

“Homophobia is so last century”: activism of telenovela fans in defense of fictional lesbians couples

*“La homofobia es tan del siglo pasado”:
activismo de los fanáticos de las telenovelas
en defensa de parejas lesbianas de la ficción*
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2020.7312>

CECÍLIA ALMEIDA
RODRIGUES LIMA,¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9771-0396>

GÊSA KARLA CAVALCANTI ²

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2453-0968>

This paper analyses the activity of fans who shipped two fictional lesbian couples from recent Rede Globo's telenovelas. It proposes a reflection over the concept of fan activism (Bennet, 2012) by identifying the practices of LGBTQ communities who acted in order to defend lesbian representativeness in television. The research has a qualitative approach and made use of methodological procedures from Grounded Theory and netnography to process a data basis of 52 515 tweets.

KEYWORDS: Activism, fans, telenovelas, Twitter, LGBTQ, lesbians, social television, homophobia.

Este artículo analiza la actividad de los fans de dos parejas de lesbianas de recientes telenovelas de la Red Globo. Propone una reflexión sobre el concepto de activismo de los fanáticos (Bennet, 2012) al clasificar las prácticas de estas comunidades que actuaron para defender la representatividad LGBTQ en la televisión. La investigación tiene un enfoque cualitativo y ha utilizado los procedimientos metodológicos de la Grounded Theory y netnografía para procesar una base de datos de 52 515 tweets.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Activismo, fans, telenovelas, Twitter, LGBTQ, lesbianas, televisión social, homofobia.

How to cite:

Almeida Rodrigues Lima, C. & Cavalcanti, G. K. (2020). “Homophobia is so last century”: activism of telenovela fans in defense of fictional lesbians couples. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, e7312. <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2020.7312>

¹ Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Brazil.
cecilia.almeida1@gmail.com

² Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Brazil.
gesakarla@hotmail.com

Submitted: 17/07/18. Accepted: 18/02/20. Published: 18/03/20

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the coordinated practices taken by fans in defense of fictional lesbian couples present in Rede Globo's dramaturgy, identifying how these groups have organized themselves collectively to gain visibility, raise awareness and pressure the TV network, manifesting in a way that is similar to activism (Bennet, 2012; Van Zoonen, 2004). For this case, we will focus on two couples that attracted an intense fan culture in digital environments: Clara and Marina (from the telenovela *Em Família - Helena's Shadow*, 2014); and Lica and Samantha (from the telenovela *Malhação Viva a Diferença –Young Hearts– Embrace the Difference*, 2017). The analysis focuses on the fans activity on Twitter.

These couples managed to mobilize social networks, generating consistent activism and shipping practices and causing more repercussion than other central narrative aspects in the referenced telenovelas. They can be considered examples of fan activism due to a number of organized tactics to gain more visibility and attention within social media, in a collective effort to pressure Globo and expand the fan base.

We argue that the specificities of the telenovela have potentialized the expectations and the level of investment of fans, who understood that their activity was capable of interfering with the text. This combination of factors assigns a greater level of complexity to the relations between fans and producers mediated by digital platforms.

The following sections present a theoretical framework about telenovelas, describing the particularities of the genre that may encourage fan activism, especially in the context of social media. It then shows a brief history about lesbian depiction in telenovelas. Afterwards, we discuss the results.

TELEVISION AND REPRESENTATION

When discussing the concept of discursive representation, Hall (2016) states that cultural meanings do not exist only in our heads, they enable us to think about how certain social practices are organized, they regulate our conduct and, as a consequence, have practical effects.

Brazil is a country highly influenced by network television channels, and Rede Globo, the largest media conglomerate in Latin America (Media Ownership Monitor Brasil, 2019), plays an important role in shaping public opinion –not only through their journalistic programs, but also through fiction–. Television has the potential to provide visibility to certain subjects so they can be discussed by society. According to Wolton (1996), television must have the triple purpose of informing, entertaining and educating, serving as a potential tool for social integration and democracy. A network as strong as Globo should be able to connect three essential dimensions: the past and the present, social classes and national identity (Wolton, 1996).

Because of this potential, television is often an arena of discursive disputes that seek to define and classify sexuality and different sexual practices. As such, the depiction of LGBTQIA+³ people in television fiction incites controversy and promotes debates about homosexuality, homophobia, transphobia, violence and self-acceptance.

Brazil has more than 210 million inhabitants, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2019) and although there is no precise statistic regarding the number of LGBT+ Brazilians, a study conducted by the NGO Grupo Gay da Bahia (2019) estimates that around 20 million Brazilian are gay men (10% of the population), 12 million are lesbians (6%) and 1 million are transgender people (0.5%). This means a fairly significant demographic group, especially considering the large number of underreporting. However, sexual and gender minorities are underrepresented in politics and the media, and are subject to physical and symbolic violence and deprivation of its rights.

The Brazilian National Congress consists mostly of right-wing conservative politicians and there is significant participation of leaders from different religious groups. The coordination of these groups, according to Machado (in Bedinelli, 2017), results in a strong moral conservatism.

Although homosexuality in Brazil, according to Cordão (2017), has never been considered a crime by the Penal Code, differently from

³ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersexual, asexual and others.

what still happens in more than 70 countries, “the non-typification of the homosexual practice as a criminal offense has never ensured the LGBTQ population the status of citizen” (Cordão, 2017, p. 2). The author also highlights that the achievements of sexual minorities are followed by an increase of intolerance and hate crimes by radical groups. According to a report made by Grupo Gay da Bahia (2019), every 20 hours a LGBTQIA+ person is murdered or commits suicide, making Brazil the world champion of this type of crime.

This context of social vulnerability and invisibility has effects in the mass media, in which the LGBTQIA+ community is rarely present.

Cuklanz (1999) notes that there is a historically relevant and complex relationship between television and social change. And because television is one of the media that most deliver images and speeches on a daily basis, it is part of the process of how we give meaning to things, helping to weave the fabric of everyday life, modeling political opinions and social behaviors, as well as providing material with which people forge their identity (Kellner, 2001, p. 9).

