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Coloring Your Prejudices: Nail-Polish Marketing, “Slut-Shaming,” and Feminist Activism

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Abstract

The Colombian firm Masglo sells nail polish across much of Latin America. Some of its colors have been marketed through words associated with “slut-shaming” and other misogynistic concepts, which stimulated a 2015 consumer debate on Twitter. We analyze the tweets from those exchanges and relate them to feminism, anti-feminism, and the status of women in Colombian society. Our results show that female clients, who were the main participants in the debate, mostly favored the company’s strategy. Some nodes highlighted deeply-rooted Colombian gender roles, or reflected on sociocultural status and femininity as political issues. Nail varnishes which suggested associations with feminism, such as “empowered”, “diverse,” or “human,” were practically ignored. The debate changed little: in keeping with the nation’s *macho* culture and commercially-narrow beauty norms, a major Colombian company continues to exploit invidious stereotypes. In future, a cross-class women’s solidarity with all of those engaged in the beauty industry

must emerge—something that social media directed at consumers cannot provide by itself.

Keywords

Nail polish, misogyny, stereotypes, Twitter, feminism, *machismo*, Colombia, social media

Coloring Your Prejudices: Nail-Polish Marketing, “Slut-Shaming,” and Feminist Activism¹

Introduction

Commercial nail polish for women emerged a century ago and has been applied in salons for eight decades (Jones, 2010, pp. 102, 119). Manicures became popular in the Global North from the 1950s. Whereas lipstick used to be the one cosmetic indulgence that never saw sales dip during an economic crisis, now it is the manicure. A neat, glossy set of nails appears to be a middle-class urban necessity (Heminsley, 2012).

Finger beauty has only recently been studied from political-economic, epidemiological, ethnographic, and textual perspectives. But we can say with confidence that nails are one of the world’s principal “high femme signifiers,” their color laden with the power of sexual

difference. Polished nails may conform to female stereotypes, but equally disrupt male normativity within public life (Kang, 2010; Lerum, 2015). Ambivalent feminist responses to nail varnish index numerous contradictions over makeup that confront women, from labor relations to occupational health to gendered imagery.

The industry's marketing pattern has become very similar internationally in the period since the late 1950s: new colors are introduced twice a year, in the northern fall and spring (Jones, 2010, pp. 156, 219). For many women customers, each release marks a personal change, too. New styles are often tried out in nail salons, which can be sites of pleasure and a certain intimacy, rather akin to the hush harbors of African-American barber shops (Kang, 2015; Nunley, 2011).

But for women working in those salons—and there were over 125,000 manicurists in the US in 2016—they are places of low wages, toxic chemicals, long hours, and ergonomically-unsound conditions. Median pay for manicurists in the US was \$24,330 a year in 2018, about half the national average (Maslin Nir, 2015a, 2015b; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; Escobar, 2015; Kreiss et al., 2006). As nail lacquers proliferate around the globe, so do new and alarming skin disorders among users, from onychomycosis, dermatosis, and neoplasm (Reis, Armarnani, & D’Angelis, 2017; Arora & Tosti, 2017; Draelos, 2013; California Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). The major corporations are likely to point to unhealthy nails as pre-existing problems they can address, rather than admit responsibility for them as the result of exposure to nail lacquer chemicals by workers and customers (Simmons, 1989). This is an industry

founded on unsafe and poorly-remunerated working conditions.

Our object of analysis in this paper, Masglo, is a Colombian firm owned by the Cerescos company. It manufactures cosmetics, notably varnishes, nail-polish removers, brushes, manicure accessories, oils, and skin-care products, *inter alia*. Beginning with thirty nail-varnish colors, it now offers over a hundred and fifty varieties. The polishes were initially distinguished by numbers, but the company was concerned that such a classification did not help clients remember their preferences, so it decided to use names “linked with their emotions so that they could recall them easily” (*Revista Dinero*, 2017). The company also has a brand aimed at teenage women, Admiss (Bolaños, 2017). Its nail polishes articulate colors with days of the week, school subjects, and boys’

names. There is even a pre-teen line, called Masglo Kids (Masglo, 2019).

