social change relies on their networked structures and content dissemination features (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; Castells, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014). Further, as these media platforms are deeply embedded in contemporary everyday life, scholars argue that they are not separate entities that impact social structures. Rather, social structures such as networked publics emerge with and through contemporary digital technology (boyd, 2010; J. van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

Leading social platforms are owned by private companies and financed by advertising, and their technology is developed to balance business goals with user contentment (Albarran, 2013; Gillespie, 2018). Simultaneously, there is pressure from legislators and interest groups on companies to maintain open discussion forums while handling disinformation, online hate, and harmful social consequences such as cyberbullying and spreading of violent content. Consequently, the development and design of platform features is complexly intertwined

¹ A public refers here to a substratum of the world population, organised around a specific interest, issue, or shared state (Merriam-Webster, 2026).

with user practices and agency, legislative pressure, and policy. Research on digital platforms point to their role as shapers of social structure, discourse, and relationships, emphasising their social power (Gillespie, 2018; J. N. van Dijck, David & Poell, Thomas, 2019). For instance, algorithms – coded instructions – structure content circulation as they show each user a personalised content stream in attempts to retain and engage them (Meta, 2023; Noble, 2018; O'Neil, 2016). Research has shown that algorithms risk amplifying harmful and stereotypical content as a consequence of both cultural and technical elements (Eubanks, 2017; Noble, 2018; O'Neil, 2016; Zuboff, 2015). Although content on commercial platforms is vastly heterogenous; racist, misogynistic, hateful, and threatening content often elicits engagement and, as a consequence, algorithmic amplification (Jane, 2017b; Noble, 2018).

Algorithms rank content based on predicted engagement (Meta, 2023), but ranking processes are semi-opaque and can be difficult to comprehend by users, legislators, policy makers, and researchers (Bucher, 2018). As a response to algorithmic ranking, users mobilise platform features such as hashtags, tagging systems, and other content creation and engagement tools in attempts to structure content and increase visibility (Proferes & Summers, 2019). The hashtag is a central feature for users and platforms alike, as it works to convene content into scrollable feeds. Digital scholars refer to hashtags as sociotechnical assemblers of discourse and publics (La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2023; Rambukkana, 2015) and research into how they are used in practice identifies information structuring, message comprehensibility, citizen journalism, social movement resource management, production of counter-discourse, and attempts at increased visibility and circulation within and beyond the specific platform (Berg et al., 2020; Bruns & Burgess, 2015; R. Clark, 2016; Erz et al., 2018; Hopke, 2015; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015; Kostygina et al., 2021; La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2023; Lindgren, 2019). First appearing on Twitter (now X) in 2007 as a suggested tagging device to structure groups, user practice evolved the hashtag into a bottom-up folksonomy (Vander Wal, 2007) feature that can classify content, develop social relations, organise texts and images, function as framing devices and meta text, and convene

publics (La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2023; Rambukkana, 2015; Zappavigna, 2015).

For social movements such as feminism, access to commercial and transnational digital platforms creates opportunities for extending reach and visibility beyond established audiences, often with hashtags and similar collaborative features. Such features enable large-scale collective story-telling in which personal experiences are interlinked and form a collective politicised story (Serisier, 2019), a well-known feminist tactic. Movement scholars have pointed out that digital resistance initiatives gain popularity and speed due to messages that are flexible and possible to tailor to ones' own experience, therefore requiring little or no adoption of a collective identity as a basis for posing demands (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; D. Snow et al., 2014). Although these opportunities have arguably led to feminism having a "cultural moment" in the 2010s up until a recent backlash (Banet-Weiser, 2018), researchers and activists have argued that social media feminism risks oversimplifying issues and solutions, especially since commercial platforms prioritise highly polarizing content. Additionally, feminist media scholars emphasise how platforms come with false promises of a meaningful political voice, algorithmic silencing of complex political messages focused on structural change, neoliberally inspired personal female responsibility for empowerment, and call-outs that only focus on "bad" individuals and not the culture that allows for them to exercise power (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Bouvier, 2020; Kay, 2020; Mendes et al., 2018; Stewart & Schultze, 2019).

At the same time, social media feminism can produce solidarity, feelings of community, and raise public consciousness (Mendes et al., 2019; Stewart & Schultze, 2019). In this sense, it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, where several competing discourses around problems and solutions are continuously negotiated (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). These discursive negotiations are curated by platform features like word-count, allowed formats, algorithms, and human-computer interaction units like the design of apps and sites, which produce particular opportunities to speak and be heard

(Albarran, 2013; Gillespie, 2018). Through algorithms and moderation practices, media scholar Tarleton Gillespie (2018, p. 1) suggests that platform infrastructures “shape the shape” of what users can say, read, and do online. Nevertheless, how social media users interpret and understand features and what they afford produces particular practices and cultural expressions (Bucher, 2018; Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Ruckenstein, 2023). Although feminist media scholars suggest that the mediality of social media supports neoliberal versions of feminism that rely on personal responsibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007), users persistently publish feminist messages that utilise and challenge social media logics of polarization and commercialization in creative ways (Mendes et al., 2019). This demonstrates how digital platform infrastructures and their users inscribe on one another simultaneously, rather than one being a cause and the other an effect.

In order to understand how feminist political articulations and mobilisations unfold on digital platforms; it is necessary to examine how opportunities for these actions emerge through interactions between users and platform features. As platforms continuously update their features, and users develop understanding and skill in relation to them, these examinations also need to be constantly and iteratively updated. A growing body of research examines digital political initiatives such as hashtag campaigns, citizen journalism, and community-building. However, it often either picks apart technical infrastructures to highlight platformed opportunities – for instance by exploring user understandings of platform features – or centres platformed political discourse as a distinct form of activism – for instance by claiming networked structures give rise to popularised, personalised, and leaderless political narratives and initiatives (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; Bucher, 2018; Castells, 2012; Poell et al., 2016; Tufekci, 2017; J. van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Nevertheless, scholars are recognising that platformed social action is a complex phenomenon, where multiple competing discourses and initiatives co-exist and iteratively build on one another, and where virality can highlight particular action in bursts of attention that travels through media ecologies (see, for instance, Banet-Weiser et al., 2020 in relation to digital feminism). In light of this complexity, researchers emphasise

the need for platform-specific investigations into how activism emerges through everyday user practices with digital features, and how the concept of activism can be expanded to encompass such routine and platform-native expressions through new frameworks of political action (see, for instance, X. Zhao & Abidin, 2023).

This dissertation examines how feminism is articulated on three particular social platforms, Twitter², Instagram, and TikTok, through localised Swedish expressions of three hashtags, #MeToo, #Kvinnostrejk, and #WomenInMaleFields. In an attempt to address the research gap sketched out above, it analyses how particular and platform-native technical features intertwine with user action in the formation of these articulations. It highlights how users actualise particular affordances – that is, relationally activated properties – of platform features to articulate and circulate feminist discourse within commercialised infrastructures. In this way, the dissertation attempts to pick apart and explore platform features as they are actualised by users in platform-specific feminist expressions, demonstrating both discursive and material layers of such expressions to speak to the complexity of platformed resistance. Doing so, the results suggest a framework for analysing such action as simultaneously technical and rhetorical, highlighting the everyday forms of digital feminist action that emerge alongside both viral and non-viral tags and uses collaborative and interlinking features for a sustained circulation of feminist discourse. They demonstrate how users carve out space for feminist discourse without relying on individualised logics often associated with “popular” and “post” feminism.

Sweden provides a productive empirical context for examining such feminist practices as an illustrative example of how features, users, and local politics come together in emergent feminist articulations. The country is frequently described as highly gender-equal in international

² Twitter changed names to X in 2023 following a shift in ownership, however, when referring to the included sub-study II on Twitter data published in 2017-2021 and collected in 2021, I use the previous name.

comparisons (see, for instance, European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025), although this has been debated as scholars and activists have pointed out persistent inequalities, lack of intersectional perspectives, and a backlash against feminist politics (Giritli Nygren et al., 2016; Pollack, 2019; The Swedish Gender Equality Agency, 2021). Sweden is a highly digitised society with widespread social media use³, making online platforms central sites for everyday communication and political expression. Swedish hashtag feminism is thus approached as an example of how transnational digital platform features are mobilised through locally embedded vernaculars. Studying these practices provides insight into how feminist politics becomes articulated through affordances of platform features within specific cultural and political settings.

Aim and research questions

The overarching aim is to account for how digital feminist practices mobilise platform-specific features of social media to articulate and circulate feminist goals. By analytically unpacking the affordances of specific platform features and how they are actualised in particular practices, this dissertation shows how political agency emerges through interactions between users and technological infrastructures. Focusing on locally situated platform vernaculars in Sweden, it traces how feminists activate, repurpose, and expand the use of platform features to carve out space for subversive conversations within commercialised environments. In highlighting persistent, routine practices rather than only viral campaigns, the dissertation demonstrates how feminist discourse unfolds through sustained engagements with platform logics and what democratic opportunities such engagements may open within contemporary platform societies.

³ An overwhelming majority of Swedes spend a lot of time online, and around 90 percent of internet users are on social media (Internetstiftelsen, 2025).

Research questions

The following research questions were used to examine the socio-technical entanglement of user agency, platform infrastructures, and localised feminist vernaculars.

1. How are platform features entangled with user agency in feminist hashtags on Swedish-language Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, and how do these entanglements afford particular feminist practices?
 - a. How do Swedish feminist activists, organisations, and everyday users actualise affordances of platform features such as hashtags, user handles, sounds, and visual effects to articulate, negotiate, and circulate feminist demands for change?
 - b. In what ways do these specific entanglements afford opportunities for feminist resistance and articulation within commercialised and engagement-based infrastructures?

Empirical cases

The empirical analyses examined three feminist hashtag initiatives across three platforms: #MeToo on Twitter (now X), #Kvinnostrejka on Instagram, and #WomenInMaleFields on Tiktok. Results demonstrate how hashtags and related platform features function through sociotechnical practices across platforms, where users actualise affordances of features to articulate, negotiate, and circulate feminist problem framings and goals. The first sub-study addresses user perspectives across platforms and cases through interviews with content creators, highlighting their actualisation of affordances in everyday practice, and how political agency emerges from these encounters. Sub-studies II-IV address one case each, analysing platform-native and feature-specific articulations, negotiations, and circulation practices. Taken together, the sub-studies show how

features and users interact in feminist practices across platforms, and what political opportunities arise from these encounters.

Key concepts, empirical scope, and delimitations

Social media platforms: I explore feminist expressions on Twitter (now X), Instagram, and TikTok, treating them as examples of commercial platforms. Their specific technical features, algorithmic ranking systems, and engagement-based logics structure feminist practices and are seen as both contexts where digital feminist articulation is embedded, and active co-constituents of these articulations.

Users and user agency: By users, I refer to feminist content creators, including activists, influencers, people with personal accounts, and social organisations (commercial and non-profit). These actors operate under different conditions of visibility and resources, which together with the technical setup of features, and nationally localised conditions, shape how they mobilise platform features and participate in feminist discourse.

Feminist articulations: Feminism is a social and cultural movement that sets out to identify and change oppressive structures based on gender, sexuality, gender identity, race, and (dis)ability among other power axes. Here, I focus on articulations of feminist problem framings, goals, and demands for change that are built on similarity, empathy, and consciousness-raising through the mobilisation and actualisation of particular affordances of platform features. These articulations do not necessarily include explicit demands for change, but build sustained alliances and space for counterhegemonic discourse that by extension can be politicised.

Content: An important delimitation of the study is that it does not evaluate effectiveness of particular online practices in any quantitative terms, that is, it does not examine views or engagement of particular posts. Rather, it investigates technical and rhetorical aspects of articulations that emerge from how users mobilise platform-specific

features in particular practices. In this sense, it does not differentiate between paid and organic reach, as reach is not under exploration. This is, however, important to note as access to funding enables certain actors to reach wider audiences. A crucial caveat in relation to this is that reaching large audiences does not necessarily equal reaching ‘the right’ audiences, in terms of effects of consciousness-raising and feminist mobilisation.

Structure of the dissertation

The next chapter presents an outline of previous research in the fields of social media, feminist media, and digital social movements research, and a gap in research is delineated which underpins the specific aim and research questions used in this study. In the following chapter, central theoretical concepts are introduced and discussed as a possible partial response to this gap, and ontological and epistemological foundations are sketched out. Next, methodological principles and ethical guidelines, research design, and choice of empirical cases are all addressed. To conclude the dissertation, chapter 5 discusses the results from the included sub-studies and relates them to the overarching research questions. Here, I reflect on theoretical concepts and methods, and conclude by suggesting analytical concepts for future critical social media research on feminist expressions and practices.

2 Research field: Social media, hashtag activism, and feminist resistance

The research context for this dissertation lies at the intersection between critical social media studies, feminist media studies, and social movement studies. Feminist social media research encompasses both the acknowledgement of digitally mediated opportunities for inclusive participation in discussing societal issues, and the recognition of negative effects of platform business models, automated processes like algorithms, and user and producer bias on those opportunities (Ott, 2018). To cover this duality, this dissertation recognizes that particular properties of media produce gendered experiences and opportunities for visibility, while accounting for the ways in which media users interact with and negotiate such terms. Feminist media scholars describe how contemporary cultures of visibility support neoliberally supported iterations of feminist cultural production (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007), while simultaneously enabling extensive negotiations and articulation of such iterations (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020).

Critical social media studies

Critical examinations of social media often stress three things; the business-driven engagement-based algorithmic sorting of content on platforms, how the particular parameters that guide algorithms are hidden to the public (black-boxed), and the collection of personal and behavioural data that platforms perform and use as basis for these automated systems and for social media advertising. I address the first two in this subsection. The third, although extremely important to critically scrutinize – especially how platforms can nudge and even influence people to perform particular acts and how this can be exploited (Zuboff, 2019) – is not addressed here since it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, this chapter presents an overview of the foundation for the dissertation's focus on what opportunities people have to act within the commercialized structure of social media.

Business logic, algorithms, and user agency

Commercial social media platforms need to generate profit, and thus prioritise content that creates engagement and retains audiences. Their services are offered to users free of charge, and are instead financed through ad sales. Given the popularity of platforms such as X, Instagram, and TikTok (active users are in the 100 million for each platform⁴), they can offer advertisers efficient ad opportunities through highly specified target audiences. As platforms track user data within and across platforms, even across offline spaces, ads can reach the right people at the right time (Albarran, 2013). For the built-in recommendation systems to know as much as possible about users, they need users to spend time on the platform. This means most commercial social media platforms nowadays provide personalised content to users on curated surfaces like Instagram's Explore page (Meta, 2024) and TikTok's for you-page (TikTok, 2026a). Specific pieces of content, paid or unpaid, is ranked through AI systems and scored on their potential engagement for particular audiences. Ranking is based on users' historical behaviour on the platform, the historical behaviour of accounts they follow, and accounts that follow them (Meta, 2023; TikTok, 2026b). Further parameters are included, but are unknown to the general public (Bucher, 2018). In this way, platforms have the power to grant more or less visibility to particular pieces of content in their infrastructure. Their AI systems sort through and rank according to their opaque business goals and parameters, and users continuously attempt to grasp how algorithms work and what makes a message reach particular audiences (Bucher, 2016, 2018; Ruckenstein, 2023).

⁴ Up-to-date, official numbers of worldwide active users are difficult to find for the platforms. X released a number for February 2024 that estimated *daily active users* to 174 million, quoted by NBC News (Ingram, 2024). Instagram reached 3 billion *monthly active users* worldwide in September 2025, according to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, CNBC reports (Vanian, 2025). TikTok has an estimated 1.6 billion global *users* according to business intelligence platform Statista, although they do not specify how many are active on a daily or monthly basis (Dixon, 2025).

However, while technical features of platforms shape what can be said and done there, users can utilise and expand on such features in creative ways (Gillespie 2018). Importantly, what users do on social platforms – produce and publish content, mobilise hashtags and links, spend time looking at a piece of content, comment, like, repost, save, click, connect – feeds back into automated systems of sorting and ranking. In this way, user engagement is both shaped by and feeds into platform infrastructures, producing particular platform logics that in turn shape online cultural production (Nieborg, D. B., Duffy, B. E., & Poell, T. 2020). Additionally, social media users are often aware that platforms use automated ranking systems (algorithms) to order and distribute content, and attempt to understand them and act with them in different ways (Bucher 2018, Ruckenstein 2023). For instance, users might try to increase the visibility of their content by mobilizing hashtags (Proferes & Summers, 2019), or by re-posting content from other users in order to increase its popularity (Freelon et al., 2016). Indisputably, users who wish to use social media to mobilize against injustice engage with, and adjust to, commercialized platform logics when they produce and disseminate their messages. In this way, the affordances of platform features such as hashtags, sounds, or links provide opportunities for users (Gibson 1986) to intervene into the engagement-based algorithmic sorting. They enable users to form publics by creating material affinities – links and feeds – between bits of content (Schöps, J. D., Schwarz, S., & Rojkowski, V. 2023).