The telenovela is the most important televisual product in Brazil, being highly consumed by the masses. As such, it is an important and strategic environment for presenting social causes to the general public and to legitimize the existence of social minorities. The next section presents some of the key features of this narrative genre.

THE BRAZILIAN TELENVELA

According to Sodré (1988), “the telenovela’s formula –a mixture of feuilleton spiced by the imaginary of the patriarchal family in mutation– is typically Brazilian” (p. 66). The Brazilian telenovela deals with domestic themes at the same time it attempts to discuss the social contexts which allows its appearance. To Vassallo de Lopes (2003), the telenovela is a privileged mediator of the national imaginary, capable of expressing private dramas in public terms.

Marriage, adultery, family intrigues, covet, love triangles, among other recurrent themes appear amid situations which try to represent and discuss the Brazilian society itself. The mixture of realism and imagery, tradition and invention, greatly contributes to the integration of millions

of illiterates in Brazilian society (Wolton, 1996). This educational role is explicitly stated by telenovelas’ authors. Benedito Ruy Barbosa, for example, declares that the telenovela is a means of politicizing the population (as cited in Balogh, 1998). Telenovelas are so inscribed in the national identity that, according to Wolton (1996), it acts as a reflection of all the Brazilian stories. Because of this, telenovelas are one of the great forces of television.

With an average length of 169 episodes (Lima, 2018), the Brazilian telenovela is a story told by televisual images with dialogues and action, creating both provisory and definite conflicts. The provisory ones are being gradually solved or replaced throughout the narrative. The definite conflicts, in general, are only solved in the ending. Every year, Rede Globo produces and displays three to five different telenovelas, which are replaced by a new one when they end.

Pallottini (2012) calls the structure of the telenovela “peculiarly open” since it is “susceptible to receive the influx of the consumer – the famous feedback–” (p. 56). Their productive process and filming are initiated before it is even fully written, in a way that the writing of the screenplay continues while the telenovela is on air –this means that is processual work, aired almost at the same time is being constructed–. For this reason, it needs to be open to risks of chance –such as an actor who gets sick or being rejected by the audience–.

Since the production’s ultimate purpose is to obtain the better audience rates as possible, the plot may be modified throughout the trajectory of the program after being judged by the audience (Palottini, 2012). Entire plots may be changed and the total number of episodes of the telenovela may be made more flexible so it has a longer or shorter duration than the predicted one.

This aspect of the telenovela’s structure contributes to a greater feeling of cooperation by the audience, since they believe their comments regarding the narrative are valid and can effectively change things. As we will observe in the following sections, this aspect is crucial for fan communities, which can be highly engaged telenovela audiences (Ronsini, Brignol, Storch, Marques, Foletto & Corrêa, 2015), especially since they understand that they hold a valuable role to the production. However, the same is true for audiences heavily

committed to destroying narrative aspects such as anti-fans (Gray, 2003; Theodoropoulo, 2007). This intensifies the dispute between groups with opposing views, in the case of this study, progressive and conservative sectors of society. Since the audience is aware that their actions and practices may interfere with the very existence of the text, they often make use of tactics to gain visibility and express their love, or, conversely, their discomfort with characters and/or plots (Lima, 2018; Pallottini, 2012; Ronsini et al., 2015).

Considering all the aspects discussed this far, the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters in telenovelas poses an object of controversy in itself. Popular culture representation actively participates in the process of producing meaning on the concept of homosexuality, especially in a televisual production of such wide reach as the Brazilian telenovela is.

Globo has 54 years of history, but there has only been a hand full of significant examples of gay, lesbian, bisexuals and/or transgender characters who go beyond one-dimensional stereotypes in telenovelas. After decades, the representation of the LGBTQIA+ characters in Brazilian teledramaturgy remains rare, when not inexistent. Since this study is focused on the fan activity revolving two lesbian couples, we will now recover a brief history regarding the depiction of lesbians in Brazilian telenovelas.

PORTRAYAL OF LESBIANS IN BRAZILIAN TELENOVELAS

In many of the examples that follow, lesbian characters in telenovelas fill a merely “pedagogical” function (and this can be extended to LGBTQIA+ characters in general). They are present on screen, but are still treated differently than heterosexual couples –physical contact and the display of affection between homosexuals are usually avoided by the narrative, whereas the sexual relations between heterosexual characters are naturalized–.

The first telenovela to ever depict a lesbian couple was called *Vale Tudo* (*Anything Goes*, 1988-1989). Due to government censorship and negative audience feedback, many dialogues between the characters Cecilia and Lais were cut off (Drummond, 2015). Ultimately, Cecilia was killed off the show, ending the relationship abruptly.

During the 1990's, the depiction of gay and lesbian characters focused mainly on themes like the discovery process of sexual identity, self-acceptance, social coexistence and prejudice (Colling, 2007). In 1998, the telenovela *Torre de Babel* (*The Babel Tower*) introduced the couple Leila and Rafaela, two mature women who lived a lasting and stable relationship, similar to a marriage. At the time, the negative feedback and the interference of religious and conservative groups caused the author Silvio de Abreu to change the narrative. Both characters were eventually killed off in the explosion of a shopping mall.

Mulheres Apaixonadas (*Women in Love*, 2003) portrayed a couple of white, beautiful, thin and middle-class teenagers, who were able to captivate the general public. Clara and Rafaela were the first lesbian couple to kiss in a telenovela, although it is worth mentioning that the kiss happened while the two girls were doing a retelling of Romeo and Juliet in a school play. The fact that they were two beautiful, white, young and feminine women reveals the role played by beauty and gender standards in public opinion. There was controversy and negative feedback, but also a strong positive one. This aspect is also evident in the two cases that will be analyzed later.

Senhora do Destino (*Her Own Destiny*, 2004-2005) also featured a lesbian couple, Eleonora and Jennifer, who discussed their relationship more openly than previous examples. Borges and Spink (2009) claim that this was the first narrative to present an ongoing and explicit relationship between women: they did not disappear during the plot and their association is named and discussed throughout the telenovela.