Several words that Masglo used in a 2015 campaign for its adult nail polish caused offense, because they were associated with what has come to be known by activists as “slut-shaming,” among other misogynistic concepts (Tanenbaum, 2015). Slut-shaming demeans and regulates women’s sexual activities based on their appearance, class background, racial formation, gossip, and humor. For women of high status, it can be used as a self-mocking badge of sexual autonomy. For women of low status, it is more likely to be an unwelcome badge of shame (Armstrong *et al.*, 2014). Some of the terms used by the company clearly deserve the moniker (see Tables 1a and b).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the firm’s terminology and the discussion it generated in social

media, in the light of feminist concerns and approaches. Discussions between Colombians on Facebook and Twitter became sites of struggle when marketing clashed with empowered women who defended their right to be treated respectfully—and for more conservative women (in this case, the majority) to offer a counter-narrative to those critiques. In a society where *machismo*, gender discrimination, and violence are common, the Masglo controversy sheds a particular light on Colombian women's lives and feminist struggles.

The case study

Masglo has several hundred employees and a 2017 budget of 67,000 million Colombian pesos (US\$20,498,000). In 2016, its reserves amounted to 1,250 million pesos (US\$431,168), with investments of approximately 2,250 million pesos (US\$684,237) (*Revista*

Dinero, 2017; *Portafolio*, 2016). Colombian sales account for 88% of corporate turnover, and it has 35% of the national market. The firm exports to Perú, Ecuador, Chile, Spain, México, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Uruguay, Salvador, Nicaragua, Curacao, and the United States, where it was warmly welcomed by *New York* magazine: “This Colombian Nail Polish Doesn’t Chip (Even After Swimming and Cleaning)” (Martin, 2017).

Titles for the company’s nail polish were once chosen by its founder. Nowadays, a marketing department is in charge, and the firm holds competitions among its employees to contribute potential new names. Thirty years ago, new adjectives and nouns were added, with the conceit of saying something about the women who use particular shades. The interactive platform <https://masglo.com/mipoderesser/> and hashtag *MiPoderEsSer* [My Power is Being] are classic instances of

cybertarian corporate feminism. It is avowedly dedicated to “el empoderamiento de la mujer colombiana” [the empowerment of Colombian women] and works with the labor ministry to formalize working conditions in salons (Montés, 2018). Masglo counts customers and manicurists as its most important allies (Pla, 2018) and supports Colombia’s “Red de Mujeres M” [Women’s Network M] of manicurists against gendered violence (Montés, 2018), and goes so far as to claim a direct correlation between the ambitions of Colombian women and the names of its various polishes (Pla, 2018).

Masglo has sought to diminish the ecological damage caused by its products, sponsored a manicure marathon to raise funds to counter osteoporosis, and staged a campaign called “Women Recognizing Their Rights” (*Kien y Ke*, 2017; *Publimetro Colombia*, 2017; *El Tiempo*, 2018b). The company’s ‘face’ of 2018, actress and singer

Verónica Orozco Aristizábal, says she leant her name and likeness to the brand because it focused on women's daily lives and working realities (*El Tiempo*, 2018a). And when the Colombian government signed a peace accord with the country's largest *guerrilla* group in 2016, Masglo was on hand to offer a new line of nail varnish called "Reconciliación" to celebrate women's role in peacemaking. Names included "Tolerante," "Inclusiva," and "Reconciliadora" (Fucsia, 2017).

The 2015 naming controversy arose because of the firm's new titles for nail polish. Below is a list of the adjectives and nouns it used, divided between what might be considered positive versus negative terms [akin to Barthes' famous "J'aime, Je n'aime pas" list (1977, pp. 116-117)]. The negatives stimulated the social-media debates that animated our research.

Table 1a Names Used by Masglo to Describe Nail Polish (Spanish and English)

ABOUT HERE

Table 1b Names Used by Masglo to Describe Nail Polish (Spanish and English)

ABOUT HERE

A virtual protest started on Facebook when a user identified as Laura Coca Rodríguez wrote: “Masglo, I disagree strongly with the names of your nail polishes, it is a product for women, we are your main customers, we make or break your company!!! How dare you call your customers, “Flirts”??? “Prostitutes,”??? Really?? How dare you!!” The post attracted 5,230 ‘likes’ and 1,685 comments. It has been shared 1,597 times (Rodríguez, 2015).