In these ways, platform infrastructures amplify some messages and downplay others in line with business logics. As polarizing, sensationalist, and harmful content often provokes more engagement, AI systems promote misogynistic content and hate speech which disproportionately affects women and girls (Jane, 2017b). At the same time, these AI systems are continuously entangled with the acts of social media users, who produce, react, consume, engage, and build networks, acts that feed back into the automated systems in real-time. In this way, users and technical features produce social media content ordering and dissemination simultaneously and co-constitutively through so-called feedback loops (Bucher, n.d.; Noble, 2018). For this reason, explorations of social media user practices are crucial in order

to understand how users can, might, or are permitted to, act with technology and what effects that has for feminist agency.

Feminist social media studies

Feminist perspectives on media technology and cultural production stress how social media simultaneously produce gendering effects and opportunities for feminists to build community, disseminate knowledge, and mobilise action. When social media began to rely on engagement-based personalisation algorithms in the 2010s⁵, these processes became a new type of gatekeepers that amplify affectively engaging content. Paired with an overall turn towards popularised misogyny, social media are spaces where hate and verbal violence is widespread (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Jane, 2017b).

In a parallel development, a neoliberal form of feminism that highlights female empowerment and responsibility has had a big cultural moment (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill & Orgad, 2015). At the same time, commercial social media platforms host a multitude of feminist iterations and intra-feminist articulation that emerge on the popular cultural radar from time to time (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). These expressions and publics further produce other important effects such as community-building, solidarity, and support for individuals and groups of women and others (Mendes et al., 2019). Feminist expressions on social media can be interpreted as a Harawayesque cyborg feminism, one that builds on coalition and affinity rather than essentialist identity, and that blurs boundaries between human and machine (Haraway, 1991). When individual experiences of sexism are interlinked with and through features such as hashtags or trending sounds, they form collective stories based on affinities where all individual parts legitimise each other (Mitra-Kahn, 2012; Serisier,

⁵ Facebook started introducing its EdgeRank algorithm for newsfeed in 2009. For the platforms examined in this dissertation, Instagram shifted to algorithmic feeds in 2016, Twitter (now X) in 2016, and TikTok had algorithmic sorting from time of global launch in 2018.

2019). In the sections below, I elaborate on this dual role of social media in relation to digital feminist practices.

Engagement-based logic, amplified sexism, and false promises

Historically, scholarly feminist perspectives on technology have highlighted the opportunities that digital media provided. When the internet started becoming 'social', when ordinary people could first self-publish online and communicate through chat rooms in the 1990's, these digital spaces allowed for anonymity and playful constructions of identity. Cyberfeminist scholars argued that these opportunities were 'gender-less' – as these spaces often made use of avatars and nicknames, the gendered body was not on display (Nakamura, 2002; Wajcman, 2004). Since then, the social internet has radically changed, and more critical and materially accentuating perspectives on cyber- and technofeminism have emerged (Schoettler, 2023; Wajcman, 2004; Wyatt, 2008). Nowadays, commercial social media often prompt users to display their full name, verify their identity, and connect various social accounts throughout the vast landscape of digital services.

Simultaneously, the culture of expression on platforms has changed as internet connections have become faster and devices more advanced. From being text- and illustration-based, contemporary social media content mainly features images and video where users are highly visible with face and voice. Instantaneously, social platforms now play host to massive amounts of misogynistic hate, trolling attacks, and doxing – harmful acts that unevenly affects women and girls (Jane 2017). Additionally, the culture around the business and development of social media arguably build on the myth of a male genius and excentric leader. Although these leaders (often) claim to take responsibility over harmful effects of their product, reports from researchers and whistleblowers show that profit margins are chosen over corporate social responsibility. Technofeminists stress that gender and technology are mutually shaping, and that their relationship is fluid and situated (Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Wajcman, 2009; Wyatt, 2008). Contexts in which technology is produced are gendered in

complex ways, and these power relations are ingrained in the technology itself, producing gendering effects (see, for instance, Jane, 2017b; Noble, 2018; Noble & Tynes, 2016).

Although technology is often talked about as neutral, values are embedded in technological processes. When it comes to social media, these values affect algorithms that sort through, rank, and distribute (or not) content to users, and shape exchanges that take place in these spaces (Eubanks, 2017; Gillespie, 2018; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; O'Neil, 2016; Tynes et al., 2016; Wajcman, 2009). Feminist media researchers stress how this reinforces gendered power relations through, for instance, amplification of sexist stereotypes and misogynistic content on recommendation surfaces (like TikTok's algorithmically curated for you-page), or users' content feeds on social media (like the personal news feed on Instagram which contains recommended content) (Kay, 2020; Nakamura, 2002; Noble, 2018). Sarah Banet-Weiser, Rosalind Gill, and Catherine Rottenberg (2020) suggest that while there are multiple contesting representations of feminism on social media, platforms and the contemporary media landscape in general support short and snappy, individualised versions of feminist messages with neoliberal connotations. Their concepts for this version of feminism – “popular feminism”, “postfeminism”, and “neoliberal feminism”⁶ respectively – share the core characteristic of being hypermediated, individualised, and apolitical (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Solutions presented are based on the individual behaviours of women, such as empowerment, “speaking out” about injustice, and “self-care” consumption (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007; Kay, 2020; Mitra-Kahn, 2012). At the same time, the perspective that postfeminism functions as a dominant media culture has been problematized recently. Several feminist media scholars suggest a more complex and continuous interplay between different iterations of feminism in the mediated public sphere (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Keller & Ryan, 2018). Individualised and apolitical versions of feminism are negotiated and contested online and people and

⁶ These concepts are further elaborated in the next subsection.

organisations use the public attention of feminism's cultural 'moment' to call for systematic political change.

Many media researchers suggest that the quantitative engagement-based logic of commercialized social media platforms brings about particular cultural expressions and an overall culture of visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018). This dominant culture shapes available opportunities for articulations of feminism, and arguably favours polarized, and often-times harmful, and sexist content. Automated processes and their feedback-loops that encompass what users click on or spend time looking at, further amplify culturally hegemonic expressions. Feminist media researcher Safiya Umoja Noble's (2018) examination of Google search results for black women show that even though algorithmically sorted search results are individually tailored to users, dominant sexist narratives still prevail on most result pages. Social media algorithms are not different, and although the companies behind them take some social responsibility, they often act after the fact to balance such skewed results. Consequently, the quantitative and engagement-based algorithms on social media might fail to give people access to a politically meaningful voice, but rather make false promises while effectively downplaying any such narratives (Kay, 2020). Overall, social media and their algorithmic amplification processes impact the political and gendered existence of feminists, making it crucial for critical research to shed light on what that existence can look like.

Popular feminism, cyborg affinities, and recognition

Contemporary digital feminism is, in this way, described by some feminist media researchers as more individualised and less apt to call for structural change when expressed on social media. Taking shape within a postfeminist sensibility – a complex set of attitudes based on the interplay of neoliberal individualization, commodification of simple feminist ideas, and the sexualization of women's bodies in the name of empowerment – such popularised feminist expressions are described as lacking political force (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Bouvier, 2020; Gill, 2007). Banet-Weiser (2018) suggests that social media platforms invite versions of feminism that are based on individual

empowerment rather than a redistribution of power. A broad range of actors are invited into debates around sexism, which also entices popularised narratives of misogyny and hate within the same infrastructures (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

Additionally, popularised versions of feminism on social media intersect with elements of personal branding that flow through digital platforms. Some scholars claim that the logics of social media platforms risks locking political subjects into a loop of speaking out about speaking out, unable to formulate consistent political demands (Mitra-Kahn, 2012; Phipps, 2016; Serisier, 2019). In the same vein, feminist hashtags and other viral feminist moments are often criticised for oversimplifying structural political issues, turning them into individual problems that are solved by “cancelling” an individual that has committed acts such as racist comments or sexual harassment (Bouvier, 2020; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). However, as an effect of this heterogenous landscape of feminist expressions, popular feminism is inseparably entangled with other iterations that critique it, for instance intersectional feminism, black feminism, and Marxist feminism (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). As recent media scholars have argued, although articulation against popularised narratives of post feminism have been and continue to be important, digital feminism cannot be reduced to only that (Keller & Ryan, 2018).

Importantly, many feminist media scholars argue that social media spaces are fitting for feminist community-building and networking, negotiations of collective feminist identities, and for framing work (Jha, 2018; Mendes et al., 2019). While the mediality of social media might invite commercialized and individualised versions of feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018), and social movement action in general (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b), the networked structure and collaborative affordances of platforms also support intra-feminist negotiations. Digital feminism can, in this way, be conceptualized as a cyborgian feminism built on affinity rather than essentialised collective identity. In the 1990’s, Haraway (1991) famously applied the figure of the cyborg as a metaphor for a new version of feminism that was entangled with (digital) technology and did away with boundaries between human and machine. Haraway’s cyborg uses intimate

connections, affinity, partiality and social-historical contingency – rather than essential identity – as grounds for political demands. In line with this digitally entangled feminist figure, contemporary social media researchers suggest that feminists use social media’s networked structures of links and tags to align their own partial understanding with others’, producing networked collective stories (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017; R. Clark, 2016; Mitra-Kahn, 2012; Serisier, 2019).

The multiplicity of social media discourses, practices, and experiences that are in some way feminist calls for analyses of the complexity of social media feminism as a phenomenon. Such analyses can amplify empirical examples of how feminists work with, against, and around popularised neoliberal iterations of feminism that individualises responsibility for solving gendered inequity. Here, feminist expressions on social media are seen as entangled practices based on affinity, that emerge with platform features and infrastructures and merge heterogenous messages together into collective stories wherein each partial story becomes legitimised through its affinity with other similar experiences. Although these stories are heterogenous and use mixed frameworks, the collective witnessing builds alliances and can help women, girls, and others that are susceptible to sexist hate (Mendes et al., 2019). It has the potential to be a cyborg feminism that can help build hopeful futures.

Digital social movement studies

The field of social movement studies is interdisciplinary and presents many theoretical routes to examining digital social movements and political action. Empirically, such research explores movement formation, intra-movement processes, or movement effects and outcomes. The concepts of *framing* and *frame alignment*, *connective action networks* and *personalised action frames* from the field of social movement studies are employed here to study intra-movement processes: how problems and solutions are articulated within the loose collective of digital feminism, and how feminists act with technology to produce such expressions. These concepts shed light on the meaning-

making processes that emerge when feminism encounters social media features and technical infrastructures.

Framing, connective action, and personalisation

Framing in movements refers to collective processes of meaning-making that produce particular problems and solutions, goals, strategies, and feelings of belonging and motivation (D. Snow et al., 2014). While the concept of frames and framing is used in several research contexts, not least in media theory, movement researchers use the term *collective action frames* to describe how social movements are mobilized through the identifications of problems as solvable and people as potential actors for change (Christiansen, 2024). Framing processes in movements include diagnostic framing, where problems are identified and attributed, and prognostic framing, articulations of proposed solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Movement scholars David Snow, Robert Benford and colleagues (1986) famously extend the use of Erving Goffman's social psychological concept of frame analysis⁷ to processes of negotiation of meaning and identity within social movements. They present the concept of *frame alignment*, processes of meaning-negotiation that are required for movement participation and adaptation of a collective identity. Frames can, according to the authors, be aligned in four distinct ways; *frame bridging*, *frame amplification*, *frame extension*, and *frame transformation*. All of these imply the main point the authors make, which is that social activists and movement organisations continuously perform interpretative work and discursively negotiate problems and solutions. This social constructivist way of regarding movement motivations then departed from classical theories of social movements, such as resource mobilisation and political process theories that emphasised rational choice.

⁷ Goffman's book *Frame Analysis* from 1974 describes frames as mental schema through which individuals interpret the world around them, a filter that produces particular meaning for particular individuals, and that is constituted by contextual, cultural, and experiential understandings (Christiansen, 2024; Jameson, 1976).

Contemporary digital activism is often said to be an example of how people in late modern times come together in large-scale, fluid networks, rather than belong to tight and discrete collective entities (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; Castells, 2012). This change in community- and movement formation is explained by social theorists as an effect of both spatial change (for instance, ways of travel) and technological development (for example, communication technology as diminisher of space) (A. Clark, 2007). These networked social orders are constituted by weak ties, relations that tie large numbers of people together in networks but where individuals do not share much time and frequent interactions (Granovetter, 1983). In this way, they enable relations and circulate messages far beyond any one person's immediate social network, and they are easy to opt in and out of. When discourse emerges on social platforms, the underlying technology enables people to connect and form ties around expressed emotions, thoughts and ideas, which creates a sense of belonging (Gillespie, 2018; Papacharissi, 2014; Tufekci, 2017).

For activism, this means that temporary networked publics can emerge and quickly mobilise, share information, and act both offline and online (Castells, 2012). Some social movement researchers suggest that movements that takes shape on social media follow a particular and distinct logic when it comes to processes of framing (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; D. Snow et al., 2014). Movement scholars W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012) describe political movements that emerge on social media as *connective action networks* built around *personalised action frames*. They argue that two elements are especially important in such connective action formations; political content that is inclusive of diverse personal motivations and in this way easy to opt into, and technology that supports the co-construction and co-distribution of those political themes in networks. Consequently, they suggest that as messages move fast among the weak ties of digital protest networks, these networks are unable to perform practices of collective framing work as seen in traditional movements (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; D. Snow et al., 2014). As they use inclusive, easily adaptable, and personalised frames – for instance, “we

are the 99 percent”⁸, or “me too” – such loose networks may struggle to pose coherent political demands (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012b; D. Snow et al., 2014; Tufekci, 2017). Consequently, diagnostic and prognostic framing, might prove difficult in these diverse movements (Benford & Snow, 2000).

However, as participants adapt personal action frames to their own personal experience, opting into a connective action network does require its own type of framing work. For instance, digital media researcher Zizi Papacharissi (2014) argues that processes of sense-making that participants in online movements and other networked publics perform, can be understood as *networked framing*: practices of emergent framing work where negotiations take place within, and with, digital technology. Since social media platforms invite particular expressions and stories, they delimit opportunities and shape the outer borders of framing work and emergent political discourse in these networks (Gillespie, 2018; Papacharissi, 2014). In this dissertation, I understand framing work on social media as the articulatory practices that produce political issues, solutions, and demands in particular ways. These practices emerge from entangled user intentions and understandings, technical features, and vernacular cultures (boyd, 2015; Bucher, n.d.) – and in this way are performed *with* technology. This perspective adds properties of technology as an entangled element in framing processes. While I agree with Bennett and Segerberg, and others, that framing in activist initiatives that emerge on digital platforms has some distinct features, the logic of diagnostic and prognostic framing, and frame alignment, observed in traditional collective action initiatives is analytically useful. As I use frame alignment as an analytical tool in sub-study II, it is applicable to discursive articulations and negotiations on Swedish X (then Twitter) as a way to understand how participants act with technical affordances to produce material-discursive effects and perform networked framing.

⁸ Used by the Occupy movement.

Discursive-material-affective digital resistance

Movement scholars have pointed out that messages that emerge with social platforms often rely on adaptability to individual circumstances, meaning many can relate to them. They thus enable individual expressions to form connected collective stories, although risks might be that movements lack formalised political demands for change (Serisier, 2019; D. Snow et al., 2014). Platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok thus provide opportunities for political engagement based on networked personal experience, while they lack the infrastructure for facilitating traditional social movement organisations. Platformed resistance can be understood as a discursive resistance, where counter-hegemonic discourse is produced and circulated through media ecosystems.

The production and circulation of counterhegemonic discourse results from the persistent work of subordinate groups that carve out space within digital infrastructures for recognition of their identities, needs, and interests (Fraser, 2005; Lee & Lee, 2023; Martinez, 2022; Skinner, 2022). Digital movement researchers continually debate and examine potential effects of social media resistance. Many point to the production of feelings of solidarity and community that strengthen group ties and can inspire other types of organized political action (Mendes et al., 2019; Serisier, 2019; Stewart & Schultze, 2019; Tufekci, 2017). As one of many modes and expressions of feminist action that unfold simultaneously across media ecologies and offline spaces, the discursive-material-affective activism on platforms such as those under examination in this dissertation can carve out space for the formation of counterpublics and counterdiscourse. These counter-hegemonic practices can continuously challenge dominant narratives with sexist or racist undertones that circulate in broader mediated culture (Canella, 2017; R. Clark, 2016; Lee & Lee, 2023).

The landscape of platformed feminism is heterogenous and feminist expressions are often iteratively developed as they are continuously recirculated and negotiated (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Hashtags are a feature commonly used for political action, which can assemble personal experiences so that counternarratives are produced and

circulated, and affectively⁹ mobilise these narratives so that participants and audiences are invited into shared affective states and sentiments (Kuo, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2023; Papacharissi, 2014). The hashtag and other connective and collaborative features can afford a mobilisation and circulation of emotional states and expressions which strengthens bonds across social platform infrastructures and pulls together users into affective networked publics through aligned sentiment (Papacharissi, 2014).