Em Família (*Helena's Shadow*, 2014), presented Clara, a young married woman who fell in love with Marina. They end up marrying each other in the last episode of the show. Once again, both women were played by actresses who were in compliance with beauty standards. Giovanna Antonelli, who played Clara, was already a famous and beloved actress at the time. Regarding public opinion and fandom activity, we will address this case with more detail later.

Babilônia (*Ambitious Women*, 2015) portrayed a couple of elderly women who had a long lasting marriage. In this case, the reaction of religious and more conservative sectors of society was intense, especially because the narrative tried to show more frequent public

displays of affection between the two women. The positive response was not strong enough, so the couple was almost erased from the narrative.

Finally, *Malhação-Viva a Diferença* (*Young Hearts-Embrace Diversity*, 2017) presented two teenagers, Lica and Samantha, who were widely accepted by the target audience. Their relationship was jeopardized by a love triangle with a boy, but they manage to get back together in the end. Regarding public opinion and fandom activity, we will address this case with more detail later.

As seen, there are not many examples of lesbian characters in Brazilian telenovelas, and some of them have suffered external pressures and been made invisible within their narrative. This aspect increases the concern of lesbian audiences, who feel like they have to fight for the existence of lesbian depiction on television.

In the context of media convergence and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2008), fan communities use social media to create connections and communities with each other, but also in a way that it is similar to activism, in order to express their desires to the TV network. The next section will present the concept of fan activism in the digital and connected age.

FAN CULTURES AND ACTIVISM

As Pullen and Cooper (2010) state, digital social networks have favored the potential of citizenship for LGBTQIA+ people, since the processes of construction and negotiation of identities are also carried out through online communities and environments. The author also notes that social media provide opportunities for political mobilization and self-reflection about identities. Popular culture and representational practices are open to dispute, through which LGBTQIA+ people can fight for their identities. As such, the depiction of lesbian couples on mass television tends to mobilize LGBTQIA+ audiences, in a way to guarantee their mediatic existence. This aspect of self-identity is strongly related to fandom (Ronsini et al., 2015).

Fans, a group of consumers characterized by their affective and intense engagement with the text (Sandvoss, 2013; Hills, 2002)

find on social media an environment to build communities, express their opinions, produce playful content and call the attention of the producers. According to Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison & Weigel (2009), one of the characteristics of the participatory culture in the era of networks is the diminishing of barriers for engagement in content production. This generates a context in which the members of a fandom or an online community “... believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connections with one another” (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 7).

In the case of the telenovela, we consider that this aspect –the diminishing of barriers– is particularly reinforced because of some of the genre’s properties –its productive process and its preference for social themes, as discussed above–. These elements permeate the experience of telenovela fans, which many times engage in activism practices.

van Zoonen (2004) affirms that fans are more likely to organize themselves in groups. The author compares fans to citizens, affirming that both groups present similarities. The difference is in the subjectivities in which they are based: affective relations, in the case of fans, and cognitive processes, in the case of citizens. However, both fan cultures and democracy have as fundamental elements the circulation of information, discussions and activism (van Zoonen, 2004).

Amaral, Souza and Monteiro (2015) indicate that especially since the 2010’s, fan scholars worried about investigating the relationship between fan practices and political participation, even though the theme is not necessarily a novelty. The term “fan activism” appeared to fulfill the demands of these forms of political engagement within fandoms.

In the definition of Ronsini et al. (2015), fan activism may be understood as one of the possible practices in the scope of fandoms, among which the members of these communities start to interact and organize themselves around one or more causes. This kind of activism does not necessarily intend to become an organized social movement: “It is ephemeral, with sporadic associations, articulated from a momentary and individual engagement, activated, many times, by the consumption of a cultural product or the affection for an actor, director or media producer” (Ronsini et al., 2015, p. 224). Even so, fan activism

indicates a renewed form of participation, crossed by the dynamics of the participatory culture and online social media.

To Bennet (2012), fan activism is related to social mobilization, due to the feeling of closeness between fandom and celebrities provided by social media platforms. When directly “called” by their idols to engage in a cause, fans would collectively organize themselves to propagate a message or idea. However, “fans are also using these social tools, without direct prompting or input from the celebrity, to organize and mobilize themselves in these acts” (Bennet, 2012, n. p.).

Bennet (2012) indicates that social media are a vital tool for the coordination of these groups, who engage in practices such as e-mail campaigns, the creation of online petitions and boycotts. Fans use social media to extend the reach of their campaigns, using hashtags, which work as conversation indexers within the network, and retweets, which allow the replication of Twitter publications (Bennet, 2012). All of these practices were evident in the observed fandoms, as we shall soon demonstrate.

Brough and Shrestova (2012) suggest that fan activism would be an intersection between cultural and political participation. It is usually associated to fan mobilization having the aim of reaching a common objective—such as maintaining a TV show on air, the promotion of certain social themes or the representation of sexual and ethnic minorities—. Although authors such as Earl and Kimport (2009) consider that these fan activities do not have a political intention, Brough and Shrestova (2012) affirm that this conclusion is problematic, since the borders between culture and politics are porous and many fan campaigns have a profoundly political orientation. Fans organize themselves surrounding “real” problems through their engagement with a cultural product.

SHIPPING AS ACTIVISM

Amaral, Souza and Monteiro (2015) understand activism as “a practice of daily resistance” (p. 146), although this resistance, in many cases, reaffirms the entertainment industry itself. The authors indicate noteworthy practices of the fan culture, such as fanzines; fanfictions, fan arts, fan videos; subtitling; crowdfunding; marathons; meetings

with artists and collective manifestations. Regarding the latter, we may highlight the element known as shipping, “when fans unite themselves to promote their favorite couples of telenovelas and TV series” (p. 149).

Shippers are fans that, according to Johnson (2007), concentrate a great part of their interest in the text around the romantic encounters of specific characters. It may be stated that their pleasure in the text depends on the diegetic potential of insinuating, suggesting or preserving these romances.