Masglo was quick to double-declutch, arguing that the terms described colors rather than their consumers, and should not be read connotatively (Kien y Ke, 2019; Revista Dinero, 2017). But the response on Facebook from Masglo's community manager provoked even more controversy. It spread through other social media such as Twitter, where the debate was mentioned more than 175,000 times:

The Naming Poet of Masglo sends a warm greeting to you and to all the women of the world, who are loved as they are; in the end, what matters is what's on the inside. I love that you are autonomous and that you have the freedom to choose your attitude. Sincerely, the Naming Poet of Masglo. (Masglo, 2015)

Twitter users proceeded to post a variety of supportive and critical comments over the names, particularly such

slut-shaming terms as Buscona [Slutty], Casquivana [Flirt], Zángana [Layabout/Lazy], Fufurufa [Prostitute], Atractiva [Attractive], Caprichosa [Willful], and Sollada [Crazy]. One person initiated a petition on Change.org (<http://chng.it/4YbmmLKb4Q>) to collect signatures from people in protest, arguing that the titles promoted *macho* culture and gender stereotypes. Vanessa Bacca, whose YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiuFWERsunvOqbS9fpwYusw>) provides beauty tips to over thirty thousand subscribers, complained in a video that: “This nail polish is called slutty. I think it is a really nice color, but it makes me mad to be called slutty. Why? Why do they have to put insults on the nail polishes? They could call it ‘spring’; I don’t know” (Bacca, 2015).

Company executives deemed the crisis grist to the mill—free publicity (Álvarez & Morera, 2018). Marketing director Santiago Álvarez said:

we are not going to change the names. Today we have been growing 12 percent in sales; I think that with all this controversy we will grow more. ... We do not seek to label women; the brand seeks to be a woman's partner in crime (quoted in *El Espectador*, 2015).

The firm created a campaign on social media with the tags #YesToMasgloDaringNames or #NoToMasgloDaringNames in order to uncover customers' opinions and encourage participants to take a binary choice in their stances. This were undertaking market research—virtually for free.

A fascinating Twitter interaction followed, involving corporate representatives, Masglo's costumers, and

citizens in general. It allowed us to see how corporate surveillance clashed with conservatism and feminism. The next section briefly sketches the politics of beauty in general, followed by an explanation of the Colombian context.

Representation and Beauty

Social-science journals are replete with research that shows women are typically depicted in popular culture as sexual objects, assigned traditional roles such as housewives or mothers rather than beyond the home, associated with negative terms, and sexualized (Collins, 2011; Lemish, 2012; López Lita & Bernad Monferrer, 2007; Railton & Watson, 2005; Ward, 2003). Beauty is often a disciplinary technology: “Women’s appearance is subject to profound discipline and regulation—even when beauty practices are seemingly chosen” (Elias et al.,

2017, p. 7). The advertising and marketing of products like Masglo's rely on commodity feminism, such that "feminist ideas and icons are appropriated for commercial purposes, emptied of their political significance and offered back to the public in a commodified form" (Gill, 2008, p. 1). As Gill explains, "advertisers assemble signs which connote independence, freedom, and bodily autonomy and link to the purchase of commodities." In this way, "feminist goals like independence and control over one's body are emptied of their political significance." Commodity feminism invites "women to become liberated and take control of their own lives by acts of individual consumption—rather than collective struggle for social and political change. Feminism, signified in this manner, becomes just another style decision" (Gill, 2008, p. 2).

Beauty and its commodification in advertising are bounded by time, space, commerce, and subjectivity. Such forces pull the very concept in directions that are far from promoting beneficial images for women, using the female body as a sexual object (Grabe *et al.*, 2008; Szymanski *et al.*, 2011; Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008) and commodity (Doane, 1989; Gallagher & Pecot-Hebert, 2007; Gimlin, 2000; Velandia-Morales & Rincón, 2014), complying with “emphasized femininity,” which confirms socio-cultural stereotypes of acceptable female appearance and conduct, stressing narrow bands of beauty (Connell, 1987, pp. 183–188). The obsession with looks has a clear impact on employment and income across cultures (Hamermesh, 2011).

Alternatively, the very practice of polishing one’s nails may be seen as a form of caring for oneself, and as a means of expressing sexual difference. Consider

Hollywood picking up on black urban fashion in the 1930s to emphasize hot rather than discreet colors and the emergence of a wide array of choices. This was self-styling—in a form that urged for display, but in a much less dull way than the appalling business attire men. Transforming oneself can be an end in itself for women as much as a means to obtaining something else; a pleasure rather than an obligation (Berry, 2000). The Masglo controversy needs to be understood in that contradictory light, along with the contemporary and historical situation of Colombian women.