Throughout the dissertation's four sub-studies of feminist articulations on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, I apply concepts from studies of digital protest that capture the discursive-material-affective dimensions of platformed protest practices. Below, I introduce the concepts of *soft resistance* and *hashtag hijacking* which I then develop in the sub-studies and the results chapter below. Further, I outline how media and movement scholars understand humour as an affective tactic in feminist articulation, which is addressed in sub-studies III and IV.

Soft resistance

Soft resistance¹⁰ is used in movement and social action research to describe resistance practices that either are non-confrontative, subtle, or completely and deliberately hidden from the view of powerful actors.

⁹ I recognise the important theoretical discussion around distinctions and similarities between the concepts of affect and emotion that transverses various fields within and outside of feminist theory. In the section on humour below, I define the theoretical conceptualisations of affect that I use here, and place them in immediate dialogue with social media research. Further theoretical elaborations in relation to affect are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁰ In addition to the described applications, "feminist soft resistance" is used by artist and PhD Minna Pöllänen in her art exhibitions/research output 'Rehearsal Space' and 'Shield' in 2017. Her research explores the relationship between art and feminist activism and draws from participatory art, whilst questioning the rules of participation that are often laid out in these practices (Pöllänen 2017). Her interpretation of 'soft' has to do with material properties of spaces and objects, while my use has to do with levels of resistance and how resistance is spelled out in an activist context.

It is used only by a few disparate researchers that rarely reference one another, and each researcher relates it to a particular context as something that emerges there and then. However, the concept shares some characteristics with a concept from resistance studies, *everyday resistance*. Both are used to describe acts where individuals carve out space to act and resist power *within* institutions and structures (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2009). I use soft rather than everyday resistance, as soft resistance implies that the initiator aims and attempts to do resistance but utilise the structures they wish to circumvent to their own advantage. Everyday resistance, however, is also inclusive of acts that might not be meant as resistance, and can even be hidden for the actors themselves.

Soft resistance has for instance been applied to acts of defiance within family units in Iran (Akbar et al., 2023), and life strategies in everyday lives of migrants in Nairobi (Matsuda, 1992). My use in of it in sub-study I is inspired by computer scientist Richard Wong's (2021) descriptions of ingenious acts of software developers that attempt to go under the radar to produce digital products that do good, and are employed because they might otherwise be shut down by higher-level executives. Wong's interviewed developers follow corporate logic to a certain point, but start resisting when expectations of them contributes to products that they deem to be harmful to target groups and communities. Similarly, Nafus and Sherman (2014) use the term to describe the Quantified Self movement ("self-knowledge through numbers"), suggesting soft resistance emerges when QS activists alternate between the roles of activist, producer, and data miner and thus only partly, but still meaningfully, escape the structures they wish to protest.

A form of digital feminist resistance that juxtaposes soft resistance can be said to be digilante resistance. A wordplay on vigilantism which is defined as extrajudicial, digilantism is applied to various practices where activists try to use digital savvy to achieve justice online (Jane, 2017a). Digital activists apply coding skills and data mining knowledge to circumvent and break digital features, rules, and regulations that limit what can be said and done online. In relation to feminism, examples of digilante practices can be "hacktivism" (unauthorized

access to systems based on a political agenda), or content sharing practices that might constitute defamation, such as publication and dissemination of accusations that contain personal information about the perpetrator (Jane, 2017a). In relation to feminist digilante responses to sexist structures, I suggest the use of feminist soft resistance to describe digital practices that mobilise platform features, rather than circumventing them, to articulate, negotiate, and circulate feminist goals. In this way, soft resistance subtly utilises, extends, and overflows platform constraints rather than reworking or breaking them. Rather than building new solutions, soft resistance practices constitute adaptable and subtle ways to mobilise features for activism, circulating feminist articulations through platform-native memetic expressions such as tagging, embedding it into users' everyday encounters with content feeds. Through this conceptualisation, hashtag hijacking and networked humour and laughter, which are explicated below and extended in the sub-studies and results chapter, can be said to constitute soft resistance practices online that subtly and shrewdly extends possibilities for the articulation and performance of resistance on commercial social platforms.

Hashtag hijacking

Hashtag hijacking refers to acts of resistance where a hashtag is used for other types of content than planned when launched (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). The clearest examples are when institutions or companies launch campaign hashtags and users overtake the hashtag feed with opposing content. Social media researchers Sarah Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles (2015) examined the Twitter (now X) hashtag #MyNYPD, an initiative by the New York Police Department in 2014 to get people to post positive content about interactions with the police. Protesters overtook the hashtag, filling it with interactions where the police acted badly (not rarely with racist connotations). Here, the authors suggested that Twitter was used to facilitate the creation of networked counterpublic narratives that directly opposed the initial intention of NYPD. Similarly, consumers may produce counternarratives with marketing hashtags to resist or nuance the need to buy products (Truong et al., 2022). Of course, hashtag hijacking can

be done the other way around. As companies and organisations see hashtags trend or go viral, they can use them to produce counternarratives that fit them better, as can of course any interest organisation, group, or individual (Zelenkauskaitė & English, 2025). In the same vein, political debaters may try and overtake tags from political opponents to get their message across.

Affective publics and networked feminist laughter

The understanding of affect as something that pulls people into networked publics is underpinned by politicised feminist engagement with affect theory and their critical stance toward the affective turn. This is represented here by feminist and queer theory thinkers Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Clare Hemmings, and social media researchers' applications of their concepts. Understanding and empirically studying affect in the context of digital media requires attention to how affect, as an orientation toward (Ahmed, 2004) or attachment to (Berlant, 2011) emotionally laden objects, becomes entangled with media technology. For instance, media researchers have paid attention to how media circulate emotionally loaded promises around objects. This is said to invite affective attachment (Anderson, 2023), and structure political affects, rendering people both proximate to and detached from objects that promise a good life (Azhar & Boler, 2023).

As social media theorist Zizi Papacharissi (2014) argues, networked structures of digital platforms invite collaborative storytelling through sentimental alignment. These structures continuously circulate feelings and affective states that can stick to bodies and objects (Schmitz & Ahmed, 2014). Further building on Clare Hemmings' notion of affective solidarity (2012), shared affective states that entangle with media infrastructures enable an activism built on and around emergent feelings of solidarity.

As affective orientations play an important part in the attention economy of digital media, where engagement is used for ranking and monetisation (Papacharissi, 2014; Sundén & Paasonen, 2019, 2021), they can also work to circulate platformed feminist articulations

throughout digital infrastructures. While shared affective states can produce feelings of solidarity, ruptures and breeches with objects that promise happiness also constitute hopeful sites for feminist engagement (Berlant, 2011). For instance, as pointed out by social media and resistance researchers, laughter can constitute a mechanism that pulls networked and affective publics together by pointing out the absurdity involved in heterosexist assumptions around gender roles (Griffith et al., 2025; Huang & Lu, 2026; Papacharissi, 2014; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015; Sundén & Paasonen, 2019). Laughter can release anger and frustration, replenish and circulate feminist, anti-racist, and queer critique of stereotypical promises of happiness, carve out space for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse, and constitute tangible political agency for social media users (Lee & Lee, 2023; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015).

Research gap and contribution

Research on digital feminist activism on social platforms is an immense and fast-growing field. This dissertation contributes by examining how users on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok act with and through their particular features – such as hashtags, user mentions, soundbites, visual effects, and templates – to produce and circulate feminist articulations of problems and goals. It particularly analyses how affordances of features are actualised by users and how these actualisations co-constitute platform-specific and nationally localised feminist discourse. Much research has examined activism on social media as one distinct form of social action that relies on networked structures and weak ties, leading to leaderless movements that are easy to opt into with easily personalised messages (W. L. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012a; Tufekci, 2017). The included sub-studies are attempts to add to and problematise such universalising accounts by picking apart platform-specific features and infrastructures and their entanglement with users and discourse in particular articulations of feminism. While hashtag activism research often scrutinises viral movements with obvious social and cultural impact which has led to important insight into how the structures of social media impacts

possibilities to mobilise in the digitalised public sphere, scholars now call for analyses of platform-native and routine activist interventions that are embedded in everyday platformed interaction (see, for instance, X. Zhao & Abidin, 2023). These investigations can shed light on platformed opportunities for sustained visibility and circulation for counter-discursive narratives that contributes to consciousness-raising over time and to expanded audiences. Here, the included sub-studies scrutinise routine everyday practices within and around viral and nonviral feminist hashtag campaigns. In response to feminist media research that has demonstrated how platform mediality risks inviting popularised feminist iterations that rely on marketable personal empowerment (for a summary, see Banet-Weiser et al., 2020), they study if and how this is actualised and countered through users' encounters with particular platform-specific features.

As online activism is complexly intertwined with the particular features of platforms and what they afford, hashtag activism research continuously attempts to find avenues for including the technical and infrastructural layers of tags in such analyses (Omena et al., 2020; Venturini et al., 2018). This dissertation contributes by analysing how users and features are entangled in the production and circulation of feminist articulations within and through platform infrastructures. By examining exactly how, for instance, a hashtag assembles individual posts into collective stories by materially placing them side by side in grids, results provide insights into the potential of platform-specific features to afford articulations of feminism. It further describes how these articulations rely on users' continuous interpretation and actualisation of affordances of features, nuancing social movement research that suggests that technical constitutions of platforms shape activist practices without accounting for exactly how this unfolds.

As a way to answer these scholarly calls for attention to everyday and routine practices through specific feature-user interaction, the theoretical framework combines the concepts entanglement, mediality, and affordance. In this way, the framework underscores how discursive and material elements of features and expressions entangle in feminist articulations, suggesting that neither technology nor discourse produced through technology can be analysed by themselves. Instead,

viewing online feminist articulations as digitally entangled shows how they are co-constituted by features and user action, enabling analyses to account for how these constituent elements come together to circulate feminist goals. By mobilising the affordance concept to perform an agential cut (Barad, 2003), the dissertation unpacks how affordances of features, actualised in practices, enable particular feminist articulations to emerge. By scrutinizing the mediality of platforms and employing critical discourse analysis as its main method, the dissertation pays analytical attention to platformed cultural production and how features carry ideological logics of engagement and visibility that underpin platform infrastructures. This is further explicated in the following chapters.

3 Theoretical framework: Digitally entangled feminism

This dissertation posits that feminist articulations emerge on social media from the complex and iterative interplay between technical features and user practices. Building on feminist science and technology studies, media and communication theory, and sociological perspectives on technology, it suggests an interdisciplinary approach to examining such articulations. This approach draws from Karen Barad's (2003, 2007) agential realism, the development of the mediation concept into mediality within the field of media and communication research, and sociological intervention into the interdisciplinary uses of the affordance concept. Digital platforms are defined here as sites where technical features and user action continuously entangle, from which platform-native and localised material-discursive articulations of feminism emerge. Attempting to analytically disentangle these entanglements by breaking up features into user-actualised affordances allows for hopeful accounts of how to do resistance in increasingly commercialised and platformed publics.

Suggesting the concept of digitally entangled feminism as a way to pair the concepts entanglement and affordance through mediality enables empirical analyses of digital feminist content to include embedded relations between users, localised political expression, and technical features. Feminist expressions, negotiations, and circulation practices on social platforms are seen as relational realisations of affordances mobilised for activist purposes, rather than results of technical feature design. In this way, digitally entangled feminism can work as a mediator between technological determinism – the idea that technology has effects on our lives (Clegg & Bailey, 2008) – and theory on the social construction of technology – where the function of technical artefacts is seen as constructed socially rather than as essential properties of these artefacts (Bijker, 2008). While the theoretical framework sketched out here leans towards the social shaping of technology through user practices, viewing online feminist articulations as digitally entangled also allows analyses to identify how the material elements of technical features co-constitute these articulations.

Entanglements of feminist online practices

I use the concept of *entanglement* to describe how feminist articulations on social media emerge through interwoven and inseparable elements. There are many layers to such entanglements, as they include development processes behind platforms, the content production and networking action they host, the algorithmic dissemination they perform, the consumption practices they enable and track, and cultural beliefs that shape understandings of social media technology. The theoretical framework draws upon Barad's (2007) theory of agential realism, which proposes how the world is in a continuous state of becoming, where discursive and material elements come together in temporary and iterative constellations. In this way, there are no separate entities before they enter these constellations, but entities emerge collaboratively – through *intra-action* within entanglements. Barad (2007, p. ix) explains entanglement in this way in the preface to their book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*:

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all [...], but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future.

Consequently, expressions on social media are seen here as constituted by entangled users, features, discourse, code, cables, and mobile phones, among other parts, that are in a state of becoming with and through one another. In this way, agency is not something that users possess, neither is it a property of technology. Rather, it is distributed across human and nonhuman, material and discursive entities within this entanglement.

While the concept of entanglement invites analytical attention to be paid to the full sociotechnical cluster of human and nonhuman

relations that constitute feminist social media expressions, including coding and developmental processes of software as well as hardware production, this dissertation investigates articulations of feminism as epistemic practices. Consequently, analysis takes place in the communicative dimension and examines the mediality of social media in relation to these articulations, that is how feminist expressions are shaped by the co-constitutive processes where users and features interact. Accordingly, I do not study the infrastructural or algorithmic layers of platforms, which could be done by scrutinizing code or interviewing developers, since I view that as a different epistemological layer of the same entanglement that is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Mediality as entanglement

In media theory, the concept of *mediation* is central, but some recent media theories suggest *mediality* as a complementary or alternative concept that captures how media events are constituted by various moving parts in flux. In the 1960's, media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964, p. 7) coined the well-known phrase “the medium is the message”, explaining mediation as the process by which media produce culture and social consequences, as they introduce a “change of scale and pace” to the social world that organizes it in particular ways. In this way, mediation suggests a priori existence of an outside reality, which is then mediated. By contrast, the concept of mediality takes inspiration from philosophies of flat ontology – where human and nonhuman elements are seen as actants entangled in assemblages within which agency is distributed – to comprehend media events as emergent and constituted by heterogenous moving parts (Bennke & Pinchevski, 2022).

Mediality captures how properties of media co-constitute a reality in flux, whereas mediation suggests the distinct facilitation of an outside reality into the social world.¹¹ This re-interpretation and extension of

¹¹ I recognize that both mediation and mediality have much more complex roots and theoretical discussions surrounding them than is discussed here. For instance, the roots of

the mediation concept into a non-linear and non-causal mediality justifies my investigation of the interplay between platform features and user action. I recognise that other entangled entities co-constitute feminist expressions and practices, such as software development processes, developer and design intentions, and business processes, as well as politics and policy on data collection, moderation, and privacy. However, to fulfil the aim, I study the *mediality* of social media, predominantly constituted by the *entanglement* of technical features and user agency that come together in *practices* from where articulations emerge. This means I examine the cultural dimensions of features through affordances¹² – how users actualise technical features in practice – and how these elements co-shape feminist articulations.

Examining some entangled elements over others permits providing insights on feminist user agency in relation to platform opportunities. There is a central theoretical discussion in the field of social media studies of what user agency looks like in the face of platform power (Sun & Suthers, 2023). Some social media scholars theorize the shaping power of digital network technology, arguing that technology offers limited opportunities for action and interaction that bring about particular socialities (J. van Dijck & Poell, 2013). This perspective can be linked to mediation, how media technology organizes the social world in particular ways. Other perspectives theorize user agency, meaning how digital media users interact with features and extend and reshape what can be said and done online (Bucher, 2018; Livingstone, 2019). Here, media technology and the ways in which it is used are treated as complexly entangled. In this sense, user agency and the shaping power of media technology are impossible to disentangle, rather they come together in *emergent practices*. As a way to analytically approach how they come together, I use the affordance concept, as it illustrates how users are relationally connected to the technical features that they mobilise.

the mediation concept lie in Marxist theory. However, this short distinction is sufficient in terms of explaining how mediality is used in this dissertation.

¹² The affordance concept is further elaborated in coming sections.

Affordances as relational properties of platform features

The *affordance* concept has been widely employed in social media research, research on human-computer interaction, design studies, and other fields. It was originally developed by ecological psychologist James Gibson in relation to visual perception. Gibson (1979) suggests that properties of objects in the environment, in other species, and in artefacts afford particular possibilities for action to animals (human and non-human). These possibilities are, he argues, perceived directly and without requiring cognitive processing. At the same time, his conceptualisation relies on relationality, as he describes how an affordance incorporates both “reciprocal” and “invariant” aspects simultaneously. Although objects in the natural environment are seen to have invariant properties, what they afford an animal to do is a reciprocal relation (Gibson, 1979; Wells, 2002). Affordances are thus conceptualised by Gibson and often in the fields of human-computer interaction, design studies, and social media research as properties of the environment that may or may not be activated in a particular encounter between an animal and an environmental artefact (Chong & Proctor, 2020).