The selected cases for this study demonstrate the intersection between the narrative interests of shippers with the necessities of lesbian audiences regarding media representation. The communities relentlessly used social media platforms, attempting to protect the couples and avoid an undesired outcome. The following sections present the methodological procedures and the results of the analysis.

CLARINA AND LIMANTHA

This study focuses on the network of fan activists who shipped lesbian couples from two recent Brazilian telenovelas. The two fan communities (Limantha fans and Clarina fans) were composed mainly by women who identified themselves as lesbians or bisexuals. These cases deserve to be highlighted because they managed to mobilize social networks, generating consistent activism and shipping practices and causing more repercussion than other central narrative aspects in the referenced telenovelas. They can be considered examples of fan activism due to a number of organized tactics to gain more visibility and attention within social media, in a collective effort to pressure Globo and expand the fan base.

There were other examples of lesbian representation in recent productions, such as the elderly ladies from the telenovela *Babilônia* (*Ambitious Women*, 2015), which, however, were not that popular and ended up succumbing to the wills of conservative groups.

Clarina

Em Família (*Helena's Shadow*) was a telenovela aired at 9 PM by Rede Globo from February 3rd to July 18th, 2014. It focused on the conflicts lived by Helena, a traumatized woman after having gone through an

abusive relationship with her cousin. Clara, her youngest sister, was married to Cadu, with whom she had a son. During the narrative, Clara falls for the seductive photographer Marina. After overcoming social barriers and personal conflicts, in the last episode, the two of them marry and their union is sealed with a kiss. The outcome was interpreted by the fandom as a victory over the most prejudiced sectors of society.

Limantha

Malhação (Young Hearts) is a hybrid production, a mixture of TV series and telenovela, which is broadcasted from Monday to Friday at 5 PM and has teenagers as their target audience. It is divided into seasons, as a TV series, but each season lasts for about eight months. Each season completely renews its cast, characters and stories. Those seasons similarly depict teenagers and typical dramas of this age range. For this, we can consider that each season is a telenovela regarding the way the product is made, its daily broadcast, narrative development (hooks, structure, etc.) is very similar to the Brazilian telenovela.

Embrace Diversity was the 25th season of *Malhação*. It aired from May 8th, 2017 to March 5th, 2018, and was the first one to represent the romance between two women: Lica and Samantha.

FIGURE 1

ART CREATED BY SHIPPERS OF THE COUPLE *LIMANTHA*



Source: Research data (2017).

Just like the previously mentioned case, *Limantha*'s relationship was crossed by a love triangle which involved a boy, Felipe. The season ended with the celebration of the love between the two girls. The production was so successful that after 13 years of being aired exclusively in Brazil, *Young Hearts* drew the attention of an international audience and was exported to other countries. Among other factors, this occurred due to the great visibility produced by the *Limantha* fandom in social media. During the process of data collection, we noticed that the more engaged fans revolved around the couple, and that the greater international repercussion was also related to *Limantha*. Figure 1 shows the concern of the fans in making their content international and accessible to speakers of various languages; at the same time it illustrates the intersection between shippers of the two telenovelas studied in this paper.

DELIMITATION OF DATA AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

This is a qualitative and descriptive study, which made use of the observational method for the generation and analysis of the data, based on the principles of Grounded Theory (Fragoso, Recuero & Amaral, 2011), a perspective which considers that theory should emerge from the data and its systematic observation, comparison, classification and analysis of similarities and dissimilarities (Fragoso, Recuero & Amaral, 2011). The research also benefits from the principles of netnography (Kozinets, 2010), although the observation has been carried out passively and was not informed to the community.

Twitter was chosen for being the social media platform in which we have noticed more investment of the fandom in activism tactics. All the collected content is public, and most of it had the intention of becoming visible to the greater quantity of people as possible. Twitter is also one of the most important platforms for social TV strategies employed by Rede Globo, since the informational structure of a microblog favors both the tracking and the formation of emergent fan networks.

Using data mining techniques, we have collected tweets with the terms “Clarina” and “Limantha”. From this first data collection, we identified other hashtags which matched the study's interest,

because they were created with the explicit intention of reaching Twitter's Trending Topics. The following terms were also mined: "I am Clarina until the end", "Globo homophobia is so last century", "Clarina without hypocrisy", "Clarina is not the problem Rede Globo", "Stop the prejudice with Clarina", "Fly off the handle Clara", "Itaú and Natura sponsor prejudice", "Clarina Wedding of the Year", "Limantha represents me", "Limantha dignified ending", "Representation with respect", "Limantha is love", "Limantha First Love", "Limantha goes out of the closet", "Samantha deserves better", "Limantha Embraced The Difference", "Limantha made history".⁴

As this is not a quantitative study, just a sample of the tweets was collected, with the total of 52 515 tweets, published by 4 907 different profiles. The sample allowed us to observe a considerable scope of fan practices, in a qualitative approach. The objective was not to quantify the frequency of these practices, but to understand how the fans organized themselves.

GENERAL INSIGHTS

On Twitter, the analyzed fandoms engaged in collective tactics to address three recipients: themselves, building bonds and communal relationships; Rede Globo, at times as an ally and others as a potential enemy, depending on its attitudes regarding the couple in the telenovela; and a common enemy: defenders of the "Traditional Brazilian Family" (TBF). The term is a reference to moralist sectors of the society, which actively seek to censor or banish the depiction of lesbian couples in Globo's telenovelas. The following tweet was posted during the scene in which Clara and Marina finally kiss onscreen:

4 "Sou Clarina até o fim", "Globo homophobia is so last century", "Clarina sem hipocrisia", "Clarina nao é o problema Rede Globo", "Chega de preconceito com Clarina", "Chuta o balde Clara", "Itaú e Natura patrocinando preconceito", "Clarina Casamento do Ano", " "Limantha me representa", "Limantha final digno", "Representação com respeito", "Limantha é amor", "Limantha Primeiro Amor", "Limantha se assume", "Samantha deserves better", "LimanthaFezADiferença", "Limantha fez história".