Women in Colombia

Colombian women's health and participation in the workforce, education, and politics saw the nation ranked 42nd of 145 countries in 2015, descending from the 22nd spot it attained in 2006 (World Economic Forum, 2015).

The Human Development Report's index of gender inequality reveals that Colombian women rarely secure positions of public leadership (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2015); they hold fewer than one in five seats in congress. There is also a stark gendered difference in the unemployment rate. Women are likely to be stuck in the informal sector and secondary labor markets, especially if they are indigenous or black, and those groups have disproportionately high levels of maternal mortality (Cabezas Cortés, 2016; Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico, 2015, p. 34; Perazzi & Merli, 2017; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2019a, p. 17, 2019b, p. 472).

Violence against women is more common in Latin America than the rest of the world, as are female deaths from firearms (Small Arms Survey, 2016). The Instituto Colombiano de Medicina Legal [Colombian Institute of

Legal Medicine] reported 26,065 cases of sexual violence in 2018, with 85.6% of victims being women (2018). The nation's many extreme forms of gendered violence include rape, disfigurement, and femicide (Huertas & Jiménez, 2016; Moloney, 2018). All sides in the last half-century of conflict, from leftist *guerrilla* to right-wing *paramilitares*, have engaged in sexual torture. Women and sexual minorities have been targeted for humiliation as part of a violent clearance aimed at sex workers, street retailers, and other people on the margins of power, who are frequently assaulted by armed groups when in public space. Statutory rape is common (Suárez Pinzón, 2015; Oxfam, 2009; Serrano-Amaya, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Colombians have been raised with *machismo* and *Marianismo* as ways of life, one focused on men as unruly, violent, and omnipotent; the other on women as

caring, loving, and selfless. These dual mythologies of masculinity and femininity restrict women's economic opportunities and daily conduct. Both ideologies are associated with Latin America, though their origins can be traced back to Southern Europe (Stevens, 1973). They clearly connect to the sexual violence and forced marriages that were part of the imperial and colonial experience (Strasser & Tinsman, 2010) and the Roman Catholic family ideal of an unseen, judgmental father (God) and an ever-present, caring mother (Mary).

Colombian women have formed social movements to define and defend their rights throughout the independence struggle and the past two centuries (Lamus, 2008; Solano, 2003; Villareal Méndez, 1994). But even recent state policies designed to alleviate gender discrimination and inequality have been inconsistently applied and largely ineffective (Gómez Cano, Sánchez

Castillo, & Díaz, 2016). The government duly produces impressive-looking reports for the UN's Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (2017). But everyone knows that this is one more case where policing, the courts, and everyday life are distant from such ideals and claims. Male domination of public life and domestic and other forms of gendered violence remain prevalent. Beauty is a crucial form of female currency in many parts of the country, beyond even most transnational norms (Cepeda, 2018; Stanfield, 2013; Streicker, 1995). So while feminist trends exist throughout the nation's history, the setting for the Masglo debate is complex and largely conservative.

Method

This section describes the procedure we followed to analyze that debate. We focused on Twitter, which was

both the social-media platform chosen by the company to run its campaign and the site that showed the most dynamic discussions of the issues—1022 tweets (there were 39 posts on Instagram). We focused on tweets that appeared between July 14 and September 22, 2015 under the hashtags #YesToDaringMasgloNames (N=794) and #NoToDaringMasgloNames (N=228). Tweets, hashtags, dates of publication, interaction metrics (likes, replies, and retweets) and information about users, such as names and usernames, were extracted through Scraper Data Miner Chrome Extension.

We deem the messages to have been published voluntarily and freely by diverse users on Twitter as part of a discussion prompted by Masglo itself, such that they form a public document (Kozinets, 2015). We drew on recommendations from the Association of Internet Researchers' Ethics Working Committee (Markham &

Buchanan, 2012) and the principle of 'taking good care' of informants (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). The tweets we quote have been anonymized to protect identities.

We sought to discover (1) who was involved in the discussion, in terms of gender, type of user, level of influence, and time on the network; (2) how users expressed themselves; and (3) how women and feminism were represented. Three Communications students assisted in coding to determine users' main characteristics (those that could be identified in a digital, sometimes anonymized environment) and the negative, positive, or neutral nature of tweets. Some additional information was collected, such as the genre of the message (announcements, descriptions of events, and complaints) and whether tweets included words, images, or video, or mentioned other users.