As such, the affordance concept can be interpreted as ontologically positioned somewhere in between constructivism and realism. When applied to social studies of technology, it accounts for how material elements of technology enable and constrain potential human action by what they afford. Sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001) discusses the concept as a way for sociological studies of technologies to empirically ground analyses in a way that circumvents both techno-deterministic cause-and-effect conclusions, essentialising material properties, and overemphasising the interpretative potential of any technology. In this way, Hutchby (2001, p. 444) argues that:

...affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object. In this way, technologies can be understood as artefacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around, and through them.

In his reading of Gibson's concept, Hutchby emphasises that affordances are relational aspects of an artefact's functional operation. While social constructivist renderings of technology as socially constructed relies too heavily on interpretation, he argues, theories such as actor-network theory risks essentialising properties of material elements. He instead suggests that with affordances, elements of technology constrain the possible range of interpretative moves that can be made of, with, and through it, which does not mean humans are caused to react in particular ways. Hutchby's text is a call for sociological analyses of technology to include material elements as underpinning and framing, but not causing, human practices.

In line with this call, I pair the affordance concept with the principles of material-discursive entanglement from feminist STS interventions into social constructivism (Barad, 2003, 2007; Haraway, 1991) for my analyses. As these theories locate how matter and meaning inscribe continuously on one another, the affordance concept is useful as an analytical mechanism for empirically accounting for what material elements do while relationally contingent on meaning-making. Paired with entanglement, the realist stance that there is a material reality outside of what we can conceive of socially which underpins Hutchby's argument can be nuanced in the sense that what material elements of artefacts afford is always actualised in practice. As constituent elements in material-discursive entanglements, what material elements afford does not pre-exist their intra-action with other elements that act with and through them. Although the affordance concept does suggest that there are static properties to artefacts, they only become meaningful when entangled with other acting elements and they are unfinished in the sense that they are potentials actualised in particular ways when entangled (van Dijk, 2021; West, 2026). In the context of technical features of digital platforms, users perceive and actualise some of their affordances in practice by interpretation and inscription (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Y. Zhao et al., 2013). While the affordance concept in itself implies that there are material limits to what a feature can afford, using the entanglement concept clarifies that these material limits are enacted and potentially expanded in practice, and not intrinsic and essential properties of those features.

Importantly, materiality as it is used by Hutchby as well as in this dissertation is expanded from a strictly physical understanding to include properties of technology. Hutchby exemplifies this with the telephone producing closeness across physical distance. Here, the materiality of hashtags and other collaborative and interlinking features organises content and users across interface surfaces within digital platform infrastructures. For instance, a hashtag materially places content side-by-side in feed grids, while a create post-option can present audiovisual elements in meme templates through which they are assembled into particular posts.

Communicative affordances in social media research

In this sense, social media user action is shaped by what is afforded by features, and affordances of features are relationally co-constituted by users and their actions, understandings, and intentions. In practice, features become socially and culturally meaningful, and meanings that attach to them indicate what features are perceived to afford to users. In their chapter on platform affordances in the *Sage Handbook of Social Media*, media scholars Taina Bucher and Anne Helmond (2018) state that features in this way afford certain communicative and social actions. Users interpret the feature and perceive a particular “range of possible actions linked to these features of the platform, or its *affordances*” [italics in original] (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, p. 4).

Varieties of the concept of affordances used in different social media research contexts diverge in how much agency they grant users of technology, and how determining they deem technology to be of social action (Sun & Suthers, 2023). One of these concepts, *communicative affordances*, attends to how communication technology and society relate to one another by combining social constructivism with material enabling and constricting (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). This rendering of affordance aligns with Hutchby’s sociological intervention as well as with my pairing it with entanglement. The communicative affordances concept illustrates how user agency and the materiality of media are

intertwined (Bucher, 2018). Patterns and norms of cultural production that emerge from affordances are referred to in this vein of research as *platform vernaculars*. Such vernaculars are emergent and platform-specific dominant types of communication that are co-constituted by affordances and entangled with cultural, political, and historical contexts as well as specific user actions (Mendes et al., 2023).

In this dissertation, affordances are understood as relational, where user action mobilises particular affordances of features. Socially and culturally dominant patterns of afforded communication are seen as platform-native and iteratively produced as users inscribe on and expand features. This means user practices are contingent on material elements of features as well as the meanings ascribed to them. For instance, employing a hashtag has both discursive and technical meanings and effects, such as assembling content into streams and producing a discursive whole that legitimises each of their constituent parts. In sum, what technical features afford confines opportunities for communication on platforms, and underpins what can be said and how, but is always relational and realised in practice.

Ontology and epistemology: Distributed agency and situated knowledge

I take inspiration from the ontological and epistemological points of departure grounding feminist STS and posthumanism. These clusters of theories work to reintroduce matter into social theory in new ways that encompass the complexity and open-endedness of social systems (Hess & Sovacool, 2020). Posthumanism further aims to decentre the human in research, giving space to other species and matter. As social theory had long leaned towards emphasizing language, for instance under poststructuralism, these theories stress the role of bodies, affect, and non-human existence and agency in social phenomena (Braidotti, 2021). At the same time, they share with poststructuralism the view of the world as open-ended, where the performative action of people and other elements continuously alter social existence (M. Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In my examinations of expressions of feminism on social media, I examine discourse as well as technical features and their

material elements which co-constitute such material-discursive practices. Ontologically, this lands me somewhere in between discourse theory and new materialism, where I view social media discourse as digitally entangled. Digital features that materially move, sort, and shape discourse are not simply context to that discourse, which is in line with much discourse theory (see, for instance, Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2010), but rather co-constitute feminist practices as intra-acting elements.

At the same time, some of the theories within the spectrum of posthumanism, new materialism, and STS rely on a completely flat ontology – for instance actor-network theory – where human and non-human elements are seen as actants that can invite, halt, relocate, or in other ways affect one another in temporary constellations that produce agency and power (Latour, 1999). Feminist posthumanists such as Jane Bennett and Katherine Hayles similarly describe how phenomena are constituted by heterogenous networked assemblages of human and nonhuman elements, within which they enact power on and through one another, and agency extrudes from multiple sites within these assemblages (J. Bennett, 2010; Hayles, 1999). Using these ontological points of departure, I find it tricky to encompass the ways in which particular power relations work through these networked assemblages to stabilise and institutionalise structures.

Although I subscribe to the view that agency is distributed across various elements in networks (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012), as feminist dialogue with STS also emphasises, technology is embedded in gendered power relations and produce gendering effects while contextual material-discursive configurations can be both harmful and hopeful (Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Haraway, 1991; Wajcman, 2009; Wyatt, 2008). Further, feminist media researchers suggest contemporary media culture supports neoliberal renderings of feminism that rely on individual responsibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007). To encompass these points, I use the entanglement concept in conjunction with affordances and mediality, and employ critical discourse analysis as my main methodological tool. In this way, the dissertation adds to critical renderings of entanglement that adopt the view that entities do not pre-exist their intra-phenomenon intertwining

while still keeping an emphasis on how discourse structure social action through hegemonic discursive knots. These knots are seen as constituted by entangled discursive-material entities while power laden discourse shape how material properties are perceived (Carpentier, 2019), while material elements intervene into such entanglements by inviting, dislocating, or enabling discourse to emerge in practice.

To summarise, these ontological points of view enable the dissertation to study platformed feminist articulations as entanglements constituted by features, discourse, and user action (Kember & Zylinska, 2012). Technology and people that use it act through one another in complex ways. For instance, features like algorithms are technical in that they are constituted by coded instructions and perform actions like sorting and disseminating pieces of content into various users' feeds and recommendation surfaces – materially showing or not showing them. They are enacting quantitative engagement-based logics, so, simultaneously, these features act through the actions of users, as user-produced metrics such as liking, commenting, or re-posting constitute important algorithm parameters that determine where, how, when, and to whom content will be made visible. This enables a critical perspective on the shaping power of these quantitative engagement-based logics while simultaneously admitting the complex entanglements of human and non-human activity that constitute them. Social platforms can facilitate reach, feminist mobilisation, information-sharing, and resource collection, but they also amplify polarising and harmful sexist content, as well as commercialised versions of feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Jane, 2017b).

Common for posthuman and poststructuralist theories is that they centre the situation. Epistemologically, this means that they allow for the presence of the researcher and the tools by which the researcher conducts research. For instance, Barad (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012, p. 20) explains the ways in which any acting entity sees reality as constituted by an “agential cut” that cuts into the entanglements of a phenomenon. They suggest that when doing research, one has to take into account the entanglements that continue beyond the cut. In this

vein, epistemological practices are considered as entangled with the phenomena one aims to build knowledge about.

I subscribe to Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledge, where she suggests science and knowledge production processes are always embedded in the social structure of power relations, and are affected by from which social location and with what tools researchers see, or use their vision. She suggests that researchers have to identify the particular location from which their vision emerges to produce partial and accountable – situated – knowledge, rather than one that falsely promises generalisability and transcendence. In this way, researcher and researched are on the same ontological level, and knowledge production produces reality with researched phenomena in particular ways – in an onto-epistemology. Similarly, Barad (2003, 2007) suggests that ontology, epistemology, and ethics are all entangled with one another in the continuous production of reality, and calls this *ethico-onto-epistem-ology*. Their emphasis is on responsible practices of science, that take into account that it is impossible to separate oneself from one's entanglements with other elements in the world and look at it from an outside perspective (Geerts, 2016). In this way, epistemic practices are never only epistemic, but are entangled in the continuous becoming of the world.

I suggest that *digitally entangled feminism* accounts for the ways in which technical features and users act through each other on social media to co-produce feminist expressions. By using the affordance concept, it takes inspiration from Barad in that elements act through each other rather than act on each other (Robertson & Farrelly, 2018), while also accounting for the ways in which cultural understandings and potentialities of features intersect in practice. Further, I take inspiration from Haraway and Barad in terms of my vision and agential cuts, the ways in which I see the phenomenon under study, my position in the field, and my methodological tools. Consequently, I aim to produce partial and accountable accounts of social media and feminist articulations by analysing the particularities and feature-user entanglements of Swedish feminist articulation practices on specific platforms. I examine these feminist articulations as emergent,

resulting in contextual knowledge about feature-afforded opportunities for the articulation, negotiation, and circulation of feminist goals of social platforms. Further, by thoroughly explaining my theoretical framework and methodological tools, I clarify the particular “agential cut” that this research project performs. The results are considered partial, as there are multitudes of other onto-epistemological avenues that would assemble platformed feminist articulations differently.

4 Methodology and methods: Locating sociotechnical practices

In the included sub-studies, I examine digitally entangled feminist articulations with a mixed methods approach to identify the co-constitutive feature-user entanglements from which they emerge. Following my theoretical framework of entanglement, mediality, and affordance, user agency is treated as intertwined with platform infrastructures, as well as contextual and localised expressions of Swedish feminist discourse. This mirrors Barad's and other STS scholars' view of sociotechnical phenomena as continuous interactions between human actors, technical materials, and research instruments (Barad, 2007; Latour, 1999; van Geenen, 2020).

The overall method for this dissertation was qualitative and relied mainly on discourse analytical methods adapted to the multimodal and affordance-based entanglements under examination. Interviews were used to deepen these insights by adding comprehension of the human agency layer of the practices examined. Additionally, software-assisted social network analysis was applied to quantitatively map the discursive effects of co-articulated hashtags in posts. Across sub-studies, methods are used singularly or in combination. In chapter 5, results from the sub-studies are presented in an integrated manner to give a mixed-methods examination of digitally entangled hashtag feminism in Sweden.

Digital methods: Discourse, interviews and software-assistance

This dissertation located practices across communities, platforms, and hashtags through the concepts of entanglement and affordance, demonstrating how platform mediality facilitates particular feminist meaning-making practices. Designing the study, I took inspiration from boyd's (2015) notion of "networked ethnography", where content analysis is combined with interviews with content creators about their online practices. This enabled a collaborative interpretation of feminist social media practices. Through interviews as well as affordance and

discourse analysis, I examined what users (can) do with and through platform infrastructures by actualising particular affordances to articulate, negotiate, and circulate feminist discourse.

Digital expressions are continuously moving and altering as people produce, interact with, extend, and circulate content. Drawing boundaries around an object of study in digital research is consequently an iterative and flexible process that allows for the researcher to get to know the field from several angles (Pousti et al., 2021). This study's mixed methods approach produced a multi-layered representation of Swedish digitally entangled feminism across particular platforms. Boundaries around the object of study were iteratively altered during the project (Postill & Pink, 2012) to account for changes in API access as well as suggestions and insights from the sub-studies as the project was executed. This is further described below.

The two primary methodological tools applied in the sub-studies were critical discourse analysis with elements from affordance and multimodal analyses, and interviews focused on content, practices and imaginations of what features afford users to do, say, and achieve (Bucher, 2016; Ruckenstein, 2023). As a complement and method for triangulation, software-assisted social network analysis of hashtag co-articulations was used to approach the discursive ecosystem that is assembled through a hashtag. This was employed as an iterative step in analysing such co-articulations in terms of their discursive effects (Gelfgren, 2016; Lindgren, 2016). The three methodological tools are further described in the subsections below.

Affordance-based multimodal critical discourse analysis

The dissertation examines feminist articulations that use features such as hashtags, user mentions, shared sounds, and visual effects that afford content searchability and curation (boyd, 2010; Zappavigna, 2012). Content data was collected on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok through hashtag searches using either platform API or platform-native search-functions. Posts were analysed with attention to how text,

images, and videos, as well as collaborative Twitter, Instagram features such as hashtags and visual effects come together into feminist articulations. Posts were analytically treated as afforded by features, and features were interpreted as ideologically underpinned as they carry commercial logics of engagement-based ranking, anchoring this study in the critical discourse analysis tradition. In sub-study II, I analysed both tweet texts and metatextual features such as hashtags and user mentions. In sub-studies III and IV, I included multimodal elements in the analysis, such as photographic or illustrated still-images or video, textual overlays, and metatextual multimodal features such as soundbites and visual effects.

To incorporate the affordances of features into the discourse analysis, the dissertation applies an affordance-based multimodal discourse analysis. This method merges critical discourse analysis with multimodal analysis and affordance analysis, which is frequently done in fields such as sociology, education studies, and digital humanities (Bower, 2008; Machin, 2016; van Geenen, 2020). For instance, discourse analyst David Machin (2016) incorporates the distinct affordances of multimodal semiotic resources into critical discourse analysis, suggesting they each structure modes of communication in particular ways. Consequently, the version of discourse analysis used in this dissertation treats both semiotic resources and technical features as affording distinct material-discursive modes of communication. Affordance-based analysis is not performed here to achieve user-friendlier design by pointing to gaps between intended design and user needs, which is often the case with these types of analyses (Albrechtsen et al., 2001; Bower, 2008). Instead, features with multimodal and metatextual (interlinking, searchable) affordances are analysed as co-constitutive of feminist articulations. By picking apart articulations in constituent material-discursive units based around affordances, analyses in sub-studies II, III, and IV demonstrate how features can be mobilised in practice to produce counter-hegemonic discourse and circulate feminist goals.

By attending to affordances, this iteration of critical discourse analysis can demonstrate that not only written text but technical features and the multimodal expressions that emerge from them can be

ideologically laden, while they can also be redirected and subverted in practice. In this way, analyses in this dissertation examines platformed content as co-constituted by written text, images, videos, metatextual features, and their affordances. Rather than reading all these units as text, I attend to how they each bring particular affordances that enable certain multimodal articulations of feminism.

Triangulation through interviews and social network analysis

Interviews with activists and feminist communication professionals function as a way to triangulate the results from the discourse analysis, and vice versa. The interview guide was designed to invite both reflections around digital traces, affordances of features, and embodied experiences of doing feminist resistance on social media. Participants thus added depth to results from analyses of content, as they explained how they comprehended and mobilised platform features and infrastructures in practice. Additionally, social network analysis was used to triangulate results by visualising the emergent hashtag ecosystem around #MeToo. It graphically demonstrated how metatextual features afford meaning-making through affinity across a large dataset of tweets where multiple hashtags were co-articulated. These triangulations are further elaborated in the Methodological reflexivity and trustworthiness section below.

Taken together, the three methodological tools enabled the dissertation as a whole to proximate feminist practices of articulation, negotiation, and circulation on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, as digitally entangled. This approach traces how users, platform features, and nationally localised and platform-specific contexts facilitate particular feminist practices within commercialised spaces. In this way, the sub-studies could bring to the fore ways in which such entanglements present opportunities for persistent, everyday, feminist action that can articulate feminist goals and circulate them beyond expected audiences – forming community, recognition, and awareness.

