(RE)SHARING FEMINISMS: RE-SHARING INSTAGRAM STORIES AS EVERYDAY FEMINIST PRACTICES

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Introduction

Social media has long been used for feminist purposes, with movements like #MeToo helping to cement their public visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018). While scholarship tends to focus on visible peaks of protest, most online engagements with feminism take place outside these peaks – in practices of *everyday feminism* (Pruchniewska, 2019). This paper explores the ways in which feminisms can be integrated into everyday social media practices that might not be understood as deliberately political, but that can nonetheless help to contest social inequalities.

We explore Instagram Stories as a site for everyday feminisms. Introduced in 2016, Stories are an ephemeral format (disappearing after 24 hours), that allows for short form (lasting 5 to 60 seconds) multi-modal content (combining, for example, photos, videos, text, emojis, audio, and interactive stickers) (Bainotti et al., 2020). Stories have since became a central feature on Instagram and one of its primary modes of sharing (Constine, 2018). Yet, their political uses are still under-explored (e.g. Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2021; Cassidy et al., 2019). As different platforms and cultures of use can shape different modes of political expression (Keller, 2019), we seek to explore how this format – commonly associated with notions of ephemerality, playfulness, or spontaneity (e.g. Cardell et al., 2018; Bainotti et al., 2020) – can be used for feminist purposes.

This paper narrows it focus on practices of re-sharing content – one of many political uses afforded by this feature. Re-sharing is an unusual affordance on Instagram, which tends to privilege original and platform-native content. Centring re-sharing practices, we recognise different levels of participation on social media – not only active content creation, but also through interaction with content created by others. The paper draws on Picone's et al. (2019) notion of *small acts of engagement* – comprehending more casual and less labour-intensive forms of participation, which can be performed without "stepping out of the comfort zone of our daily routines." (Picone et al., 2019: 2017—2018). As engaging *with* political topics online can be perceived as risky (Ekström,

2015), it's essential to explore these small acts of engagement that for different degrees of political engagement, facilitating the integration of feminist practices into everyday life, even for reticent participants.

Methodological approach

This paper analyses Instagram practices in Portugal – a compelling yet underexplored national context. While Portuguese feminisms have been historically dominated by practices of "state feminism" (Santos and Pieri, 2020), in recent years there was a growth of bottom-up mobilisations, in part due to social media organising (e.g. Caldeira and Machado, 2023; Lamartine and Cerqueira, 2023). These national practices, however, are entangled with transnational dimensions (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2022), eliciting reflections that can be significant at wider scales.

This paper analyses 2282 Stories, shared by a sample of 52 Instagram users. Participants were identified using a multi-layered approach: drawing on previous research on feminist cultures on Portuguese Instagram (author, 2023), on the exploration of relevant feminist hashtags (e.g. #FeminismoPortugal), and using Instagram recommendation features to snowball the sample. Only users with public profiles and actively sharing Stories were contacted via Instagram Direct Message, informed about the research and its aims, providing their informed consent to participate in the study.

Due to ethical and data minimisation concerns, no demographic information about the people or entities managing the studied accounts was collected. However, amongst our sample we can observe diverse profiles, including accounts from feminist organisations and collectives of various scales; accounts belonging Portuguese public figures (e.g. actors, comedians, journalists, or influencers) who explored feminist issues (either consistently or occasionally); and accounts of "ordinary" people (both identifying as feminist or engaging with these topics more tangentially).

To avoid circumstantial effects associated with specific periods (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019: 4), we collected all Stories shared by the participants on four randomly selected days per month, for three months (October—December 2022). Data from the 2282 collected Stories was manually inputted in csv files, audio content was transcribed, and all Stories were qualitatively coded. This coding, inspired by existing scholarship on Instagram Stories (e.g. Bainotti et al., 2020; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2019), covered different aspects, including: type of Story, visual content, formal characteristics, language used, use of Instagram-specific digital objects, and characteristics of the feminist content shared.

We conducted a multi-layered analysis which combined qualitative textual analysis, qualitative close readings accompanied by extensive note taking with emerging interpretations, and the use of digital methods to engage with this reasonably large dataset and explore overarching patterns.

Findings

This paper showcases the complexity of re-sharing practices on various levels. Our observations illustrate how Stories bring together feminist concerns with other social justice issues, thus reflecting an intersectional lens often associated with fourth-wave feminism (Munro, 2013). Through practices of curatorial activism (Tiidenberg et al., 2021), re-shared Stories can bring together diverse issues and help to amplify political messages beyond the immediate networks of the original content producer. Re-sharing also connects Stories to wider media ecologies (Mattoni, 2017; Zhao et al., 2016), incorporating content coming from other Instagram features (such as posts or Reels), but also opening the platform to content re-circulated across different platforms, incorporating clickable links.

Furthermore, re-sharing can carry different meanings (Tiidenberg et al., 2021) – being used either as expressions of agreement, relatability, critique, call for action, etc. As users take advantage of the multi-modal nature of Stories, they can establish intertextual conversations with original content, superimposing textual comments or digital elements, such as emojis or gifs, to frame their opinion or convey personal reactions. Yet, despite this possibility, Stories are frequently re-shared with no added commentary, their meanings not always evident due to lack of context.

Re-sharing also has a social nature (Tiidenberg et al., 2021: 25–26), at times helping to foster practices of community building. This can be done by including interactive digital objects like question stickers, but it is often reflected in indirect practices of amplification and support that reify informal feminist networks, focusing on shared issues.

Finally, our observations also shed light on the limitations of Stories. Its ephemeral character and short-format can lead to partial or fragmented information – showing only snippets of the original content, or lacking the textual context provided by captions or added comments. This can result in context loss (Cavalcanti et al., 2017), which has implications for the feminist potential of Stories, as it pushes the responsibility of feminist education to the viewer, who must actively seek to complement partial information. However, Instagram users have developed strategies and creative workarounds to subvert Stories' affordances and minimise context loss, thus complementing shared content and seeking to direct viewers' attention.

This paper highlights the tensions and complexities of re-sharing practices in Instagram Stories. These can be both an amplifier of feminist issues, a limited source of information, and a steppingstone for further feminist knowledge and action that are supposed to happen elsewhere – in feminist posts, websites, podcasts, or even in-person events. These small acts of engagement can help to embed feminist concerns in the realm of everyday life, which can be particularly relevant in contexts such as Portugal where there is a tentative history of sustaining bottom-up collective forms of feminist activism (Santos and Pieri, 2020).

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