Positive tones were defined as tweets in favor of Masglo's putatively 'daring' names for nail polish. Such statements conveyed support for the company choices, which were not considered offensive to women. Negative tones, by contrast, criticized these names as offensive, or proposed alternatives. Neutral tones presented both positive and negative traits, with neither predominating.

To measure the possible impact of participants in the debate, we used the Follower/Following (F/F) ratio: "the number of followers of a user to the number of users he/she is following" (Rao *et al.* 2010, p. 39). Higher ratios mean more people are interested in the user's status updates without the user first needing to show interest in their updates (Anger & Kittl, 2011).

The F/F ratio allowed us to categorize accounts according to the interest they generated within the social network. *Normal* accounts, of people who use Twitter for

fun, information, or to contact family and friends (1) have fewer than a thousand followers, or (2) exceed this milestone, but have an F/F ratio of between 1 and 2.

Spammer accounts indicate users who are inexperienced with automation tools and spam people to gain followers; they have an F/F ratio of 0.5 or less. *Suspicious* accounts cover users who are probably deploying automation tools but follow the ‘wrong’ people or have low-quality content; they have an F/F ratio between 0.5 and 1. *Micro-Influencers* have active audiences and boast F/F ratios between 2 and 10. *Influencers* are celebrities, public figures, rising stars popular in social-media channels, or people who arouse great interest on the network. They have F/F ratios above 10 (*WorkMacro*, 2018).

Following Said-Hung *et al.* (2017), a further variable—Level of Mobility—was created to summarize retweets, replies, and likes, thereby expressing the impact and

mobility of the discussion. A score was obtained for each message, which was typified to generate a variable with three ordinal levels: L1, for messages that generated mobility (retweets, likes, and replies) below the average of the hashtag analyzed; L2, for those with an average (normal) mobility according to the trend; and L3, for messages of above-average mobility.

Results

A total of 777 Twitter users discussed Masglo's 'daring' names. Individuals or ordinary citizens (98.33%) led the conversation, followed by institutions (1.16%) and the *bourgeois* media (0.51%). Four accounts were identified by Twitter as "maintained by users in music, acting, fashion, government, politics, religion, journalism, media, sports, business, and other key interest areas" (Twitter, 2019). Most participants (93.18%) were

designated as *Normal* in terms of F/F impact; 3.73% were deemed *Micro-Influencers*; 0.51% *Influencers*; and 2.57% *Spammers* or *Suspicious*.

As shown in Table 2, the conversation was dominated by women, who held 87.26% of such accounts involved in the debate. Only 8.49% were men. We lack enough information to determine gender in 4.12% of cases, 28.13% of comments came from institutions or organizations, and 3.12% media outlets. Most accounts had been active for over five years, with no differences in longevity between male and female users; this is a sign that most users participating were real people rather than bots.

Two women who identified themselves as media professionals were the only female users with Verified Accounts. The discussion featured 23 micro-influencers and two influencers, regular citizens with an F/F ratio of

14 and 9,144 and 1,252 followers respectively. Among the male participants, one worked in the media and had a verified account, three were micro-influencers, and one an influencer with an F/F ratio of almost 25 and 6,349 followers.

Table 2: Participants in the Masglo Discussion
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The messages mostly supported the use of 'daring' names as a marketing strategy (70.45%); 21.88% were opposed and 7.67% neutral. Some nodes highlighted deeply-rooted Colombian gender roles, as we show later, or reflected on sociocultural status and femininity as political issues. Varnishes with positive names, or which suggested associations with feminism, such as

“empowered,” “diverse,” and “human,” were virtually ignored.

Most women participants were very conservative. They favored epithets to describe opponents of the company’s campaign, denouncing such critics as “complicated,” “annoying,” or “prudish.” As per Table 3, 36.92% of messages opposed to the campaign were located at level 3 of mobilization, versus 11.76% of messages in favor. The vast majority of messages supporting ‘daring’ names were in the lower level of mobilization or impact (67.78%). Messages with a more critical stance were mostly at a medium (48.13%) or high (36.92%) level: they triggered the most comments, likes, and retweets.

Table 3: Level of Mobilization of Tweets by Message
Tone

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As per Figure 1, in terms of proportions and tendencies, messages opposed were more engaging than those in favor, which were mostly one-person statements. Analyzing the most-used hashtags in the conversation, 'daring' names appeared with greatest frequency.