Methodological reflexivity and trustworthiness

This dissertation is based on the feminist principle to produce partial, specific, and local knowledge. In order to produce “a better account of the world” (Haraway, 1988, p. 579), feminist scholars suggest that knowledge production needs to be situated in terms of who is doing research about whom and with which theoretical and methodological tools. This epistemological outlook rejects any claims of universality for all research regardless of method. Based on this rejection, this dissertation examines platform-native and geographically localised practices with a combination of methods that allows for an analytical disentanglement of those practices into discursive-material elements. In this way, my theoretical framework and methods are a constituent part of what it examines, as they delineate the phenomenon under study in a particular way.

Results point out how users articulate feminism with and through specific platform features in the context of hashtag initiatives chosen to represent a variety of users and practices. The combination of discourse analysis, interviews, and social network analysis enables a “thick” description (Luhmann, 2015) of the particular examples of feminist expressions that I have selected for this study. This specific and localised knowledge is one such account of the world that adds to the evolving field of feminist studies of social media and their opportunities for activism. It is situated in the tradition of feminist media studies and feminist STS as well as critical discourse analysis, which leads to results that simultaneously critique the ideological underpinnings and gendering effects of the technical constitution of platforms, and identify and amplify feminist opportunities for social change within such constraining infrastructures.

By accounting for how my theoretical framework constructs the research situation and phenomenon under study, and for how my methods examine platformed feminist practices as entanglements with emergent articulations, I strive for trustworthiness through credibility (Lim, 2025). These descriptions, complemented by the next chapter which discusses results in relation to contextual meanings around specific platforms, features, and local feminist discourses, also allow

for other researchers to assess whether my results are transferable to other research settings as externally generalizable (Maxwell, 2021). As my results point to what can be done with and through particular platform features in terms of circulation of feminist goals, I argue that they constitute illustrative examples of how commercial platforms can be made to afford opportunities for digital feminism and activism in general. In sum, I propose that the results are examples of trustworthy local and situated knowledge claims about particular circulation practices of feminism through hashtags and memes, in the Swedish language context and across three platforms, that highlight how platform users can actualise affordances for activism.

Quantitative (social network analysis) and qualitative (discourse analysis and interviews) methods are combined, but the study as whole is qualitative as it produces knowledge about practices in their context (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The dissertation attempts to examine the complexity of platformed expressions to be able to specify thorough and comprehensive insights into activists' relationship with social media. The results centre both the situation, and how the human actors involved are enabled and constrained as they act with and through technology (Lim, 2025). As the sub-studies highlight ordinary use of hashtags and other features, both in relation to highly visible tags and to those less visible, they attempt to perform interpretative work around hashtagging and collaborative feature-use that go beyond visibility metrics. By identifying how actors such as small-scale organisations and independent activists persistently mobilise features for framing work and circulation, the dissertation as a whole contributes to interpretative work on social media content where actions, content, and the technical constitution of platforms are all treated as parts of hashtag engagement (Omena et al., 2020).

The collection of both large- and small-scale social media and interview data enables triangulation of my results, which contributes to the credibility of qualitative results (Hine, 2017; Luhrmann, 2015; Patton, 2002). In combining large and small datasets of platform content, I could zoom in and out on multimodal discourse and the practices that constitute it, doing both distant- and close-readings (Lindgren, 2016; Moretti, 2000). Further, by discussing online practices with the people

who are actually performing them, results derived from online content could be triangulated (boyd, 2015; Postill & Pink, 2012). Especially, the interview study was used to verify results from sub-study II (performed first), and results from the interview study were then used as pre-conceived categories alongside inductively identified ones in the discourse analyses in sub-studies III and IV. This was done as a way to ensure credible results that would be deemed trustworthy by both the research community and the study participants (Lim, 2025). While social media researchers call for continuously evolving methodological tools to comprehend the complexities of platformed phenomena, interviews, discourse analysis, and social network analysis continue to be used and assessed as productive (Nieborg et al., 2020). By combining them, and adding analytical attention to affordances, I attempt to contribute methodologically to the field of social media studies, as I argue that this added layer highlights how users act iteratively with features rather than apply them. Treating them as sociotechnical, I add to strands of social media and hashtag research that demonstrate how the technicity of platforms can be accounted for in analyses without treating it as text (see, for instance, Omena et al., 2020).

When it comes to data collection, I used Twitter's API with researcher access (this type of access is no longer available), and Instagram's and TikTok's in-app search-functions through my personal user accounts. The latter produced curated results that were tailored to the particular user accounts used, as well as general content-search phrase match. My personal Instagram account has been in use since 2012, and has engaged with much feminist content throughout the years including publishing, whereas my TikTok account was started in 2024 and never published any content. No major differences in search experience were noted, pointing to a heavy reliance on content match and engagement metrics by the search functions. This data collection method further added to my familiarity with the analysed content, as it was collected within the platform context in full post form.

When requesting data through a platform API, as was done for sub-study II, data is removed from its graphical and communicative context. Using both methods allowed for my analyses across sub-

studies to zoom in and out, identifying tagging ecosystems in sub-study II, feed curation and interference practices in sub-study III, and how a memetic template can structure feminist articulations across posts and comments in sub-study IV. The research site was thus reflexively and iteratively developed as was the research design, which digital scholars argue is a necessity in research on platform content (Pousti et al., 2021). As platform constitution changes, so does opportunities for data collection (Nieborg et al., 2020; Omena et al., 2020), which forces a methodological reflexivity that has led me to particular data collection choices. In the next chapter, I discuss some of these choices and their consequences.

Research design and execution

This dissertation's research design allowed for two general types of data to be collected; social media content (text, images, video, hashtags, links, metadata), and interview data. Further, three methods for data analysis are employed; affordance-based multimodal critical discourse analysis, social network analysis, and thematic interview analysis. Over the course of the study, conditions for data collection on social platforms have changed and data is now difficult to access for unaffiliated researchers in structured form through platform APIs. This is a background condition for the shift in data collection methods from sub-study II to those used in sub-studies III and IV, which is further discussed in Chapter 5. The dissertation examines three examples of Swedish feminist articulations across Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok; #MeToo, #Kvinnostrejk, and #WomenInMaleFields, investigating their particular platform-native constitution, as well as commonalities in terms of how users mobilise affordances of technical features to articulate and circulate feminism around the tags.

Execution

The included sub-studies build iteratively on one another. Although the interview study is presented first here since it provides an overview of practices across platforms from the point of view of feminist content

creators, sub-study II of #MeToo was performed first. As this sub-study collected a large dataset of tweets, it constituted a source for the identification of interview participants that published feminist content with hashtags. Further, results from the Twitter study indicated that other features than hashtags were used in feminist articulations, leading to a widened scope for the dissertation

Sub-study III and IV followed the interview study. In interviews, participants identified contemporary examples of Swedish feminist hashtag initiatives, among which #Kvinnostrejk stood out as a fitting case for this dissertation. Further, interview study results demonstrated several practices that then formed the basis for the analysis of tagging practices in sub-study III on #Kvinnostrejk. In turn, results from sub-study III demonstrated how hashtags were employed to produce humorous articulations of feminism. This led to the selection of the #WomenInMaleFields case for sub-study IV, allowing the dissertation to further examine how features were employed for feminist articulations of this kind. Sub-studies II, III, and IV thus mainly attend to what articulations emerge from practices, answering research question 1b. Below, an overview of the research output and how they relate to the overarching research questions of the dissertation can be found under the sub-heading Research output.

Sub-study I: Trace-inspired interviews

Initially, I planned this study as a media go-along, a development of the ethnographic go-along method in which the researcher walks alongside the participant in the researched environment. Digital researcher Kristian Møller Jørgensen (2016) applied the method to digital environments by observing and guiding his participants when they navigated a digital space. It is a suitable method for understanding affordances, as researcher and participant cooperatively interpret both technical features and content. However, it is an invasive method, and while recruiting participants, the extent of the interview seemed to make them reluctant to partake. I decided to switch to trace-inspired interviews, which introduces collaborative reflections around content

that interview participants have published online (Dubois & Ford, 2015; Latzko-Toth & Millette, 2016). The interview time was thus shortened, and the interview guide included both a discussion of the ‘traces’ of #MeToo content through which I had encountered the participant, and a conversation around opportunities, constraints, and affordances of social platforms in relation to feminist practices. This approach yielded a better response.

Among the 201,101 tweets collected for sub-study II, I identified multiple posters and organisations/NGOs, and reached out via e-mail or Twitter direct message. Eight participants were interviewed November 2022–May 2023, in various locations in Stockholm (three participants) and Lund (one participant), on Zoom (three participants) and through Twitter direct messages (one activist group running a radical feminist Twitter account). The interviews lasted between one and two hours, and I recorded sound, then subsequently transcribed the interviews manually and used the qualitative research software NVivo for coding.

The aim was to describe how platform-specific features afforded feminist articulations, both in terms of strategies, possibilities and constraints of platform infrastructures, and affective encounters with online hate and misogyny. I started coding abductively using the initial concepts ‘affective labor’, ‘platform affordances’, ‘feminist practices’ and ‘versions of feminism’ that were derived from my notes during the interviews. Other concepts emerged with the iterative coding process (Fugard & Potts, 2019). At this stage, I identified a call for papers that would fit my article, a special issue of *Janus: Unbound* focused on feminist resistance. For the purpose of the article, I used ‘feminist resistance’ as a concept in the second round of coding, and identified three feminist practices that actualised platform affordances, related to online misogyny, and expanded popularised feminism, to perform what I called soft feminist resistance.

Sub-study II: Social network analysis and discourse analysis

This study focused on tagging practices with hashtags and the user mention feature on (then) Twitter around Swedish #MeToo, and was carried out in collaboration with digital sociologist Simon Lindgren at Umeå University. It combined social network analysis with critical discourse analysis of hashtag co-occurrences as co-articulations of meaning. The aim was to explore tagging as framing practices by mapping the hashtag ecosystem – the network of co-occurring hashtags in tweets – of #MeToo on Swedish Twitter. We collected 201,101 tweets by using the Twitter API with research access, which meant we could collect all tweets that had been published in Swedish with “me too”. For the SNA, we analysed the full data set with Gephi, an open-source digital tool for visualization and exploration of networks (gephi.org). With affordance-focused discourse analysis, we then examined hashtag co-occurrences as framing practices of co-articulation that extended the initial #MeToo interpretative frame.

Social networks are social systems constituted by relationships between its members, whether individuals, groups, institutions, or in this case textual elements (Ghajar-Khosravi & Chignell, 2016). Analyses of social networks use models from mathematics to represent ties between these social actors. Members are referred to as nodes, the relationships between them are edges, and important measures are network density and the centrality of nodes (Hanneman & Riddle, 2014). Combining social network analysis and discourse analysis in this study enabled an exploration of the meaning-making properties of tagging in tweets. It created an overview of the entire #MeToo ecosystem of hashtag co-articulations in Sweden, which made forms of tagging as framing practices possible to identify. Strong relations between the #MeToo hashtag and other hashtags in the network informed the process of narrowing down data for the affordance-focused discourse analysis.

Additionally, discourse analysis pointed to other sociotechnical practices that added meaning, such as using @-mentions to call out actors or call them into conversations. Results could then be triangulated through the SNA, that showed the entire ecosystem of

articulated and negotiated meaning around #MeToo. By using a definition of articulation from discourse theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), we read tweets as defining relations between hashtags and other textual elements. This was interpreted as frame alignment processes that departed from personalised action frames and produced structural frames about sexual violence within this connective action network.

Sub-study III and IV: Affordance-based multimodal critical discourse analysis

For these sub-studies, data were collected through Instagram's and TikTok's native search-functions with my personal accounts. As sub-study III examined a Swedish-language tag, the search was conducted as a hashtag search. For sub-study IV, which addressed a transnationally located tag, phrases such as "Sweden" and "swedish" were added to the tag to narrow results to Swedish-language posts. In both cases, I performed several iterative searches, and scrolled through results pages collecting data that fit inclusion criteria that were formulated beforehand and altered during the process to reflect how content showed up in result pages. In sub-study III, 30 Instagram posts were collected, and in sub-study IV, 62 TikTok posts and their related comment sections were gathered.

Both collection processes were performed long after tags first emerged. #Kvinnostrejk first appeared in 2021, and the #WomenInMaleFields sexism in relationships-iteration in 2024, whereas collection was conducted in 2024 and 2025 respectively. This shaped results, as data might have been removed by either creators or the platform. However, as the aim was not to produce all-encompassing datasets but to construct insight into constitutive feature-user entanglements embedded in their platform-native context, this was not investigated further.

Data analyses in both studies employ an affordance-based multimodal critical discourse analysis. As a way to encompass affordances and their constitutive entanglements, the methodological tools were inspired by

critical discourse analysis (CDA), affordance analysis, and multimodal analysis. Material-discursive articulations afforded by features could be thus analysed for their ideological underpinnings and counter-hegemonic potential (Machin, 2016).

Further, adding multimodality, the communicative elements that assemble into a readable and comprehensible Instagram and TikTok post were analysed in terms of affinity/incongruence and in how they each add material-discursive meaning to the emergent articulations. For instance, this enabled an analysis of how audiovisual elements of the TikTok meme in #WomenInMaleFields assemble into a structured gender-reversal meme, affording feminist humorous articulations through incongruence.

Ethical considerations

Reflections on ethics are complex when it comes to social media research, as content often is publicly available although not always intended to be by social media users. Information systems researchers Hamid Pousti, Cathy Urquhart and Henry Linger (2021) suggest social media researchers should consider the type of platform under study, their own role in that space, and the members' expectations of privacy when doing research on online phenomena. As I researched online content in this dissertation, I made continuous risk assessments of how account holders might be affected by the placement of their content in a different context than they intended. This is based on the terms of service for the particular platform, and whether or not the content producer is a public figure or organisation.

Since content producers were not informed about this study, other than those that I interviewed for sub-study I and the creators that I contacted for sub-study IV, and since the content touches on personal and sensitive stories, I carefully followed the ethical recommendations of the Association of Internet Researchers. For accounts that are deemed extra vulnerable, or for content that is highly personal, I removed account information when presenting the results, translated

content from Swedish to English, rewrote them so that they never appear verbatim, and masked links (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). However, some content is deemed to be intended for a wide audience, as creators knowingly use trending tags, for instance in the context of #WomenInMaleFields were posts often displayed tags such as #FYP (TikTok's for you-page), indicating that creators wish for exposure. In those cases, I assessed that content could appear verbatim, although user names were removed.

Overall, ethical concerns regarding content should always be evaluated through a reflexive context-specific process. In this dissertation, various types of content from creators with different reach and follower bases were used. For each unit of content, I have evaluated risks and advantages with having them appear in research output. Content from personal accounts was masked and rewritten as an ethical practice (Markham, 2012). However, content published by organisations, campaign accounts, or accounts that strive for visibility was cited verbatim in the research output, as a way to spread these feminist articulations beyond platform borders while crediting content creators. Such content is thus treated as public feminist epistemic practices that add to feminist knowledge about the social world.

Overall, this dissertation has a reflexive approach to research ethics in reference to online content. First, online content is evaluated based on follower count, appearance of content or the content creator in other media outside of the platform, and other aspects that might add to the process of weighing risks for harm with possible productive outcomes. It encompasses an ethics of care that emphasises a relational approach to knowledge production (franzke et al., 2020). Digital content was interpreted in interviews with creators, and this was followed by further e-mail discussions of results, a dissemination of the research output to participants, and an attempt to organise a group conversation around the results. However, only two participants responded to this request, and this group conversation has not taken place yet by the time of finishing this cover story in May 2026.

Further, TikTok creators in sub-study IV have been contacted on the platform to invite similar discussions. This will add an interpretative

layer to paper IV that is still in draft form. As of May 12, two creators have responded to this contact initiation. Importantly, the overall aim of my research guided the ethical concerns that were encountered during the research process. As these are in line with feminist goals to circulate feminist messages throughout commercial infrastructures, this research is an attempt to promote social change of sexist structures and platform power that prioritises individualised political narratives over structural claims.

Additionally, it is crucial to consider my situatedness in relation to the Swedish social media landscape as well as Swedish platformed feminism. As I have worked with social media in other contexts¹³, I went into the project with a particular understanding of how these platforms work for communications and marketing, but lacked knowledge about how they work as tool for feminist articulations and circulation. My intention was to be aware of the complexities of power that comes with speaking from different positions of expertise, as the participants and myself do. I explicitly explained my prior knowledge in the interviews which added transparency and a shared interpretative control where the participants and I could have productive discussions around opportunities provided by platforms (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Additionally, I was semi-immersed in the field at the start of the study, and still am as I follow and sometimes interact with many Swedish feminist accounts on social media. This means that I had some prior knowledge of important actors going in to the study, which has helped me identify potential interview participants. I noticed throughout the interviews that being explicit with my alignment with feminist messages helped build rapport with the participants in the interview situation. As participants noticed we had common knowledge about both opportunities and restrictions of social platforms, and of contemporary feminist online phenomena, they invited me into some

¹³ I worked as a digital communications specialist for several organisations in the public and private sectors between 2012-2021.

more difficult and complex experiences and reflections. For instance, we could talk about intra-feminist negotiation and critique, and burn-out, and frustration, which I could also reiterate from my personal experience.