Tweet #9 903: YOU KNOW WHAT I HEAR? THAT’S RIGHT THE CRIES OF THE BRAZILIAN FAMILY⁵

Both couples attracted very engaged fans, who dedicated themselves in daily practices of text evaluation and personalization (Baym, 2000; Jenkins, 1992). Twitter is a place where these fans share meanings and personal testimonials, relating the plot to their own lives. The platform is also used for sharing immediate reactions to the text, in the practice of live-tweeting, which occurs simultaneously to the exhibition of the program on the television. By doing that, the community feels they are watching together (co-viewing), by sharing their emotions and impressions (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012).

Based on these testimonies, we could observe that the fan base is mainly formed by cis young women, who identify themselves as lesbian or bisexuals. Fans often used the experiences lived by the characters to talk about their own experiences as lesbians or bisexuals, addressing issues such as personal acceptance, family acceptance, etc. (Baym, 2000). These testimonies often had an activist purpose of showing the general public the importance of lesbian characters as a way of asserting their identities.

Tweet #25 993: The fight is not about heterosexuals against homosexuals, the fight is for the right to exist, to love, to not needing to open up to your parents because you are in love with someone like you, to not being treated badly or stereotyped.⁶

In average, each profile has published 10.7 tweets. However, 3 827 profiles published less than 10 times, which means that 22% of the profiles were the most engaged and published content more

⁵ SABE O QUE EU TÔ OUVINDO ? ISSO MESMO O CHORO DA FAMÍLIA BRASILEIRA.

⁶ “A luta não é de héteros contra homoafetivos, a luta é pelo direito de existir, de amar, de não precisar conversar com os pais porque está apaixonada por alguém como você, por não ser mal tratada, esteriotipada. RepresentaçãoComRespeito” (Tweet #25 993).

frequently. The 10 more active profiles published, in average, 357 tweets. The sample with the greater number of profiles (2 658) corresponds to the fandom *Limantha*. Both samples were composed mainly by Brazilian fans, but also included a few residents of countries like Portugal, Spain and the United States, showing that the fandom efforts to reach an international audience were successful.

A great amount of these young women –especially within the *Limantha* community– are teenagers who declare in their tweets that they live with their parents and still feel the need to hide their sexual identity. We identified recurring testimonials made by fans who say they need to disguise their emotions when they are watching the shows next to their parents. For example, the following tweets were posted by different profiles during Clara and Marina’s wedding:

Tweet #8 909: MY PARENTS KEEP ON TALKING SHIT, LITTLE DO THEY KNOW LOL ⁷

Tweet #9 902: I can’t freak out because my parents are next to me :(⁸

Tweet #9 828: my dad like “did they have to kiss? what a trash!”
WHERE’S A GIRL TO KISS ME IN FRONT OF HIM?!?!?⁹

On social media platforms, they feel they are free and welcomed by a fan community. In this sense, fandom constitutes a safe space. The bonds created within the community fulfill a need for comforting. Declarations of love and gratitude for the community were recurrent:

Tweet #311: Oh, I love this fandom! I have so much fun! I love you guys!¹⁰

⁷ *MEUS PAIS FICAM FALANDO MERDA, MAL ELES SABEM LKJLFKJHFDH*

⁸ *“N posso pírar pq meus pais estão do lado :(“*

⁹ *Meu pai “tinha que beijar? que baixaria!” CADE ALGUMA MENINA PRA ME BEIJAR NA FRENTE DELE?!?!?*

¹⁰ *Ai, adoro este fandom! Me divirto tanto! Amo vocês!*

Tweet #419: Until tomorrow, my beautiful people, thank you for the company, you're the most faithful FANDOM in the world <3¹¹

Tweet #25 723: You guys make me so proud, I love this fandom¹²

As there are examples of telenovelas that murdered lesbian characters or shortened stories due to negative feedback, these fans were invested in collective practices as a way of trying to protect the characters. This is made evident by their own tactics: almost every day, an influential member of the fan community (a profile with many followers) would propose a common hashtag so that the fandom could be seen on Twitter's Trending Topics.

FAN ACTIVISM PRACTICES

As we have seen, the public opinion about a determined character or plot may modify the narrative of a telenovela. Telenovela fans are aware of these specificities and engage in activism practices in digital social media to fight for the text, in a cooperative or confrontational way, depending on the narrative events. The fandoms organized themselves to expand their network, attracting supporters of the defended cause, behaving as politically engaged citizens (van Zoonen, 2004).

One of these visibility tactics is the previously mentioned “hashtag of the day”. Profiles exclusively dedicated to the characters (i.e. @ForClarina and @TagsLimantha) consulted the fandom so that each fan had the opportunity of suggesting a hashtag (using the Twitter mention tool). The following tweet illustrates this process:

Tweet #42 487: Do you want to help choosing the tag? Easy! Just follow this profile here >>>>> @TagsLimantha. Send your suggestions, vote every day to choose the daily tag¹³

¹¹ *Até amanhã meu povo lindo, obrigada pela cia FANDOM mais fiel do mundo <3*

¹² *Vocês me matam de orgulho cara, amo um fandom.*

¹³ *“Querem fazer parte da escolha das tags? Fácil! Só seguir esse perfil aqui*

The fans individually sent phrases or tags to the profile, which then chose three suggestions that would be voted on by the community. The election had a few rules, which are demonstrated in the tweet below:

Tweet #42 488:

Organization:

1. Anyone can make a tag suggestion.
2. Send suggestions before the scheduled day.
3. Voting will be done within 24 hours before the scheduled day.
4. The vote will be among the 3 that stand out.
5. The one with the highest percentage of votes will be the “official of the day”.¹⁴

After the election, all members would use the hashtag or phrase it in their tweets, in an attempt of reaching Twitter’s Trending Topics. Figure 2 shows how fans taught each other how to write their tweets the most efficiently to get the tag to the trending topics:

Many tweets in the database had the intent of teaching the members of the community to write in a more efficient way for the Twitter algorithm (for examples: not using the character “#”, not using the tag before the scheduled time, not repeating tweets, among other strategies). Reaching the Trending Topics list was always seen as a group effort, a collective victory.