Figure 1: Tweets Opposed or in Favor of Campaign

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'Negative' titles appeared most often: Prostitute [Fufurufa], Glutton [Golosa], Slutty [Buscona], and Layabout [Zángana]. Nail-polish names with more positive connotations, such as Adorable [Adorable], Champion [Campeona], or Attractive [Atractiva], were also used as hashtags. Other hashtags in favor included

#ILovelt, #ISupportMasglo, and #ILoveMasglo. Anti-feminist hashtags were used to demean criticism of the brand: #WhatAWack, #GrowUp, and #StupidDebate. Hashtags expressing disgust and disagreement included #NoMoreMasglo, #IDontUseMasglo, #BoycottMasglo, and #OffendedAudience. Some contributions drew attention to the misogynistic, violent connotations of nail-polish names: #Machismo, #Outraged, #MisogynistMasglo, and #FormsOfAbuse.

Figure 2: Word Cloud of Tweet Hashtags in the Debate

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Most women in favor of Prostitute [Fufurufa], Glutton [Golosa], or Slutty [Buscona] found the names “fun and original”—easy ways to remember their favorite nail

polish colors, and conversation starters at spas and beauty salons. Many argued that varnish titles didn't matter, that they were signs without referents because the mere fact of choosing a shade of color with a certain name didn't define its users. As one participant put it: "What I have inside is not defined by a nail polish name; if a particular shade is called Flirtatious that doesn't say anything about me" (User 015, July 23, 2015). One woman even declared that the names were "part of my Colombian identity." She claimed not to understand the controversy around them. For her, connotation was everything, but in a patriotic rather than a gendered sense; the company's headquarters determined her response, not its sexist nomenclature. Supporters of the campaign denounced critics for exaggerating its significance and being selective in their concerns about sexism. For example, User26 shared Figure 3, which

reads, “They are offended by this... [an image of women mad at Masglo’s names] ... and not by that... [an image of women adoring a man singing the words ‘stupid, wicked’]” (July 20, 2015). She claimed a double standard on the part of women who were offended by this campaign but loved *reguetón* or other urban music. That point recurred throughout the discussion, often accompanied by a YouTube link to a song or meme. Connections were also drawn to the accusation of slut-shaming, from both sides: “Women who label @MASGLO_Oficial as misogynists and macho chauvinist while calling whore to any other woman prettier than them” (User 091, July 16, 2015); or images of woman in TV commercials: “Why don’t they get upset by TV commercials in which we [women] do laundry, mop the floors or cook and men just stay seated like useless kings?” (User 055, July 17, 2015).

Figure 3: Word Cloud of Tweet Hashtags in the Debate

ABOUT HERE

Campaign critics argued that “words have power” and can “hurt people deeper than actions” (User 657, July 19, 2015). One participant said she “didn’t find any fun in these tags that promote violence and make evident their *machismo* towards their consumers. How sad!” (User 704, July 14, 2015). Buttressing this opinion, User 749 replied: “The sad thing is how people transform something negative in society into something comical” (July 14, 2015). User 710 offered “semiotic lessons” to Masglo’s brand designer (July 14, 2015).

They highlighted the commercial strategy behind the use of these names and expressed concern for the possible damage they could cause. One female user

stated that the problem was not that people read the names literally, but that they assisted in perpetuating and normalizing the abuse of women (User 711, July 14, 2015). Another argued that they helped maintain a misogynistic, sexist culture and wondered why this type of campaign was not used to promote male products (User 713, July 14, 2015). Along the same lines, User 775 expressed the view that these names “reinforced stereotypes because they often have a negative connotation against women” (July 14, 2015). User 745 posted “This is gender violence, I say no to the stereotypes, this is not funny. Be creative and use names that dignify women” (July 14, 2015). Others, too, encouraged Masglo to think differently: “if words have power, you should seek to empower your brand with empowering words for women!” (User 768, July 14, 2015). User 775 asked: “Why not aim for names that generate

pride/belonging beyond humor? Positive creativity” (July 14, 2015), and User 776 added, “Why not look for names that enhance female beauty, that could be fun but positive?” (July 14, 2015).

Some men who participated stated, for example, that the campaign was “classist and sexist” (User 753, July 14, 2015) and “lack[ed] ... good sense” (User 727, July 14, 2015). User 673 said he would never invest in a product where abuse was a marketing strategy. He supported a boycott of the company (July 16, 2015). User 702 called for respect for Colombian women and argued that Masglo’s campaign affected the international image of the country (July 15, 2015). This was a minority stance among the few male participants. Most approved of the campaign or at least found it amusing, and described the critiques as a feminist whim, going so far as to propose

new abusive and offensive names to the company, as per Figure 4.