Although building rapport is often advised by interview literature and here made speaking together easier, this can bring vulnerability to participation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Schmid et al., 2024). As participants trust interviewers, they might disclose personal experiences beyond the scope of the study and its ethical clearance. This invites a challenging and delicate balance between eliciting in-depth data and going beyond comfort and scope (Schmid et al., 2024), which I experienced particularly in one interview. Overall, I attempted this balance by sticking to the interview guide which addresses experiences of articulating feminism on social media rather than any personal experiences of harm that can provide a background condition for such articulations. However, interviews sometimes slipped into that territory, one in particular. When that happened, I listened but then reminded the participant of the interview theme and excluded these experiences from analysis and research output. The trust placed in me was taken very seriously, as the project aims to aid feminist goals and never exploit personal experience. Only when transformed into politicised narratives does research output include such experiences of harm. Further, my background as a volunteer for a support organisation for girls has trained me in support conversations, giving me tools to navigate personal harmful experiences in interviews by acknowledging, listening, validating and gently redirecting the conversation back to interview themes which was what I did. Rather than interrupting, I personally believe that, besides maintaining rapport, listening to these experiences is a feminist practice of ethics that allows the burden of harmful experiences to be shared collectively, transforming it into fuel for feminist goals.

Given that sensitive subjects might come up in interviews, I tied a support person to the project in accordance with the ethical clearance process. The support person offered participants the opportunity to talk through interviews had they reminded them of uncomfortable or harmful experiences. The support person had previous experience of

volunteering in a support chat for survivors of sexual assault, a background that is in line with project themes.

Research situation and empirical cases

Contemporary gender equality and digital feminism in Sweden

I use contemporary Swedish feminist practices on social media as examples that can shed light on sociotechnical political opportunities and localised vernaculars. Sweden is internationally considered a gender equal country (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025), although this has long been critiqued by activists and scholars (see, for instance, Giritli Nygren et al., 2016). Although Sweden enjoys relatively high levels of GE in relation to other countries, its gendered pay gap has increased in recent years, and women still take longer parental leave than men (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025; The Swedish Gender Equality Agency, 2021). Women are also more exposed to domestic violence than men by 40 %, a number that has stayed fairly consistent in recent years (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023).

The country's long history of widespread feminist organising and strong ties between feminist organisations and the government was cited by Swedish political theorist Esther Pollack (2019) as a reason for why #MeToo became a catalyst for such vast feminist organizing in Sweden in 2017 – giving rise to almost 80 industry-specific petitions for ending sexual harassment and violence in the workplace (Hansson, 2020). The wide dispersion of #MeToo in Sweden is described as unique by women's rights experts, researchers and politicians, arguably an effect of the country's relatively high level of gender equality, widespread feminist self-identification among officials and political parties, and a longstanding tradition of organizing (Booth & Munro, 2017; Pollack, 2019; Stål et al., 2021).

When the #MeToo petitions put forward their demands in debate articles in Swedish broad-sheet and tabloid newspapers in 2017, they used structural frames citing patriarchy, unjust power relations between men and women, and cultures of silence, rather than only telling individual stories of harassment and violence (Hansson et al., 2020). In line with this, Swedish news media coverage of #MeToo pressed the connections between a sexist culture and the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment more so than neighbouring country Denmark (Askanius & Hartley, 2019). Further, #MeToo brought a feminist agenda to politics that funnelled into a consent-focused debate. In 2018, after many years of persistent petitioning by feminist organisations, a consent clause was added to Swedish sexual crime law.

However, Sweden is also affected by neoliberal politics and cultures, and its exceptionalist attitudes towards its own gender equal status has long been contested by feminist and intersectional scholars (see, for instance, de los Reyes, 2016), who have also noted a backlash against feminist issues since the #MeToo wave of 2017 due to a subsequent lack of attention to issues of sexism and harassment (Pollack, 2019). As a continuation of a lasting lack of intersectional analyses and solutions that can account for continuing injustices along racialised and classed lines, and an overreliance of gender equality by numbers (de los Reyes, 2016), this accentuates the need for new explorations of feminist political action for contemporary Swedish social media audiences. The included cases in this dissertation appeared on social media between 2017 and 2024. While #MeToo has been thoroughly researched by Swedish media, gender, and computer science scholars (see, for instance, Ganetz et al., 2022), #Kvinnostrejtk and #WomenInMaleFields are not scholarly explored by the time of writing in 2026. In the next section, I explain the choice of hashtags, and reflect on my position in the field of study.

Choice of hashtags and my position

As explicated in the aim, three feminist hashtags on three platforms were examined; #MeToo on Twitter, #Kvinnostrejtk on Instagram, and #WomenInMaleFields on TikTok. #MeToo came about on Twitter in

2017 and became widespread in many parts of the world, whereas #Kvinnostrejck is a small-scale and persistent Swedish Instagram initiative that emerged in 2021 with both offline and online activity. #WomenInMaleFields emerged on TikTok as a way to point out heterosexism and harmful behaviour in intimate relationships in 2024. My intention as a researcher, inspired by the well-established feminist epistemological standard of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988), was to create cases for the sub-studies in continuous relation to the phenomena under study. The project was iteratively designed during the research process, where contemporary cases were selected based on interactions with feminist content creators as well as my ongoing immersion in the context as a user.

As I had already researched Swedish expressions of #MeToo in my master's thesis and an article with my master's supervisor, feminist media scholar Hillevi Ganetz (Lindqvist & Ganetz, 2020), I recognized that Swedish Twitter expressions of #MeToo had not been explored from the point of view of persistent everyday tagging. Sub-study II was a response to this gap.

Important for this study as a whole is the perspective of feminist content creators, as user agency is highlighted as an element that is entangled with the properties of platform features. In sub-study I, I used the dataset from sub-study II to identify feminist content creators such as feminist organisations, activists, and feminist debaters. I identified and interviewed eight such actors, and as interviews circled around the subject of contemporary expressions of feminism in Sweden, several mentioned #Kvinnostrejck on Instagram as noteworthy. #Kvinnostrejck is an example of localised online and offline protest action, that fit the aim of this study and was thus subsequently examined in sub-study III.

During the third sub-study, the platform Tiktok gained popularity in a number of countries including Sweden (Internetstiftelsen, 2025). As collaborative and curational properties of features are at the centre in this dissertation as a whole, TikTok's connective features beyond hashtags, for instance sounds and visual effects, made the platform an apt case for sub-study IV. At that time, "soft girl" and "trad wife"

trended on TikTok, focusing on cooking, homemaking, and slowing down. The trend was sometimes depicted as anti-feminist, sometimes as anti-capitalist, prioritizing family, leisure, and rest over grind culture (Scott & Day, 2025). In probing feminist discourses on Swedish TikTok, #WomenInMaleFields appeared alongside reactions to the “soft girl” trend. This meme used sarcasm and role reversal to highlight harmful male behaviour in intimate relationships. I had identified a practice where hashtags were mobilised incongruently in connection with images and video to produce humorous feminist intervention in sub-study III. Similarly, the #WomenInMaleFields video meme produced humorous Tiktok feminism through incongruence, which was subsequently explored in sub-study IV.

Research output

Sub-studies II, III and IV each analyse one of the three empirical cases of tags on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok respectively, while sub-study I cuts across cases and platforms to address how users strategize around feature mobilisation. In Table 1, I give an overview of the research output of the four sub-studies, including their empirical case, what dissertation research question(s) they mainly address, and their data and methods.

Table 1: Overview of the four included sub-studies

Sub-study	Empirical case	Research questions	Data and methods
I	Feminist content producers (organisations and activists)	1b	Interviews with eight Swedish feminist content creators.
II	#MeToo on Twitter	1a	Swedish language tweets with #MeToo (201,101 tweets), a subset with the 18 most frequent petition hashtags ¹⁴ (5,640 tweets). Discourse analysis and SNA.
III	#Kvinnostrejk on Instagram	1a, 1b	Swedish language Instagram posts with #Kvinnostrejk (40 posts) ¹⁵ , discourse and feature analysis.
IV	#WomenInMaleFields on Tiktok	1a, 1b	Swedish language Tiktok videos with #WomenInMaleFields (62 posts) ¹⁶ and comments, multimodal critical affordance and discourse analysis.

¹⁴ See explanation of petition hashtags in the article description.

¹⁵ See article and the methods chapter for details on the selection process.

¹⁶ See article and the methods chapter for details on the selection process.

PAPER I

Hashtag re-appropriation, voices of reason, and strategic silences: ‘Soft’ feminist resistance practices¹⁷ on Swedish social media.

This paper challenges the perception of feminist activism on social media as impulsive, emotional, and necessarily underpinned by neoliberal substructures. Through interviews with communications specialists for Swedish feminist and SRH organisations, debaters, and feminist activists, the article reveals deliberate and strategic approaches employed in commercialized social media spaces that subvert online norms and platform constraints in subtle and resourceful ways.

PAPER II

Mapping an emerging hashtag ecosystem: Connective action and interpretive frames in the Swedish #MeToo movement.

When #MeToo reached Sweden in the fall of 2017, it gave rise to nearly 80 industry-specific petitions that demanded a stop to sexual misconduct in the workplace, some with their own hashtags. This article examines the discourse of #MeToo on Swedish Twitter, focusing on how #MeToo, petition hashtags, and other hashtags are co-articulated in tweets. It maps the emergent hashtag network and explores its resulting interpretative frames.

PAPER III

Everyday feminist tagging as techno-rhetorical strategy: Interference and curation through Instagram hashtags in #Kvinnostrejkk.

Much research on protest hashtags revolves around movements with large uptake, leading to knowledge gaps when it comes to everyday, small-scale use of hashtags in protest action. Such utilisation of tags can make subtle indents in commercial and engagement-based sorting logics of platforms. This study explores tagging practices in relation to a Swedish feminist hashtag, #Kvinnostrejkk (women’s strike), and

¹⁷ This concept is explained further in Chapter 5.

highlights persistent and routine forms of tagging as examples of how users can utilise platform features to interfere with processes of content dissemination on social media platforms.

PAPER IV

“Cry softer, I’m trying to sleep”: Memetic feminist articulation through absurdity on TikTok in Sweden’s #WomenInMaleFields

This paper examines the 2024 iteration of #WomenInMaleFields, which humorously exposes sexist behavior in intimate relationships through a flipped gender script, to show how this feminist meme articulates harm through absurdity in the Swedish context. Through a multimodal discourse analysis of 62 TikTok posts and their comment sections, this paper asks how local feminist politics are articulated through a structured meme template. The results demonstrate how posts and comment sections negotiate meanings around consent and gender-based violence through a memetic template of incongruent elements, redirecting harm into shared, networked laughter at sexism.

5 Digitally entangled soft resistance: Platform-native articulation as feminist techno-rhetorics

Together, the four sub-studies demonstrate how users persistently mobilise particular affordances of features to produce feminist articulations and advance feminist goals in everyday platformed interactions. Here, the Twitter hashtag and user mention; the Instagram hashtag, image and video features; and the TikTok hashtag, textual overlay, sound, and visual effect features, assemble techno-rhetorical elements into specific readable and comprehensible politically charged feminist articulations. Such articulations are thus emergent from what those features afford, and how these affordances are actualised by particular users around the specific hashtag assemblages that are analysed in the sub-studies. Empirically, the sub-studies bring to the fore creative feminist practices across three digital platforms and hashtag initiatives. Results show that Twitter hashtags and user handles were actualised as co-articulation elements, producing discursive effects and a hashtag ecosystem of related topics with emergent meanings. They further demonstrate how Instagram hashtags were employed to circulate feminist goals through the platform infrastructure by disrupting and assembling content feeds. Lastly, they display how TikTok hashtags, textual overlays, sounds, and visual effects afforded an incongruent meme template through which humorous feminist articulations were produced.

My findings demonstrate *soft feminist resistance practices*, digitally entangled practices that persistently enhance feminist visibility by actualising and expanding particular affordances of platform features, thus filling, overflowing, and extending the space afforded by commercial digital platforms to articulate and circulate feminist goals. Not only do these practices carve out space for counter-discourse to be formulated within the platform, they produce feminist community through solidarity and recognition (Clark-Parsons, 2021; Mendes et al., 2019), and the ability to be seen, a vis-ability, through what I call *techno-rhetorical strategies* of articulation and circulation. Hashtags and other repeatable elements function technically to gather content into feeds and streams while simultaneously constituting a meaning-

making rhetorical utility through words and phrases in combination with other audiovisual elements. In this way, these soft practices function through alignment and affinity both materially – content placed side-by-side in feeds – and discursively – articulating resemblance and solidarity. Common across my findings is that each case used platform logic of algorithmic personalisation and circulation to assemble personal experiences rather than, or alongside, mobilising for traditional activist action such as street protests or petitions. Bringing soft feminist resistance practices to the fore answers calls from digital researchers to develop and expand scholarly understandings of activism to the dispersed, collaborative, polyphonic, and vastly heterogenous social media environments that constitute a contemporary public sphere (Backes et al., 2026; Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; X. Zhao & Abidin, 2023).

The findings also constitute a theoretical contribution by empirically grounding the entanglement concept and aligning it with affordance, applying this pairing as a mechanism to examine how platform infrastructures, user action, local vernaculars and cultural norms assemble into particular examples of platformed feminist articulation. Critical perspectives on technology emphasise either how technology shapes emergent platformed discourse and sociality, or how technology is both shaped by, and shape, social contexts, categories, and hierarchies such as gender (Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2014; Gillespie, 2018; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Wajcman, 2009; Wyatt, 2008). They cite various degrees of essentialist properties on both sides, with Haraway's cyborg manifesto as a clear example of a breach within feminist technoscience of such essentialising views (Haraway, 1991; Wyatt, 2008). Introducing affordance as a way to empirically focus such continuous entanglements between users and technology, where neither pre-exist these encounters and both are contingent on the other, means explicitly underlining the relationality of platformed expression. With entanglement, the relational aspect of the affordance concept is emphasised, and with affordance, an analysable mediativity-focused layer of such expressions emerges where users actualise particular elements of specific features in articulatory practice. This constitutes a theoretically and empirically productive way to analyse

how resistance is performed within commercial and algorithmically structured digital spaces.

The results locate user agency, but recognise its co-constitution by particular technical platform infrastructures, and that their features are designed with business goals in mind. However, intentions of activists, organisations, and debaters affect the ways in which feminism is articulated and content is circulated within platforms. In this way, features and user agency entangle in digital feminist practices, which is shown in the actualised affordances – mechanisms of features that users mobilise – that make up these practices.

Business-driven platform logics operate to retain users on platform, and support what feminist media researchers refer to as an economy of visibility (Albarran, 2013; Banet-Weiser, 2018). This in turn underpins neoliberal iterations of feminism, and other political expressions, built around individual empowerment, so-called self-care, and female confidence (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007; Gill & Orgad, 2015). However, my results show how users persistently produce, publish, and circulate alternative feminist articulations within this commercialised environment. Such practices can actualise properties of features that are perhaps intended for business purposes, but that produce effects that can become feminist through their techno-rhetorics. For instance, users use hashtags to assemble and curate pieces of content into comprehensible content grids telling collective stories, mobilise unexpected hashtags with feminist expressions that place them side-by-side with generic content, and continuously assemble content through features that produce emergent feminist memetic expressions that may reach beyond expected audiences with or without gaining virality. The resulting articulations do not necessarily rely on neoliberal iterations of feminism, rather they depart from them by negotiating meaning through expanding the possible use of their constituent features.

Overall, as explicated above, the results introduce two overarching concepts and/or conceptual reworkings: soft feminist resistance and techno-rhetorical strategies. Further, they highlight particular and platform-native practices that constitute these overarching concepts,

suggesting they can be understood as hashtag co-articulation (on Twitter, sub-study II), hashtag reappropriation (across platforms, sub-study I), feed interference and feed curation (on Instagram, sub-study III), and absurdist meme templates (on TikTok, sub-study IV). The overarching concepts are explained and discussed in the initial section below. The following sections address the particular examined practices mentioned above, and what affordances of Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok features are mobilised. Additionally, feminist articulation, negotiation and circulation practices that emerge from when users and features entangle through affordances are highlighted. Lastly, this chapter addresses the dissertation's theoretical contributions, its methodological strengths and weaknesses, and suggestions for future research.

Shrewd sociotechnical resistance: Soft feminist practices and techno-rhetorical strategies

In this subsection, I explain and discuss the two main conceptual developments that I have introduced throughout the sub-studies, and employ them to address the overarching research question:

How are platform features entangled with user agency in feminist hashtags on Swedish-language Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, and how do these entanglements afford particular feminist articulation, negotiation, and circulation practices?