A mass-tweeting campaign could usually take a tone of demand and complaint, as a way of pressuring Rede Globo to treat lesbian characters with the same respect given to the heterosexual couples. As Rede Globo started to be more present on Twitter, giving explicit signs that it was

>>>>> @TagsLimantha. Mandem suas sugestões, vai ter votação todos os dias pra escolher a tag do dia”.

- ¹⁴ Organização: 1. Qualquer pessoa pode dar sugestão de tag. 2. Enviem sugestões antes do dia previsto para subirmos. 3. A votação será feita 24h antes do dia previsto. 4. A votação será entre as 3 que se destacarem. 5. A que tiver maior porcentagem de votos será a “oficial do dia”.

FIGURE 2
 MASS TWEETING CAMPAIGN BY CLARINA SHIPPERS



Source: Research data (2014).

following and monitoring the conversations (Lima, 2018), these fan tactics have also become more frequent.

During *Helena's Shadow*, *Clarina* shippers started to notice that scenes featuring the couple which appeared in the sneak peeks were being cut in the final version of the episode. This provoked a strong reaction because the fans started to fear that the couple was being censored. The risk was taken seriously and fans started threatening to boycott the telenovela, asking their followers to turn off the TV while the show was on air.

Tweet #3 392: @rede_globo if you keep this up we ARE GOING TO BOYCOTT THE TELENOVELA!¹⁵

Tweet #3 422: TODAY IS BOYCOTT DAY!!! NO ONE CAN TURN THE TELEVISION ON FOR THE LOVE OF GOD!¹⁶

Tweet #4 366: I'm in favor of a boycott today. RT if you agree.¹⁷

¹⁵ (@rede_globo), se continuar assim VAI ROLAR BOICOTE DE AUDIÊNCIA!

¹⁶ HOJE É DIA DE BOICOTE!!! NINGUÉM VENDO A NOVELA, PELAMORDEZEUS! *Clarina Não É O Problema Globo.*

¹⁷ *Sou a favor de boicote hj.quem concorda RT.*

They started a series of mass-tweeting campaigns to raise awareness, in which they would post sentences like “Stop the prejudice with Clarina”, “Globo homophobia is so last century” and “Clarina is not the problem Globo”, mentioning Globo’s official profiles on Twitter (@rede_globo and @gshow). They also started creating memes and fan videos expressing their resentment. These tweets had the purpose of raising awareness and pressuring Globo.

FIGURE 3
MEME RECREATED BY THE CLARINA FANDOM



Translation: Globo used to cut *Clarina* scenes! Not anymore.

Source: Research data (2014).

Eventually they started mentioning the brands which sponsored *Helena’s Shadow*, such as the bank Itaú and the company Natura, calling them out as “sponsors of prejudice”. The following tweets, posted by different profiles, show that:

Tweet 3 263: #ItauAndNaturaSponsoringPrejudice You guys, let’s put this TAG on top to attack the sponsors!! Clarina is not the problem Globo¹⁸

¹⁸ #ItauENaturaPatrocinandoPreconceito Gente, vamos subir essa TAG pra atacar os patrocinadores!! Clarina Não É O Problema Globo.

Tweet #3 221: Are you sure you want to support globo? Itaú and Natura Sponsor Prejudice!¹⁹

Some fans also started mentioning local and international news websites, such AfterEllen, the North-American lesbian culture website, which discussed the subject in more than one occasion,²⁰ and the Hispanic website “Hay una Lesbiana en mi sopa”.²¹

In addition to mass-tweeting, fans used Twitter to coordinate e-mail campaigns to producers. They also organized themselves to massively vote in online polls proposed by Globo, trying to guarantee positive results.

Tweet #107: Don’t forget to send an email to customer service, I already sent mine! Remember: no swearing!! Stop the prejudice with Clarina²²

Tweet #118: Done, I did my part. Email sent to the customer service and here I am using the hashtag and also voting in the poll, let’s go²³

In both fandoms, the love triangle caused discomfort because they felt that it sent the wrong message. Clara had many doubts about leaving her husband Cadu, while Lica, a bisexual teenager, seemed to oscillate her interest between Samantha and Felipe. Fans feared that the audience in general –especially their own families– could interpret that the characters were just “confused” or “going through a phase”.

¹⁹ “*Tem certeza q querem apoiar a globo? Itaú E Natura Patrocinando Preconceito Clarina Não É O Problema Globo Homophobia Is So Last Century*”.

²⁰ See <http://www.afterellen.com/tv/215737-homophobia-em-familia>

²¹ <https://hayunalesbianaenmisopa.com/2014/05/21/las-fans-de-clarina-si-guen-incendiando-las-redes-con-su-indignacion/>

²² *Nao esquecam d enviar email p CAT, Ja enviei o meu ! Lembrem sem xingamentos !! Chega De Preconceito Com Clarina #ClaraChutaoBalde.*

²³ *Pronto fiz minha parte email enviado para o CAT e vou aqui alternando entre a tag e a votação bora tbm Chega De Preconceito Com Clarina.*

Anticipating themselves from this risk, they started a mass-tweeting campaigns. The hashtag #RepresentationWithRespect is an example of Limantha fans demanding that Globo would be more responsible when depicting relationships between two women. This is an evidence that the audience had expectations regarding the socio-educational role assumed by the telenovela.

Tweet #23 616: Portraying a lesbian/bi relationship with a huge difference from straight ones (kisses and such) and even more by implying that bisexuality is confusion, wtf globo, I can not defend you!²⁴

Tweet #23 617: I am furious with Malhação, because: Globo knows that our generation is very different from the general public, they included a lesbian/bi couple using the excuse of “representativeness”, and we know that they are not doing a good job...²⁵

Tweet #23 755: Congratulations for the fandom, using their influence to expose the disservice that this depiction of bisexuals has been²⁶

Besides talking directly to Rede Globo, other campaigns attempted to confront (directly or indirectly) hate speeches against homosexuals. Tags like #LimanthaRepresentsMe and #LimanthaEmbracesDiversity tried to show the importance of lesbians characters on television.