Figure 4: Images Shared by Male Users Suggesting New Nail-Polish Names

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Some of these male Masglo supporters used such epithets as “feminazi,” “prudish,” “feisty,” or “a bother.” Most found the female critics an annoyance: “sincerely, I find the names funny. Some sensitive gals are just eager to nag” (User 102, July 16, 2015); “Stop being so dainty and easily offended” (User 168, July 15, 2015). User 479 urged Masglo to create new colors, like “leftist,” “idler,” or “hysterical” for “women that felt offended” (July 16, 2015) by ‘daring’ names.

User 703 responded to these insults by stressing the importance of female empowerment and freedom from misogynistic stereotypes, sharing a definition of *micro-machismo*: “It’s a practice of domination and male violence in daily life. It’s about naturalized, legitimized, and invisible demeanors of domain and control that perform with impunity, with or without awareness” (July 15, 2015). One male user replied, “Oh, please! Now you are going to say that because of the name of some beauty product women are going to be mistreated. Shame on you!” (User 253, July 15, 2015). A woman added, “If she cannot distinguish between defending herself for something reasonable and fighting absurdly, that’s her own problem” (User 439, July 15, 2015). User 253 complained, “That’s how feminists are today. What a shame!” (July 15, 2015).

Discussion

The Twitter exchange contrasted feminist users of nail polish, who considered Masglo's naming strategy offensive and demeaning, with anti-feminist users and male supporters, who valued the campaign as creative. Their exchanges indicated ambivalent attitudes to emphasized femininity and slut-shaming—one group was appalled, the other enraged by criticisms. Women supporting the marketing strategy disarticulated the product from its marketing.

Our case study is further evidence that heteronormative, macho, and misogynist marketing is prevalent in the beauty industry. What is more worrying, however, is that in a country like Colombia, where women have suffered so much violence, the participants in the Twitter debate did not identify Masglo's strategy as contrary to hopes for safety and equality. Only a fifth

(21.9%) of the Twitter participants deemed it sexist and misogynistic. Almost 80% considered the use of pejorative names to describe nail polish as positive or neutral—“fun” or “easy to remember.”

As McQuarrie *et al.* (2013) state, Twitter gives the public a ‘megaphone’ for opinions and ideas to be heard beyond their immediate social circles. But to what effect? This debate changed little—a major Colombian firm continued to exploit invidious stereotypes that demean women, in keeping with the nation’s *machista* culture and limited range of commercially-endorsed beauty and desire, which link in turn to the subordinate situation of women across the country. This also illustrates the powerful paradoxes, perhaps contradictions, at the heart of emphasized femininity’s reflection in nail polish. A major company contributes to *macho* images of femininity, even as it argues otherwise. Masglo uses

corporate feminism to look like a responsible entity, but the feminist concepts it invokes are shorn of their political significance, overdetermined by finance and marketing.

Our work points to the fundamental problem with consumer activism's plutocratic base, which focuses on customers to the exclusion of workers, and the tight limits to social media as supposed sources of progressive change when they are not broadly based and linked to organizing. The next and vital step after Twitter spats such as this one is to create feminist alliances that move beyond similarities and differences in responses to stereotypes to consider women's working lives, both as customers and employees, in factories, offices, homes, and salons alike, whether directly or indirectly associated with cosmetics.

The two sides to nail polish—pleasure and pain, beauty and suffering, individuality and conformity—

encapsulate the Janus-faced experience of Masglo's customers. There is something potentially positive in highlighting that duality. We can imagine pressure being brought to bear on the company over occupational health and safety for plant workers and consumers alike. Such campaigns could emerge from progressive 'impulsadores' (independent of the company) organizing Twitter campaigns based on consumption, but transcending them to involve, learn from, and promote workers' needs, thereby raising awareness among a middle-class clientele. That would require a level of social organization and cross-class commitment that the virtual world alone cannot provide.

The rage generated by Masglo misogyny can only turn into effective politics through identification with the other as well as the self. That has long been a touchstone of (non-commodity) feminism. Consumption politics is

always-already plutocratic, whether it aims at boycotts or buycotts. In its place, we need a more comprehensive feminist critique that works through and across the labor process, with social media one component.

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¹ All translations are by the authors.