Feminist media scholars Rosalind Gill (2007; 2015), Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018), and Catherine Rottenberg (2020) have shown that the mediality of commercial platforms invite individualised and commercialised versions of feminism based on gender-stereotypical imaginations around the body as capital and confidence as a feminist project. At the same time, social platforms have enabled epistemic practices that assemble personal experiences into recognizable and intelligible articulation (Mendes et al., 2019; Serisier, 2019). Within these platformed conditions, digital feminist practices simultaneously embrace and challenge the mediality of platforms as users seek ways to articulate feminist goals and persistently circulate them to expanding

audiences. In these practices, user action becomes entangled with the technical features of platforms, as particular affordances are actualised to give rise to emergent articulations and negotiations. The results disentangle these entanglements to identify how technical features might carry constraints that entice post- and popular feminist articulations as well as online misogyny. However, most importantly, they highlight how feminist practices persistently actualise affordances to carve at and overflow these constraints to articulate and circulate iterations of feminism that can challenge such commercialised logics.

First, it is notable that the interview participants in sub-study I recognised these logics as constraining conditions. They reiterate experiences of platform logics, such as algorithmic engagement-based ranking, as limiting and even silencing. Participants expressed avoiding particular platforms altogether due to algorithmic amplification of online misogyny and polarising content, which has been shown to persist and disproportionately affect women and girls (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Jane, 2017b). In their daily work for feminism online, they feel the need to pause, breathe, or hand the phone over to a colleague. Real experiences of platformed gendered threats and hate entangle with algorithmic and audience imaginaries, and from this entanglement of embodied affective experience and cognitive conclusions about the technical infrastructures of social platforms (Bucher, 2016; Ruckenstein, 2023), silences emerge. Such silences contradict techno-optimistic statements from platform companies and other actors, and reinforces scholarly articulation of digital social platforms as falsely promising a politically meaningful voice to every user (see, for instance, Kay, 2020). Notably, these silences are gendered, hinting at how technology and gender become co-constituted and how technology reinforces injustices that persist within their production conditions (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Noble, 2018; Tynes et al., 2016; Wajcman, 2009).

However, the sub-studies demonstrate that platform users continuously actualise particular platform affordances to negotiate, and circulate feminist articulations within these commercialised infrastructures. These articulations circumvent, extend, and overflow the constraints that features and platform infrastructures carry, and

thus carve out space within platform environments for counter-hegemonic discourse that challenges popular feminism and online misogyny in subtle but persistent ways. As examples of subtle, everyday, non-sensationalist mobilisations of particular affordances within commercialised spaces, I argue that these practices can be conceptualised as *soft feminist resistance practices* realised through *techno-rhetorical strategies*.

Soft feminist resistance

The identified resistance practices in sub-studies II-IV mobilise hashtags, sounds, visual effects, and other features in ways that are afforded but not necessarily intended by the platform companies¹⁸. Rather than reiterating individualised post-feminist messages, they articulate and circulate feminism based on collective experiences that highlight how gendered injustice cannot be solved individually. On Twitter around Swedish #MeToo, and on Instagram around #Kvinnostrejk, this is exemplified by co-articulations of the campaign tag with tags such as #feminism, #patriarchy, #jämställdhet [=gender equality], and #consent, which frame opposition to harmful sexist structure. Further, around #Kvinnostrejk on Instagram, mobilisation of tags such as #Midsommar2024 [Midsummer celebrations], and #Kladdkaka [=sticky chocolate cake], affords feminist posts to be injected into unrelated feeds, circulating them beyond established audiences. In addition to these feed interference practices, feed curation is performed with long-form tags. Such tags can, for instance, be #MänsMordPåKvinnor [=men's murders of women], which assembles #Kvinnostrejk posts into a newsfeed that circulates reports of femicide beyond the constraints of traditional media ecologies. Lastly, on TikTok in Swedish iterations of #WomenInMaleFields, memetic affordances of audiovisual features are mobilised to assemble

¹⁸ I recognize that platform companies employ vast numbers of people, many of whom may value political agency through platform features.

a structured meme template for humorous, ironic, gender role reversals expressing harmful male heterosexual relationship behaviour.

These techno-culturally assembled strategies for the articulation and circulation of feminist goals draw on localised and platform-native vernaculars, visible across cases as textual elements centre consent and gender-based violence through tagging, captions, and text overlays in images and videos¹⁹. My findings show that these actualisations of platform-specific affordances constitute *soft feminist resistance practices* that mobilise platform logics of engagement-based ranking, intra-platform linking and assembling, and collective collaborative expressions to articulate, negotiate, and circulate feminist ideas and goals to both established and unsuspecting audiences. In these ways, soft feminist resistance can carve out space for nationally localised and platform-native articulations that flow through commercialised infrastructures in shrewd and crafty ways.

Importantly, feminist critique of sexist and patriarchal underpinnings in epistemic communities have pointed out how *soft* connotes less valid knowledge, as it is connected with emotionality and femininity, and contrasted by masculinised rationality and 'hard science' (see, for instance, Hartsock, 1983; Nelson, 1996; Schott, 2003). This gendered divide when it comes to epistemic practice, which online feminist articulations constitute, stems from a prevailing hegemonic nature/culture divide where masculinity has represented culture and cognition while femininity represented the body. The suggested use of soft in this dissertation aims to do away with this hierarchised and gendered divide, suggesting that soft practices constitute artful and crafty ways to expand and overflow the noted (ideological) constraints that platform features carry. Like expanding foam or melting ice-cream, these practices actualise affordances to carry feminist articulations to unexpected surfaces within commercialised platform spaces, enabling them to carve at and inscribe into engagement-based

¹⁹ This localisation is elaborated in following sections of this chapter.

infrastructures. Importantly, these soft practices mobilise a variety of strategies and tactics that are traditionally connected with both sides of the critiqued feminised nature/masculinised culture divide. For instance, factual and matter-of-fact wording (see sub-study I), sarcasm, and emotionally detached rhetorical tools (see sub-study IV) – connoting masculinised rationality and cultural sharpness – are often employed alongside non-confrontational and subtle, implied opposition – which could be said to connote femininity – as demonstrated across sub-studies.

In this sense, soft practices are not easier, less clever, less politically charged, or less valid than other resistance practices. Neither do they reinforce, but rather do away with, the gendered hierarchical nature/culture divide as they are necessarily material-discursive and probe constitutive borders of technical features. They are not contrasted by ‘hard’ practices, but can be juxtaposed to feminist digilante practices as these attempt to break barriers and rules to do resistance whereas soft resistance attempts to stay within constrictions in order to expand them. These soft resistance practices bear resemblance to soft resistance in social movement literature, demonstrating everyday forms of resistance that attempt to stay hidden from powerful institutions, such as company managements, or political leaders (Akbar et al., 2023; Matsuda, 1992; Wong, 2021). Soft resistance practices are identified by scholars as productive avenues to build community, solidarity, and change through persistent resistance action that can go under the radar.

However, in my conceptualization here, soft feminist resistance practices do not aim to be hidden, but rather to circumvent, stretch, and expand hegemonic restrictions of platforms. In this sense, they also relate to the concept *soft power*, introduced by political theorist Joseph Nye (1990) as a way to comprehend non-military cultural and co-optive expressions of power in the post-cold war period. This conceptualisation also shares characteristics with postmodern theories of power, for instance those of Michel Foucault (Foucault & Gordon, 1980), that emphasise how power works to direct people towards particular ways of knowing and acting without force, which supports hegemonic power relations. In relation to these concepts, commercial

platform features can be said to carry ideological elements in how they *softly* shape discourse, and soft resistance highlights how to perform resistance practices within such commercialised infrastructures, in order to co-shape these discursive spaces.

Techno-rhetorical strategies

The soft feminist resistance practices identified across the sub-studies utilise both visibility culture, engagement-based logic, and neoliberal iterations of feminism to articulate feminist goals and circulate them beyond established audiences. I suggest that these practices are based on strategies that are necessarily *techno-rhetorical*. Hashtags are constituted by the hash symbol followed by words or phrases, which combined tell stories discursively and thus constitute rhetorical devices. However, hashtags can never be written into being without the simultaneous actualisation of their technical functions, which materially assemble pieces of content within digital infrastructures in several ways; in a scrollable feed, in a signal to ranking algorithms, and in the metadata of published content that produce assembled collections of content when exported through platform APIs.

These technical effects are also rhetorical, while the discursive-rhetorical meaning of the hashtagged word or phrase also always carries the technical function. For instance, the hashtag #Kvinnostrejk is regularly used in offline contexts, written on protest signs during street protests. The hash symbol on hand-written signs pulls the online context into the offline, signalling the techno-rhetorical function of #Kvinnostrejk – it inhabits space within the digital infrastructure of one or several social media platforms. By extension, such hashtagged phrases signal activism, as several hashtagged movements have emerged in recent years, for instance, #MeToo and #BLM.

In this way, tagging is always techno-rhetorical. As a feminist strategy, these technical and rhetorical elements assemble into tools that articulate feminist messages and goals on platforms by making them discursively comprehensible while the tag functions as a vehicle for dissemination and circulation. Similarly, other platform features that

also assemble content into feeds and streams bring inseparable technical and rhetorical elements that co-constitute platformed feminist articulations. In sub-study IV, TikTok's audiovisual features afford the formation of a structured meme template through which multiple experiences of sexist behaviour assemble into a comprehensible collaborative feminist articulation. These features, such as soundbites, visual effects, and short-video formats, carry rhetorical meaning as multimodal communicative elements, while simultaneously assembling content into searchable feeds and amplifying them on the TikTok FYP.

Given this, I suggest that techno-rhetorical strategies can function as an analytical concept to examine platformed resistance practices as digitally entangled. This enables the analysis to encompass both the entanglement of multimodal discursive meaning and platform-native technical features, and what articulatory and circulation practices these entanglements afford on particular platforms. Further, my findings show that these techno-rhetorical strategies constitute soft feminist resistance practices as they function with and through technical-material fluid constraints that are continuously inscribed upon.

Affordance actualisation – framing, interference, curation, and absurdist incongruence

In this section, I address research question 1a and 1b:

- a. *How do Swedish feminist activists, organisations, and everyday users actualise affordances of platform features such as hashtags, user handles, sounds, and visual effects to articulate, negotiate, and circulate feminism?*
- b. *In what ways do these specific entanglements afford opportunities for feminist resistance within commercialised and engagement-based spaces?*

Across sub-studies, tagging as co-articulation and reappropriation extends campaign frames and circulates feminist articulations into

content feeds. These feeds either assemble expressions into a comprehensible, collaborative, and politicised narrative, or disperse them into unrelated content through incongruence. In both cases, tagging and mobilising other features constitutes a techno-rhetorical feminist strategy that does articulatory framing work while circulating feminist goals beyond established audiences.

Used as co-articulatory devices of framing and meaning-making, tags that appear together in posts can work as *frame extension mechanisms* that either align with or negotiate an initial campaign frame, such as #MeToo and #Kvinnostrejtk. Similar to traditional framing in movements, these tagging practices negotiate meaning and enable a movement or hashtag moment to articulate problems and solutions in distinct ways (D. Snow et al., 2014; D. A. Snow et al., 1986). Although hashtag movements are dispersed along weak ties, create messy grammars, and lack appointed leaders and organised movement structures (Granovetter, 1973; Mitra-Kahn, 2012; D. Snow et al., 2014; Tufekci, 2017), by co-articulating hashtags, platform users actualise platform-native affordances and vernaculars to negotiate meanings of such campaigns, constituting sentiment-based networked framing work (Papacharissi, 2014) similar to that performed in traditional movements. Rather than movement structures, users organise such framing work along platformed infrastructures, which in the included examples means #MeToo gets a local Swedish framing along a human rights-discourse of feminist politics, mainly around consent, #Kvinnostrejtk is framed as a movement for ending gender-based violence through emergent newsfeed assemblages, and #WomenInMaleFields similarly performs continuous framing work through memetic satirical articulations of experiences of breeches of consent and instances of gender-based violence.

Additionally, when a hashtag is discursively reappropriated to cause *feed interference*, that is, when the tag affordance that places feminist content with unrelated content in the same scrollable feed is actualised, this also reappropriates the logic of the feature. Hashtags are designed to assemble similar content, and are widely used as such by advertisers to identify popular topics and discussions related to their business, which is also a service sold by social listening tools. At the same time,

hashtags once emerged as technical features of social platforms based on user behaviour, where users applied the hash symbol to organize and assemble similar content. In this capacity, it affords assembling personal experiences into collective stories, with legitimacy for each experience as an effect of such storytelling practices, which is commonly used in digital feminist initiatives (Clark-Parsons, 2021; Serisier, 2019). In the results across the included sub-studies, this assembling capacity enables the collaborative articulation of feminist opposition to gender-based violence and sexism through dedicated curated feeds as well as a multimodal memetic structured template. In addition, the interference affordance of tags enables these articulations to be circulated beyond established audiences. Both these affordances and the way they are mobilised for feminism in the data demonstrate how user action is entangled with technical features. Results highlight how such features afford several soft feminist practices through techno-rhetorical strategies of collective, collaborative feminist articulation and feed interference circulation.

Feed interference is presented in the results as related to hashtag hijacking, but differing in some important ways. Firstly, the central part of hashtag hijacking is that it attempts to undermine or oppose the initial purpose of the launched hashtag (Dempsey Willis, 2020). Feed interference appears, not as an attempt to undermine or oppose, but rather as a tactic to highlight an aspect of everyday life from a feminist perspective using hashtags. This tactic was not described as organized collective action by interviewees, and further appeared as singular or small-scale in the data for sub-study III. Rather, these practices were under-the-radar trial-and-error strategies that feminist creators employed to increase their reach outside of a perceived filter bubble, and to redirect hashtags towards more feminist content. They have an element of surprise to them, so that audiences expecting to see one thing suddenly encounter feminist content instead. By contrast, hashtag hijacking is an act of protest aimed to gain the attention of large audiences, and to oppose or discredit the original hashtag.

In sub-study I, participants describe wanting to bring attention to domestic gender-based violence by tying this to an event where family is centred, like a holiday celebration. I subsequently identified similar

practices with hashtags in sub-study III, which materially placed posts about feminist issues side-by-side with generic content using tags such as #Midsommar2025 and #Kladdkaka. In this way, the practice not only reloads new discursive content into the interpretative frame of a hashtag, but also disseminates content within platform infrastructures in a counterintuitive way.

Although the identified practices across sub-studies are hopeful examples of resistance that can emerge with and through commercialised infrastructures, they are necessarily entangled with embodied experiences of feminist users. In some cases, these experiences had the effect of practices of silence and complete avoidance of platforms, when users feel the moderation practices of the platforms will not protect them from harm. The interview participants often described frustration and fatigue in relation to their online practices. For instance, one participant explained how she had to physically hand over her phone to her colleague after one of their Twitter posts had gone viral and gained massive amounts of harsh and violent responses. Another talked about having to take many deep breaths while being online for work, because of feelings of frustration towards some responses to their posts. As popularised misogyny and gendered hate prevail on platforms, this illustrates how users persistently articulate and circulate feminist goals while paying a price with their mental health, and how this sometimes may result in silence and absence on particular platforms. In this way, while the results are meant to highlight hopeful examples of enabled platformed feminist articulation, it also critiques lack of platform responsibility leading to risks of activist fatigue. This further emphasises the need for soft resistance practices that the study identifies, as these can go under the radar and attempt to circumvent misogynist responses. For instance, in sub-study IV, the memetic template of #WomenInMaleFields introduces a networked feminist laughter at the absurdity of sexism through incongruence, ambiguity, and shared feminist literacy. This invites particular participation and might function to exclude massive misogynist responses, particularly automated sexist responses by bot and troll accounts. Arguably, this is visible in the overall supportive expressions of alignment and repaired ruptures in the analysed comment sections.

Platform-native and localised articulations of feminism

Across sub-studies, analyses show how hashtags are articulated with other textual and visual elements, and how these co-articulations can produce either attuned or incongruent rhetorical effects. In sub-study I, the participants explain how they reappropriate popular generic hashtags like #family, and add them to posts that detail feminist problem framings and goals. As shown in the feed interference practice with #Kvinnostrejk in sub-study III, tags mismatch the other elements of posts, as feminist posts are deliberately tagged “incorrectly”. Creators employ hashtags like #Midsommar2024, #books, or #kladdkaka²⁰ to intervene into hashtag feeds that assemble topical posts that users can then easily find. As users scroll through the kladdkaka feed, for instance, they will find a feminist post alongside hundreds of recipes for mud cake.