²⁴ “Mostrando uma relação lésbica/bi com uma enorme diferença com a hetera (bjs e tal) e ainda por cima dando a entender que bissexualidade é confusão, pqp globo, assim ã dá pra te defender! RepresentaçãoComRespeito”.

²⁵ Eu estou com MT raiva de malhação, porque: A globo, sabendo que em nossa geração à mts diferenças e um interesse mais amplo, colocou um casal lesbico/bi, usando a desculpa de “representatividade”, e nós sabemos que não está representando nada com nada... RepresentaçãoComRespeito”.

²⁶ Parabéns pro fandom, usando a influência q tem pra expor esse desserviço q foi a representação da bissexualidade.

Tweet #26 020: Some people (those who feel represented by straight couples/ characters during the WHOLE show) don't imagine how important it is for us to have characters like Lica, Samantha and Gabriel in a telenovela.²⁷

Tweet #26 021: For some it is difficult to understand all this mobilization around Limantha, because they didn't have to deal with it in their own lives. You didn't have to question yourself if you were normal, you didn't have yourself for being different, you didn't try to fit in a standard to be accepted.²⁸

Fans point out that many conservatives react strongly against the presence of homosexuals on television, but do not seem to mind violent or erotic content involving heterosexual couples. The fandoms argued that their enemies have double standards as an excuse to hide their homophobia.

Tweet #26 647: What to expect from people who have always had everything? How many telenovelas with straight couples kissing the whole time, having sex and shit... Then when a LGBT couple takes the spotlight, they are like “oh, this is a gay dictatorship”.²⁹

²⁷ *Algumas pessoas (aquelas que se sentem representadas por casais/ personagens héteros em TODA novela) não imaginam a importância que é pra nós ter personagens como a Lica, Samantha e Gabriel em uma novela. RepresentaçãoComRespeito.*

²⁸ *Pra alguns é difícil entender todo esse movimento em prol de Limantha, pois em nenhum momento teve que lidar com isso. Você não precisou questionar se era normal, não se odiou por ser diferente, não tentou se enquadrar em um padrão pra ser aceito. RepresentaçãoComRespeito.*

²⁹ *“O que esperar de gente que sempre teve tudo? Quantas novelas com casais heteros se beijando o tempo todo, transando e o caralho...Aí quando um casal LGBT ganha destaque eles “ah, mas é uma ditadura gay”.* (Tweet #26.647).

Tweet #26 035: “some scenes are forbidden because it is early” but straight couples are allowed to have sex, get naked in telenovelas, it’s not because of the time, it’s because of your prejudice.³⁰

The presence of kisses or cuddles shared between couples was always a reason for celebration, a confirmation of their victory against conservatism.

Tweet #37 148: I AM CRYING AND JUMPING UP AND DOWN AAAAAAW LIMANTHA ENDGAMEEEEE SUCK IT SOCIETY AAAAAA OMG THANK YOU LOOORD³¹

The happy ending of both *Clarina* and *Limantha* generated a strong feeling of gratitude, and all the conflicts between fans and producers seemed to be forgotten, confirming the ephemerality of fan activism stated by Ronsini et al. (2015). This indicates that these fans are highly cooperative and mostly conformed with the industrial system, when their wishes are granted. They can be critical and demanding at times, but are also grateful, even though the actual progress is very small. One fan has described her feeling for the narrative as “a love and hate relationship”:

Tweet #24 245: Our daily love and hate relationship is funny. There are sad days and days of joy. We may suffer shipping Limantha, but we remain firm every day and we do not give up in any way. What a fandom, huh?³²

³⁰ “*não pode certas cenas por causa do horário*” *mas os casais héteros pode transar na novela, ficarem nus, não é pq causa do horário, é por causa do seu preconceito.*

³¹ *EU TÔ CHORANDO E PULANDO AAAAAAAAAAAAAAW LIMANTHA ENDGAMEEEEEEE CACETEEEEEE CHUPA SOCIEDADE AAAAAAAAAAAAAA MDSSSS OBRI-GADAAAA SENHORRRR.*

³² “*É engraçado, nosso relacionamento de amor e ódio todos os dias. Dias de tombos e dias de alegrias. Mais ainda assim sofremos ao shiparmos Limantha, mais seguimos firmes todos os dias e não desistimos de forma alguma. Que fandom né? Representação Com Respeito*”.

Finally, on both cases, fans felt victorious because the couples did not disappear during the narrative. They felt that their collective and coordinated efforts –daily hashtags, mass-tweeting, mass-emails, boycott threats and polling– had made a difference. In the end, most of the fans expressed their gratitude for the network and for the characters, even though they agree there is still a long way to go until the depiction of lesbian couples is comparable to that of heterosexual couples.

FINAL REMARKS

The analysis has shown how fan activists used digital platforms to validate their desire for having their identities acknowledged by the media, even though they were acting mainly in conformity to the narrative and the industrial cultural system.

It was possible to notice in many tweets the importance of fandom as a safe environment to express an unaccepted behavior in other social instances. Love and the need for acceptance are the feelings which unite the fans, but, beyond that, many other emotions push them into action. Anxiety, anger and fear often fuel the activity of those fans, who at times act in anticipation of possible censorship or undesired narrative events.

These fandoms conform themselves with current beauty patterns and with representations that correspond to a more masculine fantasy –young, pretty, skinny, white and feminine women, in which one of them is sexually ambiguous–. The couple from the telenovela *Ambitious Women*, formed by two elderly ladies, did not find the same reception, giving in to the pressure of conservative groups, suffering boycotts and being, at last instance, practically eliminated from the narrative.

These fans revealed themselves as much more cooperative than properly transgressive, acting from within the system, and in a final analysis, contributing to the interests of the televisual industry. This seems to be related to a lack of lesbian representation in the Brazilian mass media, but this hypothesis is yet to be proven.

The fact that the happy-end caused the activism practices to be quickly demobilized corroborates with this perception, opening a gap for future studies about this phenomenon, involving multiple methodological approaches.

Bibliographic references

- Amaral, A., Souza, R. & Monteiro, C. (2015). De westeros no #vempruarua à shippagem do beijo gay na TV brasileira. Ativismo de fãs: conceitos, resistências e práticas na cultura digital. *Galaxia*, 29, 141-154. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-25542015120250>
- Balogh, A. M. (1998). Benedito Ruy Barbosa: Intertextualidade e recepção. *Novos Olhares: revista de estudos sobre práticas de recepção a produtos midiáticos*, 1, 10-23.
- Balogh, A. M. (2001). *O discurso ficcional na TV. Sedução e sonho em doses homeopáticas*. Edusp.
- Baym, N. K. (2000). *Tune in, log on. Soaps, fandom and online community*. Sage Publications.
- Bedinelli, T. (2017). Os parlamentares religiosos tendem a ser mais conservadores do que a população evangélica. *El País*. https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/12/02/politica/1512221378_127760.html
- Bennet, L. (2012). Fan activism for social mobilization: A critical review of the literature. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0346>
- Borges, L. S. & Spink, M. J. P. (2009). Repertórios sobre lesbianidade na mídia televisiva: desestabilização de modelos hegemônicos? *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 21(3), 442-452. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0102-71822009000300018>
- Brough, M. & Shrestova, S. (2012). Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0303>
- Colling, L. (2007). Personagens homossexuais nas telenovelas da Rede Globo: criminosos, afetados e heterossexualizados. *Revista Gênero*, 8(1), 207-222.
- Cordão, V. (2017). *Imprensa Homossexual Brasileira E Construções De Subjetividades (1960-1980)* (unpublished master's degree dissertation). Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
- Costa, F. (2016). *Novela: A Obra aberta e seus problemas*. Giostri.
- Cuklanz, L. M. (1999). *Rape on Prime Time: television, masculinity and sexual violence*. University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812204001>

- Drummond, L. (2015). *50 anos de novelas: a trajetória da representação homossexual e o beijo gay que parou o Brasil*. Appris.
- Earl, J. & Kimport, K. (2009). Movement Societies and Digital Protest: Fan Activism and Other Nonpolitical Protest Online. *Sociological Theory*, 27, 220-43. <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-9558.2009.01346.x>
- Fragoso, S., Recuero, R. & Amaral, A. (2011). *Métodos de pesquisa para internet*. Sulina.
- Gray, J. (2003). New Audiences, New Textualities: Anti-Fans and Non-Fans. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 64-81. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367877903006001004>
- Grupo Gay da Bahia. (2019). *Mortes violentas de LGBTQ+ no Brasil. Relatório 2018*. GGB.
- Hall, S. (2016). *Cultura e representação*. Apicuri.
- Harrington, C. L. & Bielby, D. D. (1995). *Soap fans. Pursuing pleasure and making meaning in everyday life*. Temple University Press.
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. Routledge.
- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística-IBGE. (2019). *Estimativas da população*. <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/populacao/9103-estimativas-de-populacao.html>
- Jenkins, H. (2008). *Cultura da Convergência*. Aleph.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, bloggers and gamers: exploring participatory culture*. New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: television fans and participatory culture*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361917>
- Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robison, A. & Weigel, M. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture. Media education for the 21st Century*. John D. and Catherine MacArthur Foundation. <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8435.001.0001>
- Johnson, D. (2007). Fan-Tagonism. *Factions, Institutions and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom*. In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss & C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom. Identities and communities in a mediated world*. New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwbtbq2.25>
- Kellner, D. (2001). *A cultura da mídia: estudos culturais, identidade, política entre o moderno e o pós-moderno*. EDUSC.

- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography. Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. SAGE.
- Lima, C. (2018). *Telenovela transmídia na Rede Globo: o papel das controvérsias* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.
- Lotz, A. (2007). *The television will be revolutionized*. New York University Press.
- Media Ownership Monitor Brasil. (2019). Globo.com. <https://brazil.mom-rsf.org/br/midia/detail/outlet/globocom/>
- Pallottini, R. (2012). *Dramaturgia da Televisão*. Perspectiva.
- Proulx, M. & Shepatin, S. (2012). *Social TV: how marketers can reach and engage audiences by connecting television to the web, social media and mobile*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Pullen, C. & Cooper, M. (2010). *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*. Taylor & Francis.
- Ronsini, V., Brignol, L., Storch, L., Marques, C., Foletto, L. R. & Corrêa, L. B. (2015). Ativismo de fãs e disputas de sentidos de gênero nas interações da audiência de *Em Família* nas redes sociais. In Vassallo de Lopes, M. I. (Ed.), *Por uma teoria de fãs da ficção televisiva brasileira* (pp. 197-238). Sulina.
- Sandvoss, C. (2013). Quando estrutura e agência se encontram: Os fãs e o poder. *Ciberlegenda*, 28, 8-40. <https://periodicos.uff.br/ciberlegenda/article/view/36927>
- Sodré, M. (1988). *Best-seller: a literatura de mercado*. Ática.
- Theodoropoulou, V. (2007). The Anti-Fan Within the Fan. Awe and envy in Sport Fandom. . In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss & C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom. Identities and communities in a mediated world* (pp. 285-300). New York University Press.
- van Zoonen, L. (2004). Imagining the Fan Democracy. *European Journal of Communication*, 19, 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0267323104040693>
- Vassallo de Lopes, M. I. (2003). Telenovela brasileira: uma narrativa sobre a nação. *Comunicação & Educação*, 26, 17-34. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9125.v0i26p17-34>
- Wolton, D. (1996). *Elogio do grande público. Uma teoria crítica da televisão*. Ática.