Incongruence is further recognised as an absurdist practice in sub-study IV. Here, TikTok’s audiovisual features afford a meme structure where assembled elements misalign, producing feminist articulations of sexist male behaviour through satire and networked laughter. The tag #WomenInMaleFields connotes women working in male-dominated industry sectors, however, the video imagery and text overlay of the meme detail an unbothered or serious female-presenting creator narrating a first-person encounter where she seemingly hurt a male partner through violence, sexual aggression, or betrayal. Sounds and visual effects add to the interpretative potential and rhetorical effect of the meme assemblage. Often-used songs Anaconda by Nicki Minaj (2014) and Oscar-Winning Tears by Raye (2023) are about sexism in hip-hop and male emotional abuse respectively, reinforcing the tag and framing the meme assemblage as critical articulations of sexism. As these elements assemble into a memetic template, posts that repeat it collectively articulate feminist response to sexist male behaviour through incongruence and ambiguity around who

²⁰ Translates to Midsummer 2024, and sticky mud cake. For full explanations of the cultural connotations of these expressions, see paper III.

performed the detailed acts. A sarcastic humour emerges where commenters explicitly laugh, arguably at the absurdity of a woman carrying out such acts as well as at the recognition potential, as many commenters ask “did we date the same guy”.

The performance of emotional detachment and misalignment with the textual elements of the meme creates a rupture in a perceived promise of happiness through heterosexual intimate relationships. Notably, while recent TikTok trends such as trad wife and soft girl have highlighted traditional gender roles as desirable, the #WomenInMaleFields trend uses subtle humour to redirect and breach these narratives, creating multimodal counter-discourse that reinvigorates Sara Ahmed’s (2010, 2023) “feminist killjoy” figure. By detaching happiness from its usual objects and sticking it sarcastically to collaborative call-outs of sexist harmful behaviour through shared laughter, the meme assembles an affective public around what is not desired. In a similar way, the sarcastic tagging practices that emerged with #Kvinnostrejk mobilized humour to point to the absurdity of sexism. By laughing at the ridiculousness of heterosexist behaviour, these feminist interventions demonstrate how shared laughter can be a productive force that collaboratively introduces detachment and redirection from the usual promises of a good life (Ahmed, 2017; Anderson et al., 2023; Berlant, 2011).

Further, the explored cases invoke the tag, mention, sound, and visual effect affordances of resemblance and affinity – that is, congruence. In a clear example, creators use #Kvinnostrejk alongside the tag #MänsMordPåKvinnor in captions for screen prints of news reports of femicide, which curates and assembles a feed of similar reports. This assembling thus actualises a main affordance of the hashtag and other features, the searchability and feed interface that places pieces of content side-by-side when a user searches for or clicks on the produced link (boyd, 2010; Zappavigna, 2012). Further, hashtag-facilitated co-articulations of #MeToo with hashtags that communicate and facilitate general debates about Swedish politics, feminism, women’s rights, and democracy, frames #MeToo as a political movement for women’s rights, and establishes technical and rhetorical connections between these discursive elements. This performs a sociotechnical frame

extension, where the initial individualised and experience-based #MeToo frame is made to encompass goals of structural change of the gendered power relations that allow for the behaviour that #MeToo speaks out against.

In this sense, the analysed features in all three cases afford searchability and visibility (boyd, 2010) through both incongruence and likeness, and the emergent articulations of feminist opposition visually and discursively point to the magnitude of sexist experiences of harm. Each included post gets legitimised as part of that structural issue. Emergent articulation thus constitute pertinent examples of affinities-based cyborg feminisms using messy grammar (Haraway, 1991; Mitra-Kahn, 2012). In this way, results across sub-studies highlight how actualised affordances of interlinking audiovisual features enable emergent feminist articulation that build on resemblance or incongruence, and is simultaneously material and discursive. They also demonstrate how such articulations intertwine with local discourse. Sweden is used as a case throughout the studies not to suggest exceptionality but to illustrate how emergent articulation is situated within the context of local politics. Most prominently, feminist tags are co-articulated with other tags that connote politics, and consent in sexual encounters is articulated around all examined tags. In #MeToo tweets and #Kvinnostrejtk Instagram posts, tags such as #politics, #womensrights, and #genderequality frame the case tag as an articulation of feminist politics based on gender equality and equal rights. Further, in connection with #MeToo and throughout #WomenInMaleFields videos, sexual consent and coercion is a prominent theme. As Swedish sexual crime law got a consent clause added in 2018, when much of the #MeToo debate took place, consent is articulated in the data as a commonsensical constituent of sexual conduct and breeched consent as a recognisable experience of heterosexual female life, rendering it a comprehensible part of demands for feminist politics. Additionally, sub-studies III and IV demonstrate that content that emerge with #Kvinnostrejtk and Swedish #WomenInMaleFields often address gender-based violence. Among other parameters, levels of gender-based violence in Sweden has long been unchanged, leading to frustrations for feminists.

These examples across sub-studies show how user agency and affordances of features entangle with local politics in particular feminist articulations and circulation practices. While this study highlights hopeful examples of how features can be mobilised for feminism, and how emergent articulations are entangled with localised expressions, there is a continuous need to examine Swedish feminist discourse from an intersectional point of view as pointed out by researchers and activists (see, for instance, Giritli Nygren et al., 2016). This is a proposed next step from my presented results, that unfortunately could not be executed within the timeline of this dissertation project.

Theoretical reflection and contribution

The dissertation as a whole engages with concepts with both social constructivist and new materialist underpinnings – especially entanglement, discourse, framing, mediality, and affordance – and contributes to theoretical discussions around how to empirically disentangle technical features and user practices on social platforms. Discourse and framing are used as analytical tools that identify discursive processes of co-articulation and negotiation of meaning. However, the concept of entanglement works as an overarching theoretical base for analyses, allowing for the inclusion of material infrastructural elements of platform features, as well as the mobilisation and assembling of affect that features afford.

The iteration of entanglement I use is based on the new materialist critique of social constructivism as overemphasising language over matter and embodiment (Barad, 2003; Niccolini & Ringrose, 2019). It re-introduces matter into the formation of social phenomena as constituted by multiple continuous processes of assembling where human and nonhuman elements are intertwined (Barad, 2003; De Landa, 2016; Åsberg et al., 2012). The affordance concept stems from a realist ontological tradition, however, both the original concept and many of its iterations emphasise relationality in how users of an artifact actualise particular properties that an artifact affords (Gibson, 1979;

Hutchby, 2001; Sun & Suthers, 2023). In this dissertation, I therefore emphasise the relational and material-discursive aspects of affordance, and treat it as a mechanism for empirically analysing the entanglement of user agency and features in platformed feminist articulations. I thus treat platformed feminist articulations as techno-cultural where material and discursive elements operate inseparably. Through affordance, I analyse what properties of features are actualised by users, in what ways, and with what emergent audiovisual discursive articulations, negotiations, and techno-cultural circulation practices. In this way, analyses both take the shaping role of technology seriously and highlight user agency while, through affordance, emphasising the relational aspect of digital feminist expression. As the affordance concept emphasises in most of its iterations, it is in the meeting between the human agency of a user and the properties of the material element or computational or design feature that particular practices emerge. When paired with entanglement, this can be understood as continuous, iterative, and discursive-material.

This theoretical contribution mobilises entanglement through the affordance concept in order to disentangle discursive-material-affective political expression into discernible digitally entangled feminist practices. Here, particular properties of features emerge through users' actualisation of them for feminist purposes. Instead of seeing social platform technology as a whole that structures discourse in particular ways (see, for instance, Gillespie, 2018), users and features entangle as users actualise part of what features afford in specific practices. As seen in the analyses here, what emerges from those entanglements becomes something else than its constituent elements, it does not show discourse shaped by technology but rather emergent material-discursive articulation and circulation practices afforded through user-feature entanglements.

For instance, feed interference and incongruent absurdist reversal memes are expressions of such entanglements. Rather than shaped by a static technology, they assemble iteratively and continuously as users inscribe on platform infrastructures and those infrastructures inscribe on users. Importantly, the epistemic exercise of drawing these practices and articulations out done in the included analyses here is also

entangled in how they are assembled, perceived, and described. In this way, ontological and epistemological layers are entangled, both in the data analysed and in the collection and analyses of those data, as my theoretical and methodological tools assemble knowledge in particular ways (Barad, 2003; Haraway, 1988). Below follows a methodological reflection that attempts to highlight some of those entanglements, in order to further situate the conclusions suggested here.

Methodological discussion

Researching a social media phenomenon opens many methodological avenues. The interdisciplinary field of social media research is constantly growing and methods for data collection and analysis are vast. At the same time, commercial platforms like X, Instagram, and TikTok which are under examination here, set limits to how their data can be extracted, which affects what data can be collected and how. During this project, these limits have changed. In 2020 when this project was initiated, then Twitter (now X) offered almost unlimited access to historical data for researchers after an application process, and there were robust methods for scraping other platforms through API access, although that option came with ethical considerations regarding platform terms and conditions, and user integrity. The initial research design emphasised an interplay between software-assisted social network and content analysis of big datasets, and close-reading and discourse analysis of small stratified datasets. However, during the project, many commercial platforms shut down research access to their APIs, Instagram closed gaps that allowed for simple research scrapers to access its data, and TikTok's research API access was assessed by researchers as producing systemic errors (Pearson et al., 2025). Scholars point out that during this time, we have entered a post-API era where access to content and networks are offered by platform companies only to marketing clients and advertisers, whereas researchers need to be creative and apply qualitative methods as data access is sparse (Caliandro, 2025; Perriam et al., 2020).

As pointed out by internet scholars, when researching digital platforms, research design needs to be reflexive and iterative to account for continuous changes in the field (Pousti et al., 2021). In the post-API era, this calls for creative use of qualitative methods for both collection and analysis. Sub-studies III and IV applied qualitative and small-scale data collection and analysis, while sub-study II collected a big data set and applied software-assisted methods of analysis in combination with qualitative discourse analysis. Further, sub-study I contextualised results derived from social media data, triangulating them while centring user agency. This mixed-methods design with a large emphasis on qualitative methods emerged both from technical conditions (restricted API access), but mainly as a reflexive methodological choice.

As this dissertation increasingly examined affordances as mechanisms where users and features of platforms continuously entangle, qualitatively examining articulatory and circulation practices in terms of their constituent elements was methodologically necessary. Importantly, the large dataset in sub-study II enabled a software-assisted mapping of hashtag co-articulations as an emergent ecosystem which guided the subsequent close-reading of such co-articulations as framing practices. This supported the ensuing reflexive move towards a qualitative affordance-based discourse analysis that could pick apart features into what articulations and circulations they afforded in practice. This could shed light on opportunities for feminism across the three examined platforms. As such, this initial quantitative element pushed the methodology towards a flexible and reflexive qualitative approach that was platform-native and used small-scale instruments such as in-app search functions and my personal user accounts for data collection. Mainly, however, it provided an opportunity for triangulation of the overall results that pointed to hopeful affordances, as it showed the large-scale emergent system of meaning built through these small-scale practices.

Examining everyday, persistent practices of feminism on the particular platforms explored here required methods for data collection and analysis that could encompass how articulations are embedded within the platform infrastructure. Here, using Instagram's and TikTok's

native search-functions with my personal user accounts came with both opportunities and restrictions. Search-results were curated to tailor to content matches as well as predicted engagement based on the historical action of the account, search-device, country- and language location (TikTok, 2026b), and possibly more unknown parameters. This curation process was not user-controlled, meaning my research intentions were not matched. However, result pages assemble content in an everyday manner that resembles the experience of a regular user, and visualise them in a platform-native feed style, which added familiarity with the results and research contexts as well as a contextual layer to the analysis. This enabled the analyses to encompass what features afford graphically as well as textually, supporting the multimodal aspect of sub-studies III and IV. Further, the account history could support the collection process by displaying relevant results that were provided as the accounts had previously signalled their interests to the algorithms, rather than using a new account which would have risked filling result pages with noise (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024), although this is an opaque process.

This practice of data collection adheres to principles from digital ethnography where immersion and mobility in and across platform surfaces is encouraged in order to identify the type of socialities that emerge through articulations, networks, negotiations, and circulatory practices entangled with platform infrastructures (Pink et al., 2015; Postill & Pink, 2012). As data were collected and analysed embedded in their infrastructural context, entangled platform-native articulations could be identified across infrastructural surfaces, for instance, assembled curated feeds of news of femicide, feed disruption, multimodal meme formats or alignment in comment sections. These results could triangulate interview data, where users expressed how they mobilised features for these specific purposes.

While the aim of the study as a whole was to examine feminist articulations and pick apart features to show their potentialities for feminism to circulate in a persistent manner that carves at commercial infrastructures, critique against platform companies and their questionable promises of a meaningful voice becomes difficult when datasets are not collected in structured ways through API queries which

could render representative data. Further, the dissertation does not examine quantitative engagement metrics for content, and as a consequence, does not include an analysis of differences in production conditions which, for instance, should include access to finances that provides opportunities for targeted reach. It instead sheds light on hopeful opportunities and particular techno-rhetorical properties of emergent feminist articulations. It could have taken a more critical stance arguing for platform accountability and policy change, basing such critique on quantitative engagement-based metrics that could highlight who is allowed to speak and be heard on digital platforms. However, the methods used for data collection and analysis enabled the dissertation to develop a deep understanding of how specific technology-user entanglements afford feminism to be articulated and circulated in platform-native and localised ways, which elicits hope from within a critical tradition of social media studies.

Future research

Research on other cases of nationally localised and platform-native feminist expressions that mobilise hashtags and other technical audiovisual features to articulate and circulate feminism could add to and extend conclusions and suggested concepts in this study. For instance, soft feminist resistance can be used as an analytical concept that groups persistent activist practices that actualise particular affordances of platforms to circulate feminist articulations in shrewd ways through, for instance, feed interference, curation, tag co-articulation, and structured meme templates. Through the lens of softness, practices can be seen as occupying a material property that allows such articulations to circulate and overflow porous limits set by ideologically charged platform logics and infrastructure. In this way, platform logics can be held accountable while analyses focus on hopeful opportunities to productively use and repurpose them. In addition, emergent localised feminist articulations should also be further probed through intra-feminist critical lenses of intersectionality and post-feminism.

Additionally, collection and analyses of big datasets through software can further triangulate such results, showing how these practices circulate articulations in quantitative measurements and what role production conditions such as financial means play in opportunities for reach. However, such conclusions should be nuanced with qualitative close-readings of content and user interactions, as this stays close to the context in which content is embedded and yields more precise results. Interviews with content creators can further highlight how platformed articulations entangle with experiences of activist fatigue as well as feelings of solidarity, community, and with online-offline relations.

Further, future research can extend explorations of feminist articulations as co-constituted by multiple features and surfaces within platform infrastructures. When comment sections, likes, shares, saves, and collaborative features such as TikTok's duet and stitch, are seen as co-constitutive sites of meaning negotiations to posts, analyses increase their trustworthiness as these negotiations are always part of users' encounters with content. Thus, similar to sub-study IV here, feminist articulations need to empirically include such collaborative features that go beyond posts.

Lastly, as platforms continuously change, research also needs to follow platforms, ensuring a critical perspective on what this means for feature affordances in relation to emergent political agency on commercial platforms. This further reinforces a call for iterative and flexible methods that can develop platform-specific analytical tools to examine such themes and articulations.

Conclusion

Across the sub-studies, what emerges is digitally entangled feminist meanings and goals that assemble through users' engagement with platform features, affording specific articulations and circulation within the particular infrastructures of Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. These feminist articulations are embedded in everyday interactions on platforms, and surface in conjunction with other assembled feeds and memetic expressions. By mobilising platform-native vernaculars like incongruent memetic humour, hashtag co-articulation and re-appropriation, and tag-facilitated feed curation, these feminist practices constitute examples of soft resistance through techno-rhetorical strategies; sharp, shrewd, and crafty practices that add to the struggle for feminist goals, placing them alongside other activist initiatives like consciousness-raising through other media, as well as resistance initiatives such as feminist digilante action, street-protests, and petitions. Further, results demonstrate how platform technology and its features can be ideologically charged and power-laden while still allowing for counter-hegemonic discourse to be articulated within the borders of their infrastructures. In this sense, by displaying how technology, user action, and local politics entangle in these articulations, the dissertation emphasises productive avenues for doing feminist resistance in algorithmic, engagement-based, and post-feminist, realities.

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Digitally Entangled Feminism

This dissertation explores digital feminist practices through #MeToo, #Kvinnostrejck, and #WomenInMaleFields on Swedish Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. Sweden functions as an illustrative example of how platform-user entanglements include platform-native and nationally localised discourse. Combining discourse analysis and interviews with feminist content creators, the included sub-studies demonstrate creative and boundary-pushing practices that move feminist expressions through social media.

In explorations of what hashtags, sounds, visual effects, and other platform features do when mobilised by feminist content creators, results point to how feminist resistance practices shrewdly fill, overflow, and extend boundaries imposed by commercial platforms. Like expanding foam or soft serve ice cream, this feminist resistance moves subtly through platforms by gathering individual experiences into curated collections, pushing feminist content into unrelated feeds, or redirecting harmful patterns into feminist humour. The dissertation answers calls for new understandings of digital activism, as social platforms host ever-evolving ways to be political in the contemporary online public sphere